The Core Team for this initiative first gathered on April 25, 2016 to begin to get to know each other, clarify the potential of this project, and share our understanding of the need. The group was diverse, representing various parts of Minnesota’s workforce development field, community colleges, nonprofit service providers, private philanthropy, adult basic education and state agencies. After the first meeting, Core Team members met for the initial planning of Equity Works three additional times: June 6th, June 30rd, & July 18th.

WHO WAS INVOLVED
Rachel Speck (Greater Twin Cities United Way), Brian Paulson (Pohlad Family Foundation), Jennifer Racho (Northwest Area Foundation), Deborah Schlick (Department of Human Services), Nola Speiser (Department of Employment and Economic Development), Tom Cytron-Hysom (Consultant, Adult Basic Education), Nicole Swanson (Anoka County), Bryan Lindsley (MSPWin), Jodi Sandfort (Humphrey School), Mike Christenson (MCTC), Becky Brink (Goodwill/Easter Seals), May Xiong (PPL), Tasha Shevelin (East Side Neighborhood Services), Joe Hobot (American Indian OIC), Dana Dumbacher (Department of Employment and Economic Development) Stephaine Jacobs (Humphrey School) Anne-Marie Kupier (Summitt Academy OIC), Isadora Tabue (Humphrey School), Eduardo Barrera (CLUES), Tuleah Palmer (Northwest Indian OIC), Melissa Cuff (St. Paul College) & Julie Brekke (PPL).
The Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota acts as the project facilitator (commissioned by MSPWin funders). Activities were not predetermined. In the participatory method that underpins the work of this project, the Core Team is a group invited together because of the diverse perspectives each person has about the system.

At the first meeting we talked in small groups to uncover the needs that are ripe in the workforce development field now. Many themes arose in defining project scope and activities. Through this activity we articulated the dire needs of this sector and what could be done.

**RECOGNIZING THE NEED**

- To explore and develop more strategic funding in workforce
- To address multi-system failure for people of color
- A shared set of measurement for defining success among service organizations and the ability to utilize data as a means to support program improvement
- To keep employers informed and invested on our work

**WHAT WE CAN DO**

- Make racial disparities, access and outcomes front and center in our work
- Help employers visualize career pathways and methodology
- Strengthen the capacity of organizations delivering direct services
- Infuse innovation as we wrestle with the tension between clarity and compliance in the field
- Shine a light on programs that are working within the field locally and nationally

**HOW WE ENGAGE**

The next meeting focused on the **HOW**. How we could address the need? How we should work together? How we will impact change within this sector? Humphrey School staff spent time illustrating and exploring the concept of a Community of Practice. In a Community of Practice, work, co-learning and relationships are at the core of how we will engage in this process. Members agreed this model should be our approach in this initiative.

Learn more about Equity Works at [www.futureservicesinstitute.org](http://www.futureservicesinstitute.org)  •  [results@umn.edu](mailto:results@umn.edu)
Not wanting to duplicate current or past efforts within this field, we spent a significant amount of time discussing what was worth preserving, what could fall way and what might be added to strengthening existing efforts. From this conversation, we were able to develop three specific strategies to approaching this work working in different parts of the field: with direct service organizations, with individual change agents, and with cross-sector decision makers.

The last two meetings focused on defining the purpose of this Community of Practice, branding the initiative, and outlining the specific tactics/approach to address our strategies. After several intense conversations about our purpose, we were brought back to the needs we had initially stated our work should address. Members felt that it was critical our purpose:

- Call out the equity crisis within workforce development and industry
- Include language that is positive, bold and free of jargon
- Leading with tactics and results rather than policy ideals
- Focus on equity for communities of color and American Indians
This reflection grounded our discussion and made clear what we want to do going forward. It lead us to the creation of a purpose and brand that is reflective of this aspiration.

OUR PURPOSE
Cultivate workforce development practices and systems that lead to outcomes which address the equity crisis impacting communities of color and American Indians in Minnesota.

WHO WE ARE
Equity Works
a Minnesota workforce development collaborative

OUR APPROACH TO THIS WORK
WITH DIRECT SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS
Share solutions to optimize common operational problems. Provide support for using data, share effective service delivery practices, and build capacity to sustain organization resources and programs.

Frontline Peer Learning Community Within key areas of service provision, convene frontline staff to share effective strategies with proven records of success relating to curriculum, grant management and data.

Data Collection & Outcome Management Facilitate effective data management that leads to outcome driven program improvement. Cultivate culturally based practices authenticated by evidence. Establish data access and application for direct service organizations.

WITH INDIVIDUAL CHANGEMAKERS
Work to build a learning community that understands both demographic trends in the field and promising national and local program responses to develop and advocate for solutions.

Leadership Development Build courage and skills to create capacity to lead organizational and systems change.

Replicate National Program Models Identify successful workforce programs nationwide to bring promising practices and replicate national program models to fit the uniqueness and demographics of communities in Minnesota.

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WITH CROSS-SECTOR, CROSS-LEVEL DECISION MAKERS

Engage public funders, philanthropic donors, service providers, and employers who need to work effectively together to strengthen this field.

Employer Equity Training
Develop and implement equity training and education for all employers. Stress culturally appropriate hiring tactics and expose barriers to employment for communities of color.

“Blueprint” Restructuring & Implementation
Organize a taskforce to deepen the Blueprint so that it reflects the work of cross-sector workforce development programs.

Cross-Sector Networking
Convene people across sector silos and levels to maximize resource investment and minimize redundancy. Address gaps in funding, effective services, and employment needs.

NEXT STEPS

Going forward, Equity Works will be governed by a smaller Core Team to assure that it stays focused on its purpose. As Ambassadors for this work, core members will help project staff address the strategies and tactics outlined above. These leaders have committed to serve as members of the team for at least one year.

Other participants in the initial project development are volunteering on work groups that will bring their expertise and resources to one or more of the outlined tactics. Others are very welcome to engage with this emerging project through input and their energy. Please join our Community of Practice.

The Future Services Institute is an initiative of the Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. For more information about the Humphrey School please visit us at: hhh.umn.edu

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