DANIA PARTNERS DATA GATHERING INTERVIEWS
TO INFORM NEXT STEPS

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DANIA PARTNERS WHO WERE INTERVIEWED

Abdi Salam Adam
Executive Director, Darul Hijrah

Hashi Abdi
Executive director, Somali Action Alliance

Ali Tahirro
Refugee Services Officer, Oromo Community of Minnesota

Hussein Samatar
Executive Director, African Development Center

Jim Ruiz
President, West Bank Community Coalition

Fredda Scobbe
Executive Director, Riverside Plaza Tenants Association

Mrs. Park
Executive Director, Korean Center

Tim Mungavan
Executive Director, West Bank Community Development Corporation

Amano Dube
Interim Director, Brian Coyle Community Center
THEMES FROM DANIA PARTNERS INTERVIEWS

Commitment to Dania Partners is Unanimous
There was unanimous support and a firm commitment towards the continuing working collaboratively together as Dania Partners. The Dania Partners collaborative was seen as something unique and an asset to the community. It was felt that it was significant thing for community leaders to be at the table together as unity makes us strong. Coming together to ensure that the Dania lot was not converted into a parking lot was a significant event for the partners. It was proof that coming together made us powerful and able to accomplish larger things. It feels like there is a vacuum in the neighborhood and Dania Partners helps fill that empty space, creating an opportunity to have those typically not represented at a chance to have their voices heard.

Rebuilding Dania Hall is A High Priority
Almost all the Dania Partners brought up rebuilding Dania Hall. Dania Hall was described as something everyone was looking forward to. It was a larger symbol of the neighborhood and was seen as something good for everyone. The old neighborhood and the new immigrants would both benefit. Everyone could envision Dania Hall being used as a community space, fellowship room, space for celebrations, weddings, gathering space for elders, youth. There was a significant amount of energy and enthusiasm when Dania Hall was talked about. It was seen something that could bring everyone together. There was apprehension that without Dania Partners, something will be built but it will not have the community’s wellbeing and needs at heart.

Commitment to Cedar Riverside Neighborhood is Deep
All Dania Partners felt a strong connection to and ownership of the neighborhood even though many did not live here. It came across loud and clear that Dania Partners were invested in the neighborhood and considered this their homebase. Everybody wanted to see the neighborhood become more successful. They wanted a safe, clean neighborhood where they their families and businesses could thrive. They all wanted the streets and pavements and sidewalks to be repaired and maintained. Everyone wanted to be able to feel proud of Cedar Riverside.

Dania Partners Need to Tell The Community Story
Another theme was the importance of telling this neighborhood’s story. This has always been a neighborhood of immigrants and thus the strong attachment and emotional connection associated with this place. It was felt there was a wealth of history in our neighborhood that yet has to be told. There are also the contemporary immigrant stories that need telling. All these stories are powerful and can help Dania Partners make things happen.

Questions that were posed include:

- Who should be telling the immigrant story?
- Can Dania Partners tell their own stories? Is there power in telling these stories?
- Who owns these stories? Who should tell it? How should they be used and by whom?
- What happens when somebody else tells our story? Is there a shift in power?
Dania Partners Data Gathering for Next Steps

Dania Partners Can Contribute According to Their Capacity
While there is firm commitment from all Dania Partners, it was acknowledged that not all the partners have the same capacity, skill or resources. Not everyone is able to contribute equally; some organizations have more organizational and leadership capacity. Others expressed that their strength is in the people they can mobilize, and bring together when important decisions need to be made or when community input is needed. It was clear that these organizations were in the business of working with and knowing their constituents.

Demands Beyond Neighborhood Boundaries
Another challenge faced by Dania Partners was that almost all organizations served constituents outside of the Cedar Riverside neighborhood. Some of Dania Partner organizations were engaged in statewide work and so were not able to focus only on the concerns of the Cedar Riverside neighborhood.

Many Demands Made on Dania Partners
Cedar Riverside is a complex neighborhood and has many needs. Dania Partners felt pulled in many directions. Many issues seemed crucial e.g. Dania site, LRT, Central Corridor issue – but that did not help Dania Partners build capacity. It is tempting to bring up multiple issues especially since they do impact everyone. Being drawn into different issues and conflicts was also very confusing and made it difficult to understand everything that was going on. Projects seem to be determined by the current crisis in the neighborhood. We were always reacting to something and it was not always clear what we were coming together for or what the process was.

Lack of a Clear Purpose or Tangible Results
Many partners expressed frustration that despite spending time on meetings, we were not always able to deliver a tangible product that showed success. Leaders have limited time and so if we continue coming together with no clear focus we will lose participation. We don’t want to over-burden people to the point that they cannot function.

