

CITIES INITIATIVE: MORE LIVABLE FOR MORE PEOPLE

In 2008, the world passed a significant milestone that went mostly unheralded at the time. For the first time in history, more people were living in cities than in rural communities. This threshold moment for humankind has far-reaching implications for how we live now and in the future. The Urban Land Institute Minnesota (ULI MN) and the Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM) recognized the importance of this shift and established a partnership called the *Great Cities Initiative* to develop a major traveling exhibit along with civic engagements to focus on creating cities that are more livable for more people.

The first product of this partnership was an April 30, 2015 program featuring [John Eddy](#) of Arup, the world's largest engineering firm, titled "Designing a Driverless World" on how autonomous vehicles will dramatically impact urban development and how we move around. He argued that this change was happening much faster than most believed. Many in the audience that day were skeptical. Yet in the year since that program, the development of autonomous vehicles has only accelerated with every major auto manufacturer researching and developing the technology.

That program was a positive first step toward what a partnership between ULI MN and SMM could become, demonstrating how science and technology are shaping our increasingly urban lives. Following this event, ULI MN and SMM applied for and received a generous grant from the Pohlad Family Foundation that enabled our partnership to explore more deeply the possibilities of the *Great Cities Initiative*, create a framework for action, and determine our objectives.

Through that process, our thinking about the focus of the initiative began to change. While the past and present of cities would no doubt make for interesting subject matter, we see greater opportunity for impact by focusing on the future. The world is at the precipice of accelerating change on several fronts. The global population is urbanizing rapidly. Technological changes of all sorts are on exponential growth trajectories. Climate change, once thought to be a problem for distant decades, is affecting our cities and infrastructure now. These complex dynamics are challenging for our leaders and creating apprehension in the public.

This initiative has the opportunity to influence how we address these pressing issues. It will educate and empower citizens, enabling them to view themselves in the solutions to our problems. It will raise up new leaders and invigorate existing ones by giving them the knowledge and tools they need to make decisions and take action. This report outlines why ULI MN and SMM are the right organizations to address the future of cities, how we reached this realization through use of the Pohlad Family Foundation's funding, and what we plan to do next.

WHY ULI MINNESOTA AND SCIENCE MUSEUM OF MINNESOTA

Cities are now both the engines of global innovation and key drivers of planetary environmental change. More people live in them than ever before, and yet much can and must be done to improve their livability. How do we foster cities that are more livable for more people while reducing their environmental impacts? How can we help an increasingly diverse citizenry engage with changes that are happening in their communities to help them adapt and succeed over the long haul? As leaders in their fields, ULI MN and SMM are uniquely positioned to address these questions through a partnership to produce an exhibit that promotes active learning and companion programming that inspires civic action. Here's why.

SMM is a renowned developer of science-based traveling exhibits that have reached more than 40 million people over the last thirty years. It has demonstrated a particular strength in delivering content that explores the nexus of science and society as evidenced by the remarkable success of its exhibit [RACE: Are we so different?](#) There is [scarcely a city](#) in the United States that has not benefited from its work, a reputation that brings credibility and opens doors. Moreover, science museums hold positions of high public esteem. People value them as popular civic spaces in which exhibits and programs provide large audiences with shared experiences that elevate civic discourse but without the rancor that often arises in other settings.

For its part, ULI MN brings a nationally recognized ability to convene leaders across the public and private sectors in civic spaces that build trust and lead to action. Over the last dozen years, the [Regional Council of Mayors](#) has provided a nonpartisan forum that allows local officials to discuss topics important to their communities while learning and collaborating with each other. Additionally, the [Advisory Services](#) programs bring the formidable knowledge and talent of ULI MN member volunteers as leaders in real estate, architecture, design, land use and urban planning into productive discourse with local governments on challenging projects in their communities. This occurs in settings where member volunteers have no stake in a particular outcome, further strengthening the civic trust critical to good policy and decision-making.

