

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC****Cross-Cultural Center without Walls**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY****INFORMATION  
ONLY**

In May 2022, Council directed staff to move forward with cross-cultural programming, exploring possible non-profit partnerships, and utilizing existing space opportunities within the City for cross-cultural activities. In Summer 2023, the Diversity Advantage Team launched the Cross-Cultural Center without Walls, which would bring community members together around shared intercultural experiences that would take place at locations around the City. A series of three community workshops were held in Fall 2023, resulting in nearly 150 diverse residents participating in the planning and implementation of the Cross-Cultural Center without Walls. On February 8, staff opened a request for cross-cultural project proposals and invited community organizations to submit their ideas for cross-cultural programs. We expect to contract with between 20-30 organizations and run cross-cultural programming in a pilot project lasting from May 2023 to May 2024.

**RECOMMENDATION**

N/A

**BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

The 2014 Diversity Advantage Plan envisioned a cross-cultural facility with a mission to “educate, celebrate, challenge and inspire Bellevue to be a welcoming and inclusive community that embraces diversity.” In 2016, the City Council approved a series of studies to assess the need for cross-cultural programming in Bellevue and explore the feasibility of a cross-cultural center. The studies, which involved considerable outreach, reflected the thinking and experience of hundreds of diverse Bellevue residents, and concluded there was a strong demand and need for more cross-cultural engagement opportunities here.

In 2018 in the first of the three studies, the City of Bellevue conducted an extensive public outreach study to assess residents’ values, concerns, and aspirations. The *Cross-Cultural Programming Public Outreach Study* gathered community feedback from 443 survey participants and 125 workshop attendees. The study found that the adequacy and effectiveness of existing cross-cultural programming are strong for those who participate. However, barriers to participating in existing programs include the range of culturally relevant programs offered, cost of facility use and/or cost of programs, transportation, the time of day the programs were held and childcare among others. Community feedback also emphasized a significant desire to have a multicultural facility gathering space and

programming from community-based cultural organizations, in partnership and supported by the City of Bellevue.

In May 2019, City Council approved a feasibility study of physical spaces in the community that could support the ongoing and increasing demand for cross-cultural programming. Phase II of the Cross-Cultural Programming Public Outreach Study, the *Cross-Cultural Facilities Feasibility Study*, explored public and private gathering spaces dedicated to providing services and cross-cultural programming in the city of Bellevue. The feasibility study evaluated current physical gatherings spaces, both public and private within the city of Bellevue, where community organizations and individuals convene to educate, celebrate, challenge and inspire Bellevue [residents] to be a welcoming and inclusive community.

Assessment from the study included;

- Stakeholder interviews with City staff, including community engagement staff and planners, community multicultural nonprofit organizations and leaders
- Review of existing facilities: City owned and operated community centers, and other public and private facilities in Bellevue.
- Site opportunity analysis in BelRed, Downtown, Wilburton and other development areas
- Assessment of operating models for a new facility
- Financial analysis for cross cultural facility hypothetical programs

From this study, consultants determined that there is a continued strong interest and enthusiasm for a cross cultural center in Bellevue that is specifically designated, and mission driven.

In 2022, following the preliminary feasibility study, City Council directed staff to work with AECOM to expand the feasibility study to include indicators of demand, conduct benchmarking, engage with City staff to develop possible development and operating models, identify short- and long-term strategies, and to refine a facility program and conduct subsequent capital cost estimating and implementation strategies.

The following summary highlights the report's overall findings.

- There is strong interest in supporting cross-cultural engagement, programming, and appropriate spaces for these activities among staff, elected officials, and community members.
- The consultants recommend that this be a community-led, City supported effort. As such, the City needs a partner. A key step is identifying a non-profit 501(c)3 with a mission related to cross-cultural engagement who can champion the project and be a key partner working with the City.
- It was determined to be an approximately 27,000 square-foot facility that would cost around \$35 million to develop (excluding site costs), \$1.9 million to operate, and likely require \$1.5 million annually in contributed income from individual donors, foundations, corporations, or public support.
- Developing and operating any cultural or community facility requires an intensive staff, leadership, organizational, and financial commitment, typically over a period of several years.
- While steps are being taken to develop a feasible cross-cultural facility, the consultants recommend a series of City investments that can be initiated in a shorter time frame, including

the provision of space, program funding, and capacity building support. This could include establishing a City grant program to support community-led cross-cultural programming

AECOM recommended a multi-faceted plan with one set of strategies focused on program funding, space provision, and capacity building, and a second component directed towards supporting the development of key elements required for an economically feasible cross-cultural center in Bellevue.

With the conclusion and review of the final Cross-Cultural Center Feasibility Study in late 2021, in May 2022 Council directed staff to move forward with creating cross-cultural programming, exploring possible non-profit partnerships, and continuing to test out existing spaces and facilities for cross-cultural programming. Funding for this direction was included in the 2023-24 adopted budget.

In summer 2023, staff launched the Cross-Cultural Center without Walls. In this pilot effort, the city would work with and fund community organization to lead cross-cultural programs that travel around the city to different venues and facilities. As a result, the city will be able to offer cross-cultural programming, engage a number of cross-cultural non-profit partners, and test-out the adequacy of existing venues and facilities in the post-pandemic world when communities have returned to in-person programming and events.

Starting in fall 2023, staff held a series of Community Workshops to include community members in the planning of the Cross-Cultural Center without Walls. Nearly 150 diverse individuals participated in these workshops, generating more than 70 ideas for cross-cultural programs and projects. From these workshops, a series of priorities and principles were identified to guide the development of the Cross-Cultural Center without Walls. Using the feedback from these community workshops, staff developed a detailed Project Scope of Work to be used as the foundation of the Request for Cross-Cultural Project Proposals.

On February 7, the RFP for cross-cultural project proposals opened. The RFP will stay open through March 8. The City expects to enter into 20-30 contracts ranging from \$2,500 - \$15,000. An evaluation committee made up of both staff and community members will evaluate project proposals using a standardized evaluation matrix throughout March, and organizations will be notified of their project status in early April. We expect cross-cultural programs to begin as early as May and to continue throughout the pilot's year-long timeline in to May 2024.

Staff will be working with contracted organizations to conduct reviews of their cross-cultural events, with the intent of learning more about successes, challenges, opportunities, and any other feedback that could be used to inform the city's next steps regarding the proposed Cross-Cultural Center. Staff will continue to keep Council informed of the project's evolution and results.



## POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

### Policy Impact

Diversity Advantage Plan

*Cultural Competence in the Community*

- Invest in more public gathering spaces, or Third Places, throughout Bellevue for people to connect, celebrate and interact.
- Support and produce special events, art exhibits and performances, educational materials, festivals and public information that increase opportunities for cultural interaction and education.
- Improve outreach and engagement to build relationships with isolated communities and establish trust and affinity.
- Coordinate with local community groups and organizations dedicated to issues of diversity and culture.

Cross Cultural Programming Public Outreach Study

- Explore options to form community-centered program models that will work in partnership with the City.
- Implement phase two of the Council's approach that would analyze the effectiveness and adequacy of the places of cross-cultural programming and gatherings.

### Fiscal Impact

Council allocated \$400,000 to the implementation of cross-cultural programming in the 2023-24 adopted budget. Half of this funding will be used to contract directly with community-based organizations to host the programs while the other half was used to support staffing and consultant fees associated with directing this new body of work.

## OPTIONS

N/A

## ATTACHMENTS

A. Request for Cross-Cultural Project Proposals

## AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A