

Minnesota Multi-faith Network (MnMN)
Prospectus
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Vision Proposition:

Communities of faith have great untapped potential to enhance the common good--the quality of community life and relationships -- what some call the Beloved Community.

The vision of this network is that communities of faith will fully mobilize their potential to effectively help the broader community to address critical issues affecting our common life, particularly: divisive and destructive intergroup relationships; disparities of privilege, opportunity, equity and quality of life; and degradation of the environment.

Communities of faith bring unique motivation and experience. Many fine faith-based and interfaith groups and efforts are already at work and contributing greatly. Still there are great gaps; lack of cross-group connection, cooperation and mobilization; much work in isolation; and failure to achieve what might be done with greater attention to strengthening relationships, sharing resources, working cooperatively, and collaborating on leadership development.

We envision a society with outstanding positive growth in quality of life for all, based in part on the efforts of many faith communities and interfaith groups working in concert.

Tagline: Connecting and supporting multi-faith work to heal the world.

Mission: The Minnesota Multi-faith Network is the statewide network supporting faith and interfaith leaders and organizations who work for a more just and loving world.

Goals:

- **Strengthen and broaden relationships among faith and multi-faith leaders and organizations to build the pre-conditions necessary for collaboration.**
 - Gather and convene members and prospective participants for inspiration, learning and identifying common goals, locating resources, etc.
 - Make introductions and facilitate one-on-one conversations that help connect people with similar interests.
 - Conduct an annual conference during World Interfaith Harmony Week.
 - Offer tailored training and development opportunities and occasional short workshops with network building as a primary goal.
 - Use technology and communications tools to connect members of the network with each other and to broaden audiences; share news, resources, calendars of events, and other information helpful for their work.

- **Create the conditions that build intentional networks and encourage emergent thinking to help faith leaders and organizations achieve their goals.**
 - Facilitate the formation of self-organized affinity or community of practice groups, which can offer learning and sharing, as well as exploration of cooperation or collaboration around a common focus issue, or type of work.

- **Develop and mobilize leadership to increase the effectiveness and the impact of multi-faith work in Minnesota.**
 - Provide professional and program development through training, mentoring and consultation.
 - Help multi-faith and faith-based organizations identify leadership from other organizations who might be willing to work collaboratively on issues.

- **Build the network's capacity to achieve its goals.**
 - Establish a strong governance structure and operational plan
 - Develop a diverse transitional steering committee to lead and champion this effort.
 - Develop a volunteer operations leadership team that will ensure the short-term goals are achieved.
 - Build a longer-term and sustainable organizational structure.
 - Map existing and potential network people, organizations and work
 - Identify faith-based organizations and leaders of faith communities, and interfaith organizations, including greater Minnesota and underrepresented communities.
 - Do network mapping of leaders, organizations, and existing interfaith work.
 - Engage leaders in dialogue to find their interest, needs, and resources (this is continuous work).
 - Build the communications and resource-sharing capacity that establishes the network as the go-to entity for inter-faith information and relationship building.
 - Establish a strong, sustainable financial base.
 - Secure short-term, transitional funding for three years.
 - Develop a long-term financial plan.
 - Communicate with stakeholders to identify their interests and needs, so that the network can be responsive and helpful and continue to evaluate its own performance, learning how to adjust and adapt on the move.

Values:

Multi-faith: People of many different religious/spiritual traditions can draw upon shared values of compassion, justice and work together for greater impact for the common good

Relationship-driven: Intentional relationship building (networking) is a core strategy to build trust.

Diversity/inclusion: An ongoing intentional effort to incorporate otherwise marginalized people and their voices is necessary.

Anti-racist: Active resistance to white dominance in composition and functioning is necessary to achieve effectiveness and must be an ever present aspect of the work.

Collaboration: Greater impact and better results can be achieved when we work cooperatively

Generative approach: A networked approach requires a continually flexible, learning, changing style of operation with the power of self-organizing, and non-hierarchical, circular structures.

Intersectionality: Greater overall impact can be achieved when we recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of various social injustices and human needs.

Collaborative learning and accountability: Continually assessing and learning about the social impact of efforts within and across the network is critical to deepening trust, knowledge and effective practices.

Benefits for participating individuals and organizations:

Relationships:

- Stronger relationships with trust, understanding and respect of one another
- More connections to diverse colleagues who can be helpful
- Work on one issue, or with one approach, is valued and supported by work on other issues or with other approaches

Sharing resources:

- Access and connections to people/organizations with relevant interests, talents, skills, knowledge and networks.
- Rapid diffusion of news and information relevant to the work
- A “go-to” place for press, public, funders to get knowledge, contacts, information, help

Working together:

- Greater political clout, collective voice and aligned messages
- Aligned or coordinated work on shared goals
- Ability to mobilize more people; ease of entry for newly motivated persons
- Processes and relationships through which new ideas emerge
- Opportunities for micro-collaborations

- Opportunities for joint projects which no one organization could do on their own

Leadership development:

- Opportunities for training and development, both for seasoned leaders and for novices
- Access to affinity communities of practice to fine tune skills and knowledge for practice
- New insights and perspectives on problems and issues
- Inspiration and motivation from and for collective impact
- Opportunity for significant, deep and careful dialogue on issues which tend to divide within and across groups (over different values, beliefs, practices)

Measurable Outcomes: (How do we define success?)