By combining their networks of learning and impact, ULI MN and SMM will deliver an exhibit and civic engagements that address the critical challenges and unprecedented opportunities related to increasing urbanization. ULI MN gains the ability to expand its platform and reach audiences it does not typically address while SMM gains access to the deep knowledge and experience of ULI MN's member volunteers. Starting first in Minneapolis–Saint Paul and then traveling across the country, ULI MN and SMM believe this effort—now known simply as the *Cities Initiative*—will catalyze civic engagement, inspire new and existing leaders to action, and help global citizens to create cities that are more livable for more people.

THE ROAD SO FAR

Excited about the possibilities of the partnership between their two organizations and bolstered by the Pohlad Family Foundation's funding, ULI MN and SMM began development of a four-step process with the assistance of Activ8 to produce an implementation framework for the exhibit and accompanying civic engagements. Each of these steps was completed, though their formats occasionally changed somewhat during execution. These four steps were:

1. Conduct individual interviews with a group of key thought leaders, including our funding partners, to gather their perspectives and inform the design and implementation of the exhibit, programming and engagement experiences.
2. Design and facilitate a three-hour session with 8-12 key stakeholders to dive deeper into what the success metrics look like and how they will drive the design and implementation of the exhibit, programming and engagement experiences to create success.
3. Produce a document that becomes a road map for implementation.
4. Design and facilitate a three-hour session with the key stakeholders to ensure alignment to launch the next phase of execution that inspires innovative action.

The interviews in Step 1 provided a range of ideas on what types of issues and content the *Cities Initiative* might tackle both in terms of the exhibit and the civic engagement initiatives. But what stood out was how participants defined what success would look like for the initiative. Interviewees focused on issues, such as civic engagement, trust, and dialogue. The emphasis was not about the ways in which cities themselves might improve or learn from the project but rather how *people* would learn and grow from the experience—how they might become more informed and more engaged citizens.

LOCAL LEADERS: WHAT THEY THINK

Marina Lyon, Pohlاد Foundation:

Increase the base understanding among citizens of the key issues and develop a sense of regional identity – with the ultimate goal to engage a critical mass of people in the dialog to generate increased political will and change.

Bert Colianni, Pohlاد Companies:

Increase the health of our region, economically, educationally and the physical and mental health of our citizens.

Peter Frosch, Greater MSP:

Impact the level of engagement around the world and construct a common nomenclature for this dialogue, exposing macro trends and enabling the U.S. to catch up on environmental leadership.

R.T. Rybak, Generation Next:

It's about people – how we move within the city and connect. We can innovate solutions by creating experiences that immerse people in each other's' points of view.

Kathy Tunheim, Tunheim Group:

Build the platform to innovate civic trust by creating a massive listening operation and getting to how decisions are made.

Danielle Steer, Impact Hub MSP:

Inspire people to take action and make connections.

Following the interviews and definitions of success identified in Step 1, Jack Uldrich, an acclaimed futurist and member of ULI MN's Advisory Board offered to help with Step 2 by facilitating a workshop with additional regional thought leaders and stakeholders from both ULI MN and SMM. It is Mr. Uldrich's contention that the people and organizations who ask the best, most focused questions are more innovative and successful in the face of challenges. Simply put, better questions lead to better solutions. The purpose of the workshop was to take the learnings from Step 1 and move closer to implementation by defining the questions that the *Cities Initiative* ought to address.

This workshop was called *Discover the Future* and took the format of two 2-hour sessions held a week apart on consecutive Fridays in February 2016 at the Science Museum. The first session consisted of a presentation from Jack Uldrich looking at accelerating technological change where he conveyed to attendees that "the greatest change is the *rate* of change." The presentation showed how changes that may seem like distant possibilities—such as the driverless vehicles in John Eddy's session—arrive more quickly than we imagine because of the exponential growth dynamic. The dynamism of change was used as a frame to challenge attendees to think about a series of questions that Jack posed to the group to be analyzed both in the context of the *Cities Initiative* and more generally:

DISCOVER THE FUTURE QUESTIONS

1. What don't we know?
2. To what trends might we pay closer attention?
3. How might we stay on top of new, emerging trends and issues?
4. Who might we learn from?
5. What assumptions about your business model, competitors, customers, etc. might you challenge?
6. How might the world change faster than we expect?
7. How can you keep an open mind to the future?
8. How might your company or organization go out of business within the next 5 years?
9. What should we do even if it might fail?
10. What won't change?
11. What questions aren't we asking?

