

discover together | South St. Paul



This report assesses the progress to date on the Discover Together: South St. Paul project. Discover Together is an initiative that aims to promote community engagement while building capacity within Dakota County to work generatively with communities. The report draws from a range of activities conducted in June and July 2017, during which time the project focused on hosting engagement events, identifying and responding to need, and building relationships between Dakota County and South St. Paul.¹

Over this period, the Discover Together Core Team accomplished the following:

- Hosted nine “pop-up” engagements, focusing on topics including transportation, education, business development, community space planning, and community pride.
- Convened two planning work groups to address needs related to community space and welcoming new residents.
- Recruited Dakota County employees to participate in engagement activities.
- Continued to build and strengthen relationships between county and city government, business community, and religious congregations in South St. Paul.
- Presented phase 1 accomplishments to the Dakota County board in July.

These activities allowed the Core Team to **engage and connect** with different parts of the South St. Paul community, including the business community, youth, and families. Yet **reaching the full diversity** of the community continued to be **a challenge**. The “pop-up” engagements offered opportunities to gather information and assess the challenges, needs, and resources of South St. Paul, while the work groups allowed team members to collaborate in addressing some of the immediate community needs. While outreach to the community was strong, Core Team members had **limited chances to share** with the community the insights learned through the engagement activities. Finally, relationships between Dakota County and the city and community of South St. Paul, continued to develop and **grow stronger** during this period.

¹ Information for this report was gathered via written reflections from engagement events as well as harvests from engagement events, planning meetings, and bi-weekly Core Team meeting.

Reaching a diverse community

Discover Together: South St. Paul is guided by a purpose statement and five principles, which shape evaluation questions. One Discover Together principle affirms a commitment to “build and invest in relationships across difference.” The corresponding evaluation question aims to assess whether project activities reach the full diversity of the South St. Paul community.

- In June and July, the Core Team hosted nine “pop-up” engagement events in natural gathering spaces in South St. Paul, including an annual festival, art fair, business park, and city-wide garage sale (see Table 1). Each event prioritized a different topic of conversation, from general questions about South St. Paul to specific questions about education, transportation, and community space. These questions addressed one of 10 themes that were gathered through probing interviews at the start of this work. Events occurred on different days and times and sought to engage different audiences, including the business community, long-time South St. Paul residents, and youth.
- While intentional efforts were made to engage diverse parts of the community, reaching the full diversity of the community was a challenge. Several reflections note the lack of racial and ethnic diversity at the engagements: community attendees have been overwhelmingly white, and with the exception of the youth engagement event, have tended to be older and, as one participant with knowledge of the community noted, wealthier. Engagement events have also been clustered on the northern and eastern parts of town, where fewer Latino and African American families reside. The team is working towards engagement with the Latino community through the schools and will do so when school resumes in September.
- To facilitate outreach to the community, the Core Team developed a website and Facebook page. These pages provide general information on the project, the Core Team, and past and future engagement events. The team explored additional venues for communicating with the community, including a city newsletter, the local newspaper, and “leave-behinds” at various locations in the city. Moving forward, the website will be a useful space for sharing information back with the community.



Kaposia Days at Central Square

Leveraging resources to address shared challenges

Other Discover Together principles state that the project aims to “magnify and leverage assets of the community” and “identify resources to act on ideas from all parts of the community.” The corresponding evaluation questions assess the strategies in place to monitor need and leverage community resources, as well as the improve relations and align activities between key stakeholders.

