



How A Stadium Equity Plan Was Created: The Inside Story

After months of negotiations, the state of Minnesota, the city of Minneapolis and the Minnesota Vikings have come to an agreement that will result in a \$1 billion NFL stadium in downtown Minneapolis.

When talk of a new Vikings stadium began in early 2012, HIRE Minnesota began listening with interest. Our coalition members had different opinions on whether the stadium should be built, but we all shared one core value: that major public investments that create jobs need to benefit everyone in our state. As the debate unfolded, HIRE Minnesota noticed that there was lots of talk about job creation, but no talk about *who* would get those jobs. We set out to change that.

The result of our work was a Stadium Equity Plan, a plan that will guide all investment decisions for the new stadium and could result in thousands of jobs for people of color in Minneapolis. That's a big deal in a town with the worst black-white employment disparities in the nation.

The debate continues about whether public funds should be used to subsidize private business in this way. Opinions will continue to diverge for some time as to whether this is lemonade from lemons, or a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down. Is it frosting on the cake, or lipstick on a pig? But there's one thing everyone agrees on. The Stadium Equity Plan is vitally important. Here's how it happened.

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HIRE Minnesota welcomed 2012 by setting an ambitious goal for our state: to bring Minnesota from worst to first in racial equity in employment. We set out to talk to public officials, business leaders and community members about the critical need for us all to work together to close Minnesota's employment gap. We wrote a piece published in the [Downtown Journal](#) that spelled out our stance: we must integrate strategies for reducing racial disparities into all of our development decision-making if we are ever to achieve employment equity in Minnesota.

Many leaders want to do something about it, but when big deals happen quickly, equity planning often gets left off the table. We wanted to make sure that didn't happen this time. As soon as the Minneapolis plan for the Vikings stadium was announced, HIRE Minnesota proactively contacted the Minneapolis City Council and Mayor R.T. Rybak, laying out key ideas we wanted to see in the city's Vikings stadium proposal. Council Members Cam Gordon, Robert Lilligren, John Quincy, Kevin Reich, Diane Hofstede, Meg Tuthill, Elizabeth Glidden and Betsy Hodges each took us up on our invitation for dialogue. Although not all of these council members endorsed the stadium, they each

sent a [letter to the mayor and City Council President Barbara Johnson](#), outlining their support for our four key goals:

1. Increased hiring goals for construction jobs,
2. hiring goals for the permanent jobs,
3. reporting requirements from contractors and employers, and
4. a permanent funding stream to train and place people of color into career paths.

The city council held a public hearing on April 24, and HIRE Minnesota attended along with leaders from the Northside Community Response Team. Tanisha Flowers gave wonderful testimony on our behalf, which got the attention of everyone in the room. Tanisha told the city council that she is neither for nor against the stadium, but that she *is* for racial equity in employment. Tanisha described the unacceptable racial disparities facing people of color in the Twin Cities, and she told the city council that we need “a long-term commitment to placing people in jobs with family-sustaining wages.”

All the while, HIRE Minnesota kept our state legislators informed of what we were doing. So, on a parallel track, they ensured that the state legislation contained strong equity principles that would support our work and the work of the city. Sen. Linda Higgins and Rep. Bobby Joe Champion were instrumental in ensuring strong language in the legislature. Sen. Higgins introduced a measure that forces the new stadium authority to contract with an agency to recruit, hire, and retain people of color on all jobs around the stadium. Rep. Champion, along with co-authors Reps. Mullery, Clark, and Moran, introduced the same measure in the House. The legislation laid the groundwork for what we were asking the city of Minneapolis to commit to if the city council chose to endorse the stadium deal.

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After the legislation passed and was signed by Gov. Mark Dayton, HIRE Minnesota stepped up our efforts at City Hall. It became increasingly clear that the way to get the city to move forward was through a process called a staff direction, where the city council passes a motion to direct city staff to take a particular action. One of our strongest allies, Council Member Glidden, took it upon herself to write a staff direction that would require city staff to start developing a Stadium Equity Plan to meet hiring goals, to ensure people of color had access to the permanent jobs, and to prioritize workforce development funding in future budgets.

Council Member Quincy walked the halls to get more support, and Council Member Don Samuels introduced the motion. “After the people on the bench, we have people being trained and people who need to be trained,” he said. “The best plan to end all gaps is a job.”

In the end, every city council member and the mayor supported the action. Council Member Quincy, who played an incredibly important role, described it as “an incredible step forward as we all recognize the importance of reducing disparities.”

“The impetus was that February letter,” he said. “We had differing views on the stadium but all agreed on one thing.”

As the Mayor put it, “It’s imperative that this project lift all workers in our community, especially those that have been left behind.”

As the motion passed unanimously, Council Vice President Lilligren called on his fellow council members to be as present as possible in moving this work forward, and noted that it’s not just enough to set the goals. The real work, he said, is in *meeting* the goals.

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The members and leaders involved in HIRE Minnesota played a key role in making equity one of the central pillars that the Vikings stadium will be built upon. Council Member Hodges thanked us for our persistence in making this happen, and Council Member Glidden said that we drove the dialogue and that our leadership set the stage for this accomplishment.

We did this together. All of us, carrying all of our varying perspectives, came together to make this deal more equitable. That’s a victory in and of itself, and it’s an essential component of what needs to continue to happen moving forward. Moving Minneapolis from worst to first in hiring equity requires all of our energies, talents and perspectives. We’ll be there every step of the way, and we hope you’ll be there with us.

HIRE Minnesota is a coalition of organizations and activists working together to end employment disparities in Minnesota. We have set an ambitious goal: to bring our state from worst to first. **We believe Minnesota can close the gap and lead the nation in racial equity in employment.**