Between the first and second sessions of the workshop, participants were instructed to reflect upon and answer those questions for themselves, their organizations and for the Minneapolis–Saint Paul region. The second session consisted of breaking into small groups of generally 4-6 participants where each person was asked to propose a question they had about the future with an eye toward the objectives of the *Cities Initiative*.

After three rounds of generating questions, nearly seventy were written on flip charts around the room. The group reconvened for a brief readout of the questions from each group and some time to discuss and react. Next, participants were tasked to walk around the room rereading the questions and to mark up to three questions each deemed the most important. Finally, Jack Uldrich tallied up the votes and identified which questions the group had chosen:

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS EMERGED

1. How do we accelerate our collective capacity to adapt to change?
2. How do we re-scale systems to give communities more agency over their futures?
3. How do we continue to foster human interactions?
4. What are the tomorrow problems we need to begin working on today?

At this point, the group reconvened to consider these four questions. What was it about these questions that resonated most deeply with attendees? Did they have things in common with each other? And most importantly, what did they tell us about the direction of the *Cities Initiative*?

Much like the interview series revealed a desire to see the *Cities Initiative* focus on people through civic engagement and participation, the key questions that came out of the *Discover the Future* workshop were focused on how a changing future will enhance or inhibit the ability of people to live good lives. In other words, whatever the questions we try to answer and whatever goals we pursue, ultimately, it's about people.

ULI MN ADVISORY BOARD DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK

After the *Discover the Future* workshop, ULI MN and SMM began compiling our learnings to develop the implementation road map for Step 3. This work produced a presentation for ULI MN's [Advisory Board](#), a group of ULI MN members who are thought leaders from the public and private sectors across the land use industry including developers, builders, attorneys, planners, investors, designers, architects and elected officials, at its quarterly meeting on April 13th. The purpose of the presentation was to share the current direction of the *Cities Initiative*, particularly with respect to the four questions that emerged from *Discover the Future*.

Those four key questions offer a more expansive view of the challenges and opportunities that exist in cities than the relatively simple observation that more people live in cities than in rural areas for the first time, and the Advisory Board was an ideal sounding board for how ULI MN and SMM might address them. These are people who are intimately connected to the inner workings and decision-making that cities deal with on a daily basis, and the presentation led to a lively discussion about civic leadership, public engagement, and citizenship itself.

From that discussion, two contrasting viewpoints emerged. On one side, there was a feeling that for cities to become more livable for more people, we need more engaged and more informed citizens. Limited understanding of issues increases the likelihood that people will resist or actively oppose necessary changes. On the other side, it was argued that what we need most is smarter, more courageous leaders who are willing to challenge the status quo.

For ULI MN and SMM, these two viewpoints were a powerful affirmation of our partnership and the strengths gained by linking our networks of learning and impact. SMM's strengths are educating and engaging large public audiences, and the *Cities Initiative* exhibit will elevate understanding of the issues we all face through increasing globalization and urbanization. Meanwhile, ULI MN is in the business of developing leaders and empowering them to make better decisions for their communities. The civic engagement piece of the *Cities Initiative* will empower leaders from the private sector, nongovernmental organizations and governments, giving them all the information and tools they need to make their communities more successful.

ULI SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

After the informative feedback from the Advisory Board meeting, ULI MN took the presentation on the road to the Urban Land Institute's Spring Meeting in Philadelphia during the week of April 17th to share the *Cities Initiative* with ULI's Sustainable Development Council (SDC). The SDC is a convening of global multidisciplinary leaders made up of developers, designers and more across the public and private sectors focused on sustainability, resiliency and health throughout the real estate industry.

The format of the event at the Spring Meeting included deep dives into case studies and lightning round panels focused on best practices. Throughout the day, a recurring theme emerged—how do we get more traction on these ideas and best practices? There was a sense from these deeply knowledgeable and experienced practitioners that the barrier to better sustainability is no longer about what to do or how to do it, but rather how to get better adoption of what we know needs to happen and less resistance to change.