- In June and July, the Discover Together Core Team gained a firmer understanding of the needs of South St. Paul residents through focused questions at engagement events. These questions explored the topics of community space, transportation, education, business development, and youth perspectives on South St. Paul. From these questions, the Core Team learned:
 - ▶ **COMMUNITY SPACE:** There is a strong desire for more community space, especially in the form of public parks and gardens with adequate lighting, bike paths, and locations for festivals and general community gatherings.
 - ▶ **TRANSPORTATION:** Most residents either drive or walk within South St. Paul. Bus service is infrequent and the numerous attendees noted the poor quality of sidewalks. There was strong interest in learning about the South St. Paul LOOP through DARTS, which provides scheduled transportation to the community (especially seniors).
 - ▶ **EDUCATION:** Residents strongly support the schools – especially the teachers and extracurricular activities. Bullying is a prominent concern and some residents express skepticism about the new principal of Lincoln Elementary. More peer to peer counseling and support of lower-income families is needed.
 - ▶ **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:** There is a desire for development that includes a mix of business and commercial space. Many residents cite a desire for more restaurants; others express an interest in entertainment and shopping venues. While many work in South St. Paul, few actually “play” there.
 - ▶ **YOUTH:** Many youth plan to stay in South St. Paul. Neighborhood crime and bullying in schools are cited as prominent problems. There is a need for more community space and activities for youth to enjoy.
- Early engagement efforts revealed a lack of interaction between long-time residents of South St. Paul and newer residents (often families of different race or ethnicity). To address this challenge, the Core Team convened a working group to create a “welcome packet” for new residents. Between May and July, the working group met three times and developed a plan for developing the packet. The working group secured the involvement of local contributors, such as a graphic designer (wife of Community Service Employee) and the Director of Community Relations of the local bank.

- On July 24th, the Core Team hosted Tony Schertler of Dakota County's Community Development Agency (CDA). The meeting was well attended, with 7 Core Team members (including 2 from FSI), 4 South St. Paul city officials, 3 members of Clark-Grace United Church of Christ, and 4 Dakota County employees. The meeting allowed city officials and community residents to learn more about county-wide housing programs and the ongoing strategies to providing housing throughout Dakota County. The meeting also provided a forum for the attendees to discuss housing-related concerns.
- In general, the engagement events and Core Team meetings have provided an opportunity for county, city, and community participants to identify shared needs and begin to co-create solutions. For instance, from the July 24th Core Team meeting, members of Clark-Grace United Church of Christ (UCC) learned that some religious congregations act as emergency shelter during winter months. The church is now meeting with the Dakota County Housing Manager to determine whether the UCC might be able to act as an emergency shelter in South St. Paul.
- Throughout June and July, Discover Together drew upon the resources and expertise of the Future Services Institute (FSI) for engagement purposes. The team contributed visual artifacts, branding expertise, and graphic recordings (see Voices of South St. Paul Youth, below). These visuals play a powerful role in promoting awareness of the Discover Together: South St. Paul project.
- The Core Team has had few opportunities to share back with the community insights learned over the course of the work. Moving forward, there is a desire to utilize project-based resources (such as social media, project brochures, etc.) to better inform the community of the work being done and the lessons learned.

