

Group Authority and Scope

In May 2013, the Council established the Equity Working Group to address three key questions relating to the equity principle, defined for the Thrive MSP 2040 effort, including:

- Assessing and recommending improvements to the Council's internal and external practices and processes for outreach to and engagement activities with people of color and historically underrepresented residents of the region.
- Attracting and appointing people of color and historically underrepresented residents of the region to the Council's advisory committees.
- Considering whether to recommend a new body within the Council to foster equity in the Council's work on an ongoing basis.

For the purpose of this work, the Council defined "equity" as:

- Connecting all residents to opportunities such as good jobs, transportation choices, safe and stable housing, a range of parks and natural areas, and vibrant public spaces.

- The opportunities and challenges of growth and change are equitably shared across our communities, both geographic and cultural.
- All residents and communities are involved as full and equal partners in public decision-making.
- Some residents and communities may require different approaches to ensure full participation and benefit from access to opportunity.

For the purpose of this work, "historically underrepresented residents of the region" means American Indians, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income and low-wealth populations, and immigrants and new Americans. The policy recommendations in this document set higher expectations for the Council's approach to engaging the residents of the region. As a result, the Council will strive toward more equitable outcomes for historically underrepresented residents in the region, through more inclusive outreach and engagement, more focused efforts toward diversifying membership of its advisory committees, and creating an appropriate forum for the community to influence Council efforts to imbed equity principles into its work.

Question 1: Outreach and Engagement Practices

Historically, the Council has been inconsistent in how it engages the region's residents and constituencies. Methods have been more formal and inflexible – relying on formal public hearings, and statute designated and project advisory committees that have a more limited advisory role. These committees have not reflected the underrepresented residents of the region. Therefore, the Equity Working Group has considered several options which could strengthen the voice of the historically underrepresented residents in the Council's regional policy development, processes and projects. . Successful outreach results in community engagement. The Council has placed additional emphasis on the importance of outreach and

engagement work, and supports staff activities to better coordinate outreach and engagement efforts both across Council activities and with community organizations and stakeholders. Our region's community organizations and the historically underrepresented residents they serve, and for whom they advocate, are important resources and assets to our region that also deserve greater recognition by the Council for the expertise they provide in this engagement work. Collaborations between the Council and community organizations are a model practice for community engagement in our region.

The working group recommends the following improvements to Council outreach and engagement activities to achieve greater engagement with the region's residents, particularly communities of color and other historically underrepresented communities:

1. Council administrative policies and procedures will be revised to emphasize engagement and support community participation.
2. Council best practices for outreach will be grounded in scholarly research and relevant successes at both the local and national level. Best practices will include specific measures of success that will be applied to both internally managed and consultant-managed outreach efforts. Staff will be organized to share best practices, build skills, and access information regarding local and national trends related to outreach, engagement, and cultural competence.
3. Outreach efforts provide key information for Metropolitan Council decision-making. The Communications Department will provide the Council with quarterly updates about both ongoing and project-based engagement efforts to support Council decisions.
4. Effective outreach and engagement efforts will be characterized by the following principles:
 - **Equity** – As part of the Council's definition of equity mentioned above, the Council involves all residents and communities as full and equal partners in public decision-making. Some residents and communities may require different approaches to ensure participation. When engaging consultants in outreach activity, contracting practices will allow for community groups to compete for and receive funding.
 - **Respect** – The Council listens to residents of the region in a manner in which the residents feel their voices are heard. The Council honors residents' diverse interests, needs expectations in and experiences with their communities.

- **Transparency** – The Council will include members of the community in planning and structuring public engagement efforts. The public will receive sufficient notice of opportunities to participate.
- **Relevance** – The Council will engage communities early and continuously to assure authentic engagement that results in equitable outcomes.
- **Accountability** – The Council monitors its performance and periodically provides progress reports to the Council and to communities regarding the Council's public outreach and engagement efforts and outcomes in order to measure success in influencing Council decisions and processes. This measurement will include feedback from community participants.
- **Collaboration** – The Council collaborates with communities to establish best practices to engage people in its decision-making processes to build lasting relationships and support community investments and to establish reasonable and appropriate measures for public engagement.
- **Inclusion** – The Council engages people in ways that remove existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers. This engagement focuses on diverse races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and socio-economic and disability statuses.
- **Cultural Competence** – Council outreach and engagement efforts reflect and respond effectively to the racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic experiences of communities.
- **Leadership** – The Council will provide leadership on issues related to the five outcomes adopted in *Thrive MSP 2040*, that may include convening partners around issues that extend beyond the Council's authority. However, the Council's primary outreach and engagement activities will be related to matters within the scope of its authority.

Question 2: Council Advisory Committees

The Equity Working Group affirms the principle that the membership of the Council's advisory committees will reflect the diversity of the region.