Enter the *Cities Initiative*. Presenting the goals and objectives of our work generated an immediate an enthusiastic response about the value of engaging people in experiential learning that can lead to better outcomes. The *Cities Initiative* has a built-in alignment with the SDC as we envision exhibits and civic engagements that help leaders and the public better understand the challenges urban areas face in terms of water, food, energy, housing, infrastructure, urban design, and equitable development. The response to the presentation of the Cities Initiative was so strong that the SDC decided to champion and support this initiative and create a strong connection to ULI at a national level. Key members of the SDC expressed interest in helping with the creation and refinement of the initiative and to ultimately help promote the travelling exhibition in their own region.

WHAT WE LEARNED

In the time since receiving the Pohlada Family Foundation's funding, ULI MN and SMM have engaged with thought leaders throughout the Minneapolis–Saint Paul area and even nationally, touching a wide range of industries and sectors in that time. We have heard from industry leaders, elected officials, and more. Here are the most critical takeaways from these efforts.

- Complex global dynamics—the breakneck pace of technological change, international economics, climate change, declining social trust, debt and more—are shaping our lives. These challenges make people fearful of change and angry at their perceived lack of ability to influence their world which manifests as alienation and cynicism.
- Cities are indeed global engines of innovation, but for the *Cities Initiative* to succeed, it will need to acknowledge the complex dynamics that shape our lives and the fears they create to help citizens imagine how they can exert agency over their own lives and, in turn, the cities in which they live.
- For both ULI MN and SMM, our business is people. Our aligned missions are to empower people with knowledge and tools to provoke new ways of being and thinking, to develop leaders and encourage action through experiential learning and civic engagements.
- Our organizations can help people see themselves in these massive challenges as a key precursor to taking action to address them, and the presentation at the SDC revealed that this effort resonates nationwide, and likely on a global level as well.

NEXT STEPS

The work made possible by the Pohlada Family Foundation, and the learnings that emerged have informed new and clearer objectives for the *Cities Initiative* as we move forward. As ULI MN and SMM enter the next phase of the partnership, four goals were identified that will help our two organizations address the great dilemma faced by our cities—making them more livable for more people while reducing their environmental impacts.

Through the traveling exhibit and the series of civic engagements produced and facilitated by the Science Museum and ULI MN, the working goals of the *Cities Initiative* are:

1. To demonstrate to participants how the complex global dynamics and market forces that affect our lives can be rescaled to a local level and enable them to see themselves as participants in solving problems.
2. Empower people with knowledge and tools about the factors that make cities resilient in the face of changes that arrive with increasing frequency and decreasing warning.
3. Accelerate our collective capacities to adapt to these changing dynamics that affect our cities and the citizens therein.
4. Generate active hope—hope that leads participants to ask “what can I do?” and “what can we do together?”

With these goals in mind, ULI MN and SMM have a roadmap for moving forward with the *Cities Initiative*.

PURSUE NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Goal:

Along with funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), partnerships have been central to every major traveling exhibit produced by SMM. Generally, these partners have been organizations that possess specific scientific expertise necessary to execute an exhibit. The *Cities Initiative* presents an opportunity to pursue new relationships. ULI MN and SMM are cultivating partnerships with philanthropic organizations whose missions focus on critical urban issues like climate science and equitable development, corporations and universities who research and innovate in areas that are important to cities, and real estate leaders to leverage the knowledge and experience of people who invest in cities and care about what happens in them. The collaborations that arise from these new partnerships will help us deliver on the mission of creating more informed citizens and more empowered leaders.

Example:

The initial funding from the Pohlad Family Foundation was the first step in developing new relationships. We are also in preliminary conversations with the Kresge Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the University of Minnesota. The response so far has been positive and helped validate that the *Cities Initiative* is on to something that resonates. Further, the decision to adopt and champion the *Cities Initiative* by the Sustainable Development Council at the ULI spring meeting was an important test of the new partnership model. SDC’s sponsorship advances our work by building on the connections between SMM and ULI MN’s networks of learning and impact. It will help catalyze new opportunities between host museums and their regional district councils.