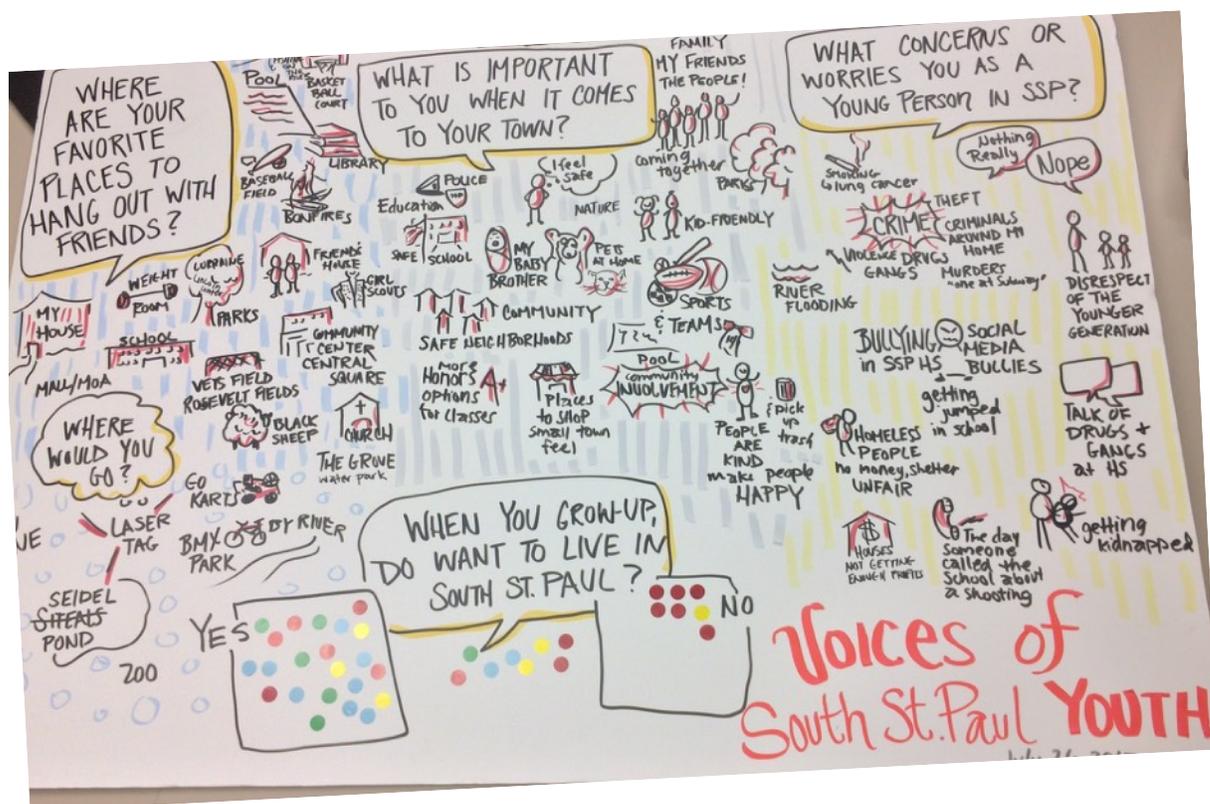


Figure 1. Graphic Harvest from South St. Paul Youth Engagement Event

Improving relations and aligning activities

Finally, improving the relationship between Dakota County and the City of South St. Paul is an important outcome of the project. This outcome is reflected in the another Discover Together principle: that governments can have a positive role by facilitating community conversations and enabling collective action to address shared challenges.

- To this end, the Discover Together: South St. Paul Core Team worked to align activities with the City of South St. Paul Comp Planning team. The two teams worked alongside one another at the visioning session, Kaposia Days, and Swimming under the Stars. The teams will continue to align activities and share learnings in the coming months.
- Ongoing conversations with South St. Paul residents reveal a desire for enhanced public space. In June, the Core Team convened a working group focused on community space planning, which would align with the city's efforts to renovate (and possibly relocate) the public library. The work group is collaborating in this effort with UMN professors, an urban planner who has developed a method for public engagement and community visioning, the city of SSP, Dakota County, and other key stakeholders.



SouthWest Lioness Club Garage Sale

- The presentation to the Dakota County Board in July indicated an interest in working collaboratively with the South St. Paul business community. A business engagement work group met in late July to investigate opportunities to identify need, leverage resources, and align activities with local businesses. An engagement event for small business owners took place in August.
- Within Dakota County, Core Team members have worked to raise awareness of the Discover Together project and identify areas of shared community interest across county divisions. For example, employees from the Public Health Dept. participated in engagement events and helped refine the engagement questions for these events.

Discover Together: South St. Paul Core Team Members

Connie Garling-Squire

Director of Early Learning & Equity, SSP Public Schools

Deb Griffith

Community Affairs Liaison, City of SSP

Patrick Joiner

Associate Pastor, Luther Memorial Lutheran Church

Oliver White

Reverend at Clark-Grace United Church of Christ

Jeanne Zehnder

Community Education Director, SSP Public Schools

Jackie Forrester

Senior Project Manager, Dakota Cnty Community Services

Jill Pittelkow

Program Supervisor, Dakota County Workforce Services

Stephanie Radke

Deputy Director, Dakota County Community Services

Kathleen Simon

Manager, Strategic Projects/Performance Measurement

Luke Van Horn

Contract Manager, Dakota County

Andrea Zuber

Director, Dakota County Social Services

This report was prepared by Future Services Institute. For more information, visit
<http://futureservicesinstitute.umn.edu/>

