

Cross-Cultural Center without Walls Pilot Project

At today's meeting, staff will present on the city's upcoming Cross-Cultural Center without Walls pilot project.

Background

For several years, the City of Bellevue has been researching and considering a Cross-Cultural Center that would bring together Bellevue's diverse residents around shared intercultural experiences and increase feelings of inclusion and belonging. These cross-cultural experiences would be designed around active intercultural engagement, learning, and exchange. The intent is to create interactions and build understanding across people from different racial, ethnic, cultural and other backgrounds.

Starting in 2016, a series of three feasibility studies determined strong community support for more opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges. The studies also found a lack of appropriate spaces within Bellevue that could host the kinds of intercultural exchanges and resource access that were identified as high-priority by the community. While these findings pointed to a clear opportunity for the city, a new, stand-alone facility for cross-cultural programming could take years to plan and finance and is currently not part of the city's short-term plans.

In the meantime, the city is moving forward to create cross-cultural programming in partnership with a variety of community stakeholders. In 2023, the city launched the idea of a Cross-Cultural Center without Walls. In this year-long pilot, Cross-Cultural events, activities, and workshops hosted by various community and cultural organizations will travel to different trusted locations around Bellevue. Previous studies had found that any cross-cultural project should be "community-led, city-supported" – directed by local organizations with support from city staff and resources. This memo and presentation will summarize the results of the 3-month long community engagement process staff used to co-design the cross-cultural center without walls with community and outline the project's next steps, including funding opportunities for cultural and arts organizations.

Key Takeaways

1. **From September – December 2023, we engaged 150 individuals at three Community Workshops representing residents, non-profit leaders, and small-business owners.** The aim of these workshops were to:
 - a. Establish and deepen relationships with and between cultural organizations and non-profits
 - b. Identify community priorities and necessary "key ingredients" for cross-cultural programming and activities
 - c. Establish a more equitable and accessible process for awarding cross-cultural project contracts to small, cultural organizations

2. The community developed a very expansive definition of “cross-cultural,” brainstorming more than 75 ideas and examples of cross-cultural activities bringing together different ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, and abilities. **Please see Attachment A for a summary of the key takeaways from the Community Workshops.**
3. In February 2024, the city will open up an informal request for proposals for cross-cultural projects. Project proposals will be evaluated based on how closely they align to the priorities identified by the community in the Community Workshops (see Attachment A). **In March, we will award 20-25 contracts of \$5,000 - \$15,000 to the most successful project proposals.**
4. Cross-Cultural programming will begin in Spring/Summer 2024 and travel around the city through Spring/Summer 2025. Following an evaluation period, findings on the pilot project will be presented to City Council.

Next Steps

January 11 & January 23: Host technical workshops for those interested in submitting a proposal

February 5: Request for proposals is opened (date tentative)

March 6: Request for proposals closes

March: Proposals evaluated

April 3: Organizations notified (date tentative)

Attachments

Attachment C: City of Bellevue Cross-Cultural Center without Walls Draft Scope of Work

Staff Contact

Sara Boyle, DEI Administrator

sboye@bellevuewa.gov