PROTOTYPE EXHIBITS

Goal:

Exhibits will be designed to bridge knowledge gaps about the challenges we face in an increasingly urban world. They will engage people in experiential learning about a wide range of issues that cities face and demonstrate how possible solutions can be scaled to communities of many different sizes. This will help attendees begin to see themselves and their communities in these issues and their solutions.

Example:

SMM is developing a prototype exhibit component about urban heat. Cities are heating up twice as fast as the planet as a whole because of the additive effects of regional urban heat islands on top of global warming. This exhibit is intended to engage large public audiences about urban heat and also help spur discussions amongst the public and private leaders attending the museum’s July 12-13, 2016 Urban Climate Institute, thus enabling SMM and ULI MN to learn more about how exhibits serve both as public education experiences and catalysts for civic commons discussions about cities.

CREATE NEW CIVIC COMMONS

Goal:

The *Cities Initiative* is an opportunity for professionals from many sectors (public, real estate, land use, technology, scientific research) to both contribute and learn. This is the key capability that ULI MN alone can deliver, and SMM provides a highly regard, trusted space in which to do it. The *Cities Initiative* is also an opportunity to demonstrate how the MSP region is poised to succeed in the future. Contributions to this multidisciplinary series of exhibits and civic engagements can serve as a tool for demonstrating that MSP is on the leading edge of science, technology and leadership.

Example:

We are advancing experiments into how to link up our respective networks of learning and impact. SMM's [Social Science](#) nights offer adults 21+ opportunities to explore the museum, grab a drink, listen to music, and participate in special programs. Adults-only nights are popular offerings at a large and growing number of science museums. The engagement models that arise from mashing together SMM's Social Science know-how with ULI Minnesota's civic convening expertise will in turn be incorporated into the suite of programming opportunities that will accompany the *Cities* exhibit to science museums across the U.S.

DEVELOP NEW LEADERS

Goal:

The *Cities Initiative* is inherently forward-thinking, and as such it seeks to speak to new audiences including the Millennial generation as they rise into leadership roles and school-aged children. These are the two most diverse generations in American history, and we will cultivate an interest in civic issues, urbanism and science. The exhibits and civic engagements of the *Cities Initiative* will demonstrate to attendees and participants the ways in which they can employ increased agency over their circumstances. Additionally, connecting the networks of the SMM and ULI MN will catalyze action between and among the engaged constituencies of both organizations. For ULI MN, this is an opportunity to greatly expand its existing platform where for SMM it is an opportunity to leverage the talent and knowledge of ULI MN's members from a variety of sectors that will be critical to the success of our cities now and in the future.

Example:

SMM's [Kitty Anderson Youth Science Center](#) helps underserved youth from middle school to early adulthood to excel by teaching them practical technology skills, getting them invested in community service, and preparing them for future careers. Bringing together SMM's aspiring youth leaders with ULI MN's current urban leaders, particularly those in the [Young Leaders Group](#) and student participants in the [Urban Plan](#) program, offers great promise both locally and nationally since many U.S. science museums operate comparable youth programs and Urban Land Institute chapters exist in virtually every major U.S. metropolitan area.

THE CHANGES WE WILL CREATE

Through the *Cities Initiative*, ULI MN and SMM will provoke in exhibit attendees and participants in civic engagements new ways of being and thinking that will help cities become more livable for more people. No two institutions are better equipped to take on this project. ULI MN brings together leaders from government, the business community, and non-profit organizations addressing social issues in civic spaces that foster interactions that build trust. Science museums hold positions of high public esteem, and SMM in particular is a national leader in the development of major touring exhibits that enable self-directed, experiential learning. Together, combining our networks of learning and impact, we will deliver a transformative experience that educates, builds new trusted relationships between people and institutions, and catalyzes actions that will make our cities more livable for more people.

Here we are. Humanity is the dominant agent of global change. With six billion urban residents expected by 2050, the future of Earth will be decided by its cities. And the futures our cities will be determined by human decision making, either by default or by design, by accident or by intention. So together let's imagine, design, and realize the better, brighter, more livable cities that we all want.