The working group recommends these strategies to support this principle:

1. **Advisory committee information.** Information about Council advisory committees will be available via a website in a manner that allows the public to readily understand the purpose and membership of the advisory committees. Information will include committee name, purpose, current members, eligibility requirements for membership, selection process, meeting schedule, agendas, minutes (if available), and staff contact. The site will link to websites from other organizations with information about opportunities to serve in advisory roles at these organizations.
2. **Open call for appointments.** The Council will encourage applications to advisory committees on an "open" basis. Twice annually the Council will use its various communication channels, including its outreach work, to invite applications to its advisory committees and promote the availability of advisory committee service. A pool of candidates will be maintained and periodically updated during these semi-annual calls for applicants. Applicants will be able to apply at any time, as well.
3. **Selection and appointment process.** The candidate development, selection and appointment process is clear, simple, fair, equitable, and public. Candidates participating in the selection process will be reflective of the demographics of the region as a whole.
4. **Preparation and training.** Candidates in the applicant pool will be invited to participate in training for prospective advisory committees. The Council will identify and support such training resources and will consider certifications issued by other organizations in making appointments. The Council will develop need-based scholarships and support for candidates in this regard.
5. **Council procedures.** The Council will review and revise its expense reimbursement policies to reimburse the expenses for mileage, parking, and child care for members of advisory committees to attend meetings of their respective advisory committees. The Council will also consider adjusting meetings times of advisory committees to accommodate participation by community members.
6. **Revise Membership requirements.** The Council will consider changes to Council policies, and consider pursuing possible amendment of state laws prescribing membership and appointments to advisory committees to consider adding "at large" members or alternate members who may vote if an appointed member is either absent or has an identified conflict of interest and must abstain from a vote.
7. **Accountability.** The Council will periodically review a report of the demographic composition of the advisory committees, and recommend any changes to processes necessary to assure advisory committees are reflective of the region's diversity.

Question 3: Fostering Equity in the Council's Work

The Equity Working Group affirms the equity principle of assuring that residents and communities are full partners in decision-making. The Metropolitan Council was established to address issues that transcend local

government boundaries and cannot be sufficiently addressed by one unit of government or community organization. In the spirit of that legacy, the Equity Working Group recommends:

- A. the Council serve as a convener to address complex regional issues that impact equity as an outcome in the region – including efforts to address concentrated areas of poverty and racially concentrated areas of poverty, and efforts to engage and empower American Indians, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income and low-wealth populations, and immigrants and new Americans in regional planning.
- As convener, the Council can help determine who needs to be at the table to discuss complex regional issues and forge partnerships among governments and community organizations to address those issues and assure those issues are viewed through an equity lens. This includes facilitating collaboration among the region’s best thinkers, experts, and stakeholders to help identify problems and solutions that likely won’t be implemented by just one of the partner agencies.
 - To that end, the Council will work with stakeholders and community organizations to convene partners around a specific issue of focus, on short-term and long-term bases as appropriate to the issue.
 - The Council will also create an organization-wide public engagement plan, in collaboration with community organizations. The engagement plan will provide guidance for regional planning, as well as best practices for local planning efforts, to assure all communities are equitably engaged in the planning for the future of our region.
 - Council members will convene a public discussion at least once a year, outside the regular public meeting schedule, to engage residents, policy makers, community organizations and other key stakeholders regarding the assets each of them can offer to the development of possible solutions to overcoming the barriers impeding their success .
 - In addition to its role as a convener of external stakeholders, the Council has convened and empowered staff teams to imbed the equity outcome from *Thrive MSP 2040* into the Council’s administrative work and recommend policy revisions and assure these principles are an essential part of all the Council’s work in establishing regional policies and in providing important services to the region. Specifically, changes will be evident in the regional systems and policy plans, internal policies and procedures related to customer relations, outreach, communications, and regional transit fares.
- B. the Council chair consider the establishment, consistent with applicable process required by the Council’s bylaws, of a committee or work group comprised of some Council members and representatives from organizations which serve and/or advocate on behalf of historically underrepresented residents of the region to assess the progress of the Council’s integration of the equity outcome from *Thrive MSP 2040* into the Council’s policies and practices. We leave the scope, composition, and meeting frequency to the chair’s discretion, but provide the following advice, based on recommendations from the Community Engagement Steering Committee:
- Structure: Informal structure, patterned after the Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council managed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, initially created as a grass-roots committee to assist the department with equitable delivery of services. While formalized in state law today, the committee began as an open, regular gathering of advocates for and members of cultural communities to assist the department with service delivery issues. Meetings were open to those who could attend and ground rules governed consensus decision-making.
 - Scope: Assessing the implementation of the principle of equity in the Council’s administrative practices, and community engagement activities.
 - Membership: Informal, with special attention given to invite and include people of color, American Indians, new Americans, low-

income residents, and people with disabilities from communities throughout the region.

- Meeting frequency: quarterly, aligning with expectations for staff to provide quarterly updates to this committee and full Council on outreach activities.
- Meeting location: A location convenient to the community and an environment that fosters interaction and a less formal setting.

We recommend that this committee meet for two years and then the full Council should review its performance in order to determine its effectiveness for continuation, restructuring or elimination.

The ultimate goal of this work is to create more equitable outcomes for the people who live and work in the Twin Cities region.