

# Blue Ribbon Commission

Reducing Racial Employment Disparities

## June 20, 2011 Meeting Notes

### Meeting Attendees

Commission members: Liz Anderson, Andrea Ferstan, Louis Henry, Clarence Hightower, Butch Howard (Co-Chair), Doug Hubbard, Ramon Leon, Cyndi Leshner, Janet Ludden, Kevin Martineau, Repa Mekha, Tran Nhon, Mary Russell, Dr. Sheila Wright (Co-Chair)

Guests: Cam Counters (Ramsey County), D. K. Singh, Zsuzsanna Hill, Gaigongdin Panmei (Humphrey Institute students).

Staff: Mary Jo Gardner, Anne O'Connor, Ann Olson

Facilitators: Karen Gray, Nora Hall

### Welcome and Review of Previous Meeting

Karen opened the meeting by welcoming the BRC members and guests and reminded participants of the commission's charge. Dr. Hall then discussed the conversation at the previous meeting stemming from the small group breakout sessions. She mentioned that they had begun to put together a sheet outlining the primary stakeholders related to this issue and said that it would soon be shared with the group. She then introduced the draft logic model that was put before the group for discussion.

A commission member mentioned an article from the April 30, 2011 edition of The Economist magazine, which he said touched on many of the topics discussed in the commission's meetings. The article is called *Decline of the Working Man: Why ever fewer low-skilled American men have jobs* and is available at [www.economist.com/node/18618613](http://www.economist.com/node/18618613).

Karen mentioned a DEED-administered program called the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) that a commission member suggested exploring between the June 6 and June 20 meetings. The WOTC is a federal program through the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration that aims to create employer incentives in the form of tax credits for the hiring of certain targeted groups including veterans, family assistance recipients, ex-felons, food stamp recipients and others. Members of the commission who had some familiarity with the program indicated that it was cumbersome and difficult to navigate, and that it has not had consistent federal funding and is therefore not a reliable resource for employers. It also relies on the participants (those who become employed) to complete a great deal of paperwork, and many are not deemed eligible for the credit after a long application process. An example was given about how similar targeted tax credits greatly improved the landscape relative to the employment of persons with disabilities; however, it is not clear that this program has the same potential to have a broad and lasting impact on reducing racial employment disparities. More discussion may be needed on this topic at future commission meetings.

### Discussion of Draft Logic Model

Ann introduced a draft logic model to begin discussion on the implementation/outcome framework. The logic model was intended to reflect on one page some of the primary drivers and goals that had been introduced during the course of the commission's meetings. There was some discussion about whether the charge of the commission (Reducing Racial Employment Disparities in Ramsey County) and the goal were the same thing, or whether there was a more general vision within which the commission's charge should fit.



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## Reducing Racial Employment Disparities

There was some concern that the model did not capture any sort of “game changer” when it came to racial employment disparities in the region. The model showed three broad strategies, which were the general actions intended to help bring about the commission’s goal. These included: creating employment opportunities (creating jobs and fostering entrepreneurial opportunities); helping secure employment for people (improve the ability of people of color to take advantage of available opportunities and change hiring practices); and helping people stay employed (improve networking, support employers to help them value and appreciate diversity of the workforce). Each of these broad strategies was paired with specific actions associated with each goal. Discussion included the need to ensure that when discussing job creation, we needed to reflect the needs of employers and also look at replacement jobs that will be created as Baby Boomers retire.

Many edits to the logic model were discussed, including the use of an equity model (improving the employment situation for ALL residents in the region) versus a more specific, targeted approach that focused on decreasing the employment disparity for African Americans and Native Americans. Some commission members expressed concern that a more universal focus would result in watering down the goal of the commission and would diminish the urgency of addressing these two racial groups, which through our earlier data presentations are known to be most impacted by the current disparity in employment.

Dr. Hall noted that when the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed to improve accessibility of buildings, ramps had to be installed. In this case, we need to specifically name the actions that need to be implemented. A commission member added that although these requirements were put in place, ramps were not always put in unless people raised the need for them. If no one is checking on whether ramps were actually being put in, they never would be. It is important that there is accountability for any actions included in the commission’s recommendations. In addition, some members mentioned that the commission’s recommended goals had to be measurable and needed specific numbers or percentages needed to eliminate or reduce the current gap.

A commission member raised concern that government contracting needs to be reformed to ensure that there is compliance with its own goals for hiring disadvantaged business entities as well as businesses owned by people of color and women. People also discussed the barriers presented by having a criminal background and how certain union policies that base hiring decisions on seniority and how changing some of these policies, along with creating attitudinal changes, could help address the issue of employment disparities. The group seemed to be in agreement that in addition to various policy changes that would be needed, a broad-based, multi-level public awareness campaign would be essential to moving the needle on this issue.

Finally, a discussion was held about how the commission’s goals and recommendations would be stewarded after the completion of the commission’s work. Should there be an entity to monitor activity and ensure that actions are being carried out?

Dr. Hall indicated that a revised logic model would be circulated prior to the next meeting and that it would be discussed at the next meeting on July 6. She closed the meeting and thanked the commission members and guests for their input.