Short term:

- Relationships:
 - An increase the density of relationships among participants
- Sharing resources
 - Robust listing of resources such as speakers, events, educational materials, and connections to Minnesotans faith communities is available.
 - Congregations, news organizations, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and businesses seek information through the communications hub
 - Paid staff and/or volunteers responding helpfully to requests for information and connection to resources
- Working together
 - An increase in cooperation and collaboration among existing organizations.
 - A well-functioning rapid response network offering support in times of tragedy or challenge.
- Learning/leadership development
 - An increase in the number of affinity group meetings bringing together practitioners working on particular topics such as racism, housing, education, climate change.
- Extent participants' "value propositions" are fulfilled

Strategic Rationale: The Value of a Networked Approach

Background: St. Paul Interfaith Network conducted a strategic planning process in 2016-17 funded by The Saint Paul Foundation and Twin Cities Interfaith Network conducted a review of its functioning and prospects for its future early in 2017. These processes revealed the need for more coordination and less fragmentation of multi-faith work. The environment for interfaith work was described as:

- Many organizations are making good efforts at interfaith work.
- Each organization has its own structure and approach to interfaith work.
- Each organization – large and small – is fairly separate from the others.
- There does not appear to be regular strong connections among organizations and initiatives.

Interviews with leaders from multi-faith perspectives confirmed the need for a new entity that would address:

- Increasing religious and cultural diversity
- Misinformation, misunderstanding, avoidance, stereotyping, hostility and violence
- Climate of distrust, divisiveness, extremism
- Lack of voices and forces for social cohesiveness
- Fear of “them,” “the other,” “foreign”
- Alignment of resources and greater potential for sustainability and clarity for stakeholders

They said the key challenges they face include:

- Sharing of best Practices
 - Lack of transmission of operational best practices – we (and others) work in bubbles.
 - Redundancy with lack of resources to support so many organizations
- Mission
 - Alignment – organizations need to grow or they diminish/dissolve
 - Connect & Clarify – need someone to intersect organizations and missions, act as directory – where to go for what
 - Lack of opportunities for collective action
- Time and Priorities
 - People are busy, sorting all of the opportunities is a large challenge
 - We work in a transactional culture, chase current trend/reactionary, hold event and move on
- Capacity
 - Need to focus on long-term sustainability
 - Funders get distracted by the many options to fund – leads to no funding
 - Need consistent staff to sustain long-term, volunteer model creates longevity risk

Knowing that this is crucial work in these times, and desiring a more profound impact on our state-wide community, the SPIN and TCIN decided in the summer of 2017 to explore together how faith-based and multi-religious efforts with common interests could increase collective impact. To date the exploratory group has met with more than 50 stakeholders in groups and one-on-one and we continue this effort as part of our approach to continually get involvement of stakeholders.

Why a network: Because there are many, many seemingly disparate parts and we believe that by connecting in a network, organizations can retain the autonomy that makes them meaningful and effective (i.e. connected to their base, knowledgeable about their issues, able to mobilize resources) while at the same time realizing the benefits of a larger and diverse group of faith leaders and organizations (i.e. broader impact, sharing resources, gaining new knowledge).

“A need to network and better connect work is arising in many contexts, as people see silos that don’t connect,” notes New Directions Collaborative blogger Beth Tener. “People whose interests and goals are similar or complementary, who could be learning together and exchanging information and resources, *do not know each other or lack incentives to collaborate* (italics ours).”

In *Network Weaver Handbook: A Guide to Transformational Networks*, June Holly provides the following answer to “Why Networks?”

Network approaches focus our attention on relationships and help us connect people who haven’t been connected. They encourage self-organization so that novel solutions are generated. Network approaches are particularly useful when:

- **The problem or opportunity is big.**
Networks work especially well when what you want to do will require more than just a few organizations in a partnership. Dealing with large, intractable problems (such as poverty or urban blight) or moving in ambitious new directions (building a green economy) requires the engagement of many individuals and organizations. Network mapping helps identify who is interested in or already working in this area, and a network weaving strategy enables you to engage them effectively.
- **You need new ideas.**
Most big problems require fresh thinking. For this, you need to draw new ideas from all over the world and identify and draw in people likely to have those new ideas. Network Mapping enables you to identify local people who know innovators outside your immediate area and network strategies offer ways to engage these resources locally.
- **The solution is not clear or you need to build a new system.**
When a lot of experimentation, innovation, or system building needs to happen, a network strategy is appropriate. Partnerships or coalitions are fine for well-defined projects or actions. Networks are appropriate for situations where the solutions are unclear. Networks encourage self-organizing to explore the problem or situation.
- **You need to engage people from different backgrounds.**
For big problems or opportunities, you need to bring people together who may not have worked together before. Network mapping helps identify connectors – those individuals who already have relationships across these divides - and engage them in bringing groups together.

Transitional Steering Group (current as of _____)

1. Curtiss DeYoung, Minnesota Council of Churches
2. Adam Stock Spilker, Minnesota Rabbinical Association, Mount Zion Temple
3. Mary Pickard, Unity Church - Unitarian
4. Carl Nelson, Transform Minnesota
5. Onder Uluyol, Zafar Siddiqui, Naaima Kahn, Islamic Resource Group
6. Gail Anderson, Twin Cities Interfaith Network, EmpathyWorks
7. Tom Duke, Saint Paul Interfaith Network
8. Ben Connelly, Minnesota Zen Center
9. Judith Lies, Blooming Heart Sangha (Buddhist-Thich Nhat Hanh tradition)
10. Randi Roth, Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul
11. Rob Eller-Isaacs, Unity Church - Unitarian
12. Erich Rutten, Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, St. Peter Cleaver Catholic Church
13. Jessi LeClear-Vachta, United Theological Seminary
14. Prabhat Tekriwal, Satya Balroop, Hindu Milan Mandir
15. David Cournoyer (Lakota), independent consultant
16. Julia Nerbonne, Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light
17. Zan Christ, Hamline University