

## ***North@Work Launches Today***

### **1-year pilot phase of Northside Funders Group's initiative begins to connect 2,000 men with living-wage jobs by 2020**

Contact: Tawanna Black 612-351-8212 | tblack@northsidefunders.org  
Doug Stone 651-336-9907 | doug7586@gmail.com

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Minneapolis 2/1/16* – The Northside Funders Group launches the one-year pilot of its North@Work initiative today to connect Northside African American men with meaningful employment by scaling proven strategies and testing innovations to reinvent the way our local labor market functions. North@Work aims to move 2,000 African American men, aged 25 and older, into living-wage jobs by 2020.

Just over half (51 percent) of African American men (ages 16-64) living in North Minneapolis are not working. This figure includes the officially unemployed, plus discouraged workers no longer counted among the labor force. In some Northside neighborhoods, this figure tops 65 percent. The continued economic exclusion of African American men in the regional labor market is untenable for North Minneapolis' stability and prosperity and threatens the economic and cultural health of the entire Twin Cities region.

Despite numerous efforts to address the issue, the black-white employment gap in Minneapolis has not shrunk in the past 15 years. In fact, just 27% of African American achieved stable employment after participating in public workforce programs. Those who did earned only 39% of what their white peers earned and 48% of their Latino peers' earnings. Employment strategies that move beyond job training are needed.

To that end, the Northside Funders Group (NