City of Independence Diversity & Inclusion Visioning Workshop: Summary Report

Prepared by MARC

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Workshop Summary

The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC)'s Government Training Institute (GTI) was selected by the City of Independence through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process to facilitate a half-day listening and visioning work session to collectively explore and agree upon shared goals, visions and performance expectations, as well as determine the most appropriate structure and way forward for continuing the City's diversity and inclusion work. A brief description of the workshop agenda, content and design are included in this summary report.

Scoping Session

Prior to the half-day listening and visioning work session ("workshop"), GTI met with the City Clerk and committee chairs/leaders to better understand expected workshop outcomes and to learn how this exercise aligned with the strategic goals identified by the City Council. The purpose of the advance meeting was to provide the facilitator with more context and to evaluate various facilitation techniques that could be utilized for the workshop. Participants spent time learning and better understanding the foundational principles of diversity and inclusion work, the leadership goals for this work in the City/community and to set the tone for the session.

Workshop Agenda

1. Welcoming Remarks and Context
2. Introduction
3. Leadership and Learning Development
4. What is Your Story? (Data Mining)
5. Aggregating the Data, Clear Outcomes
6. Determining a Structure and Next Steps

GTI facilitated a half-day workshop with approximately ten members representing the Mayor's Taskforce on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), the City's Human Relations Commission, other key interest groups, and/or other stakeholders identified by the City (see Appendix A). Committee

members were asked to share their understanding of their committee's purpose, mission, values as well as short-term and long-term goals regarding diversity, equity and inclusion.

Mayor Eileen Weir made opening remarks and emphasized the importance of this gathering. Participants reviewed and discussed the guiding principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participants were encouraged to share their perceptions of the guiding principles with the group.

The facilitator created a space and time for each participating committee to discuss the group's history and purpose of existence. Participants were surveyed to identify each group's current responsibilities and activities around diversity and inclusion. Each group described organizational and operational structure, including the capacity to absorb additional, long-term, and strategic diversity and inclusion work.

The facilitator encouraged the cross-conversation, sharing, and brainstorming of each committee to reflect on the group's impetus (how it came to be) and historical background, evaluate the best fit to lead this work internally and externally, and review the group's involvement and/or level of activity with the City/community.

Exploratory Storytelling Feedback

The following topics were compiled from group discussion as well as responses from the pre-session survey.

Human Relations Commission (HRC)

The Human Relations Commission expressed the presence of inclusion and diversity in their group. The Citizens with Disabilities Advisory Board and HRC are working through their merging process. HRC supports the community in speaking for themselves and invites people to join and participate in their meetings. Initially, the board focused on housing but is now incorporating other community issues such as handicap accessibility. Long-term commission members first saw very little diversity within the group but are happy with its evolution over the years. The HRC meetings have focused their work driven by the members' passions. The City's complaints process is reviewed by the Human Relations Department and forwarded to the commission if mediation is needed. Most of the complaints received by the City are health/property upkeep related and referred to resources in the community. The HRC voiced that they used to be included in the City's Human Resources Department complaints process but feel like that is no longer the case. The group's concern regarding diversity and race relations is that it may overpower the HRC tasks and the HRC should have its own focus.

- Successes:
  - Accountability
  - Advocating for accessibility
  - Commission members get things done independently
  - Community-focused not diversity focused

- o Forgiveness/Tolerance of one another
- o Hands-on and resolving issues 1:1
- o Holistic approach
- o Fair Housing duties are overseen by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- o Inclusion of community members
- o Resolving housing issues (race, class, gender, age, disability, discrimination)
- o Standing for disability rights
- o Tangible services that directly impact community members
- o Warm and welcoming environment for the community
- o Working on their goals

- Challenges:
  - o City no longer shares community complaints with the commission
  - o Disconnection in working with HUD
  - o Community representation is missing
  - o Diversity is too large of a component to be managed by commission, yet it falls under the umbrella of D&I
  - o Educating the community about the commission through City 7 Television
  - o Feel as though commission is not valued/heard/listened to/overshadowed
  - o Infrequent 1-hour monthly meetings (every 3 months)
  - o Scheduling challenges with meetings
  - o Wear thin because it's challenging to keep up with few participating members

- Suggestions for improvement:
  - o Clear objectives and direction to fulfill goals of the community (including City personnel/liaison)
  - o Disconnected from HUD due to lack of communication
  - o Education opportunities on public forums
  - o Include City officials in commission meetings to improve communication
  - o Limited time and resources during meetings
  - o More time needed for diversity (overwhelming/overpowering) -- lack of guidance, had to establish definition/focus
  - o Outline specific solutions/outcomes/goals/liaison for different complaints (housing, PD, ADA)
  - o Practical approach to passionate goals
  - o Policy to show the importance for HRC to receive the information they feel they are lacking
  - o Redo/propose mission and vision
  - o Refortification of commission
  - o Re-organized chair and co-chair
  - o Retain current commission members and add new members

- o Subcommittees/groups based on different strengths/skills
- o Timely communication via email with contact person at City
- o Written course of action - liaison

Mayor's Taskforce on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)

The purpose and mission of D&I was to recognize that the community wants diversity and inclusion and find ways they can grow and change. Everyone's voices belong at the table to get an understanding and allow people to explain themselves. The taskforce sees the need for the committee and would like to accomplish more without losing momentum. They acknowledge the diversity in the community and strive to close gaps. There is an issue with encouraging people to come to the community not realizing that there are aspects of the community where people are struggling or not being treated fairly.

Everyone has different perspectives and realities, and the committee must be willing to dissect and unpack the community's past and present. One participant shared his old perception that the City was not friendly to Black people, but once he joined HRC, he was able to meet many friendly people and moved forward. Members see people's desire to change the culture of the City, and the City needs to take more advantages to make the cultural shift. The D&I Taskforce were originally tasked with providing recommendations to update a 1987 memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the City and the Community of Concerned Citizens (local civil rights organization) as well as the city's boards and commissions application. The taskforce presented recommendations to the City Council on February 28, 2020, which included feedback to update the MOU and include accountability measures to ensure both parties were adhering to said agreement. The taskforce also presented to the City Council an updated city board and commission application which included demographical information, so the diversity of applicants received could be monitored. The greatest goal of D&I is to enact policy and create systemic change. The plan moving forward with the committees needs to blend strategy and practicality.

- Successes
  - o Access through marketing in media to reach residents regardless of socio-economic
  - o Accountability
  - o Assurance to committee's foundation to continue and change
  - o Awareness of unique historical issues in the community (culture, race, trauma, socio-economic)
  - o Committed to the Community of Concerned Citizens including Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) influence and work
  - o Community inclusion of broadened needs, trauma, and emotional conflict
  - o Following committee's policies, practices, and actions
  - o Foundational change and historical awareness regarding community issues
  - o Honest communication about DEI work
  - o Mission to impact systemic changes
  - o Ongoing education
  - o Recruiting diverse community talent with DEI reflected material

- o   Representation of all City communities
- o   Responsibility for DEI conversations
- o   Transparency in the committee and its policies

- Suggestions for improvement:
  - o   Ask DEI perspectives from potential committee interviewees
  - o   Broaden inclusion to represent all groups and communities
  - o   City's handling of DEI work and reflective of values
  - o   Honor beliefs of the Community of Concerned Citizens (local civil rights group established in 1982)
  - o   Increase community engagement
  - o   Outdated documents and material from the City that does not reflect values of DEI
  - o   Welcoming spaces (safe spaces for marginalized groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender communities (LGBT+) and people of color (POC), places of employment, city, organizations)

Next Steps

The following are recommendations based on the input documented during the workshop. GTI is eager to discuss the content of these next steps to answer any questions and expand on the ideas and recommendations captured here or generated during the listening session. GTI is happy to provide proposals for consideration by the City for additional services including: Identifying DEI workgroups and researching examples of other cities' DEI initiatives.

1. Consolidate DEI work under a single advisory committee.
Due to the similarities and overlapping goals, consolidate the Human Relations Commission and Mayor's Taskforce to work together under one entity with a unified focus.
- Rewrite and define the committee's mission/vision to reflect DEI values
- Come together for a unified focus between the 2 committees
- Ensure that the focus reflects more than racial equity and includes priorities expressed by the HRC such as accessibility.
- Create tools for success

2. Establish work groups for the advisory committee to address specific goals.
Create workgroups under the new consolidated advisory committee for where individuals from both current committees bring their strengths as liaisons in different communities such as LGBTQ+. The workgroups will convey information to the consolidated committee.

Suggested workgroups under single advisory committee:
- Access and Functional Needs
- City Liaising and Relationships

- Housing and Sheltering
- Law Enforcement and Public Engagement
- Multicultural Affairs

3. Establish Communication Protocols to Ensure Support from City Leadership and Alignment with City Organizational Goals

The new advisory committee will require support from city leadership (City Council and the City Manager's Office) to be successful. The city should provide guidance to the advisory committee to establish communication protocols for the committee to periodically report to the City Council about current issues and proposed improvements for DEI. The committee should be given the opportunity to submit an annual budget request through appropriate channels for the funding necessary to support DEI work.

4. Hire a DEI Officer

The committees recommend for the City to create a new position – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer. This new leadership position will be needed to support the new advisory committee and help it identify and execute on its goals. A DEI officer oversees the conditions of learning and actively works to remove barriers that hinder success and well-being. The position should be filled by a person who has knowledge and expertise in promoting equity and inclusion. The following are examples of job titles and job descriptions that may be informative.

Director of Diversity & Inclusion
Springfield, Missouri
The City of Springfield is seeking a progressive leader to serve as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion. The Director will serve on the City's Leadership Team as a senior-level management position and will be responsible for the development and implementation of the organization's diversity, equity and inclusion e-orts and initiatives. This position will work collaboratively with the City's Leadership Team to identify and provide expertise on issues related to policies, procedures, best practices and applicable laws related to diversity, equity and inclusion. The Director's work will be focused on advancing diversity and inclusion strategies and work within the City as an organization and will build relationships and partnerships within the Springfield community as well.

https://www.springfieldmo.gov/DocumentCenter/View/50536/Director-of-Diversity-and-Inclusion?bidId=

City of Benicia Equity and Diversity Manager: http://beniciaindependent.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/DRAFT-Job-Description-Benicia-Equity-and-Diversity-Manager-2020-08-25.pdf

City of Lawrence Director of Equity and Inclusion: https://jobsearcher.com/j/director-of-equity-and-inclusion-at-city-of-lawrence11478-in-lawrence-kansas-4QJ8xV

4. Adopt best practices from DEI initiatives in peer communities.
Explore different cities and what kind of work they are doing in order to mirror established initiatives. The following is an illustrative, not exhaustive, list as a starting point.

Diversity Department of City of Tempe, AZ: https://www.tempe.gov/government/strategic-management-and-diversity/diversity/workforce-initiatives

City of Peoria, AZ's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion: https://www.peoriaaz.gov/government/departments/city-manager/diversity-and-inclusion

City of Billings, MT Human Relations Commission: https://ci.billings.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/23452/Doc2?bidId=

City of Asheville, NC Human Relations Commission: https://www.ashevillenc.gov/department/city-clerk/boards-and-commissions/human-relations-commission/

City of Beaverton, OR: https://www.beavertonoregon.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8942/DEI-Plan-web?bidId=

City of Gastonia, NC: https://www.cityofgastonia.com/images/files/city_council_mayor/documents/Strategic-PlanFINAL-2020-2022.pdf

It has been a pleasure working with and getting to know your committee members. We very much appreciate the opportunity to work with you and to play a small part in your City's development efforts. We applaud the City's commitment to provide D&I work within Independence city government as well as the Independence community at large.

Appendix A
Workshop Attendance - 11/17/2020

List of Human Relations Commission members present:
- Nina Woodson-Falls
- Mike Coppoc
- Lupe Moe

List of Mayor's D&I Taskforce:
- Casey Phillips
- Helen Hurley
- Meredith Parrish
- Nina Woodson-Falls
- Roman Davis
- Thad McCullough

City of Independence:
- Mayor Eileen Weir
- City Clerk Becky Behrens