Challenges of Doing Cross-Cultural Collaborative Work
Getting 13 partners together is a challenge. Add on a layer of a multicultural collaboration and complex neighborhood relationships and dynamics adds to the complexity. Not talking things through sufficiently created many opportunities for communication breakdowns and confusion. The goals were not clear to everyone and we did not seem to be moving towards a common shared vision. Roles and levels of participation were not laid out clearly, and a decision making process was not clearly defined. Infrequent attendance for a variety of reasons by partners also further acerbated this problem.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING THE WORK OF DANIA PARTNERS FORWARD

Determine Leadership of Dania Partners
A Core Leadership Team or Board of Directors needs to be established. Roles and responsibilities of Core Leadership Team/Board of Directors as well as all Dania Partners needs to be defined. Each partner needs to articulate what they can bring to the table, what their interests are, and what they’d like to get out of this collaboration. All partners need to articulate their self-interest and those with more power and influence should own it.

Create Acceptable Decision-making Process
A clear and transparent decision-making process needs to be established and accepted by all Dania Partners to enable the work to move forward. The collaborative process of decision-making can be time consuming but unless we have deep participation, this partnership will not succeed or be strong. Dania Partners must have decision-making capacity within their own organizations

Generate Enthusiasm Among New Immigrant Community
There was something missing. The Dania Partners table has not yet been able to generate energy and enthusiasm among the immigrant community. It was not yet clear how the immigrant community could be a core part of this work. Community ownership of the vision put forward by Dania Partners could be a key factor in generating this energy and excitement.

Explore Issues Around Cross-cultural Work
While we celebrate diversity among the Dania Partners we need to move beyond that to ensure that we have an effective and meaningful collaboration. We need to develop and cultivate a real ability to work appropriately with cultural difference. When different cultures come together, there will always be challenges and conflicts. Learning to work through challenges and conflicts needs to be a part of the collaborative process. Acknowledge that everyone – the new immigrant communities, the established immigrants communities – everyone has a culture.

Explore, Understand and Learn to Deal With Race Issues
Racism happens. Individual racist actions may be done out of lack of awareness or ignorance. While it is not always intentional or deliberate, it sometimes is. Race issues are not just personal. Race issues need to be studied from a systems perspective. Only when we go there and explore institutional racism, and the role we play in it, can we figure out strategies to dismantle it. It is appropriate for Dania Partners to engage in work around racism, white privilege, and cultural differences as we can all benefit from this. Collaborating together as Dania Partners is a valuable opportunity to educate each other, learn from each other, work cross-culturally, to educate others, and to educate ourselves. None of us knows everything, and we all have room for growth

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Explore, Understand and Learn to Work with Institutional Power
Many of the Dania Partners said that institutions in the neighborhood are ignoring them and not listening to them. Despite being surrounded by wealthy, resource rich institutions – universities, colleges, hospitals - our huge population of elders and youth in the neighborhood have little of no access to these facilities. There is an invisible glass wall that keeps us away from the playing fields, libraries, swimming pools, exercise facilities, and computer labs. These institutions don’t see themselves as part of the neighborhood and the neighborhood is not part of them. Both are outside of each other.

Explore, Understand and Learn How Immigrant Communities Can Gain Access
It was strongly felt that there seems to be a lack of listening when the immigrant community speaks. They are called new immigrants despite some of the having been here for 10-15-20 years. They are always on the outside of power circles and decision-making tables. The question is how can we make inroads into the existing power structures to make sure that our voices are heard. Access is a huge issue that needs to be addressed.

Determine Staffing Needs to Move the Work Forward
Can existing partners offer staff-time? Or should a part-time facilitator-consultant-project manager-coordinator – be hired to move things along? Dania Partners need to up front about what they can offer. Everybody’s time is valuable.

Some Things to Keep in Mind as we Move Forward doing Cross Cultural Work
- Members of all cultures tend to internalize and become consciously unaware of their own norms. For members of a dominant group in a culture this condition is exaggerated; they are usually surrounded by people and institutions based on their set of values. Thus that system is constantly reinforced, and they have less exposure to contrasting values and behaviors than do members of minority groups.
- It is often the invisible differences in expectations, values, goals, and communication styles that cause cultural differences to be misinterpreted as personal violations of trust or respect.
- What happens when two different ways of life intersect? What happens when individualism and communalism intersect? How do individuals whose identity is tied up with their place in a community work with those who are individuals in their own right – not tied to any culture or community?
- What are our backgrounds? What political circumstances are we emerging from and how does that impact our interaction with the current reality? How does that impact our work?
- How much do I know about my own cultural values, and norms? What is the lens through which I view the world? What are the factors that shape my worldview?
- How do I respond when I have to deal with someone who has very different cultural values and norms?
- Cultural Differences can be found in the way we - communicate, deal with conflict, get our work done, make decisions, feel about self disclosure, and ways we acquire knowledge, wisdom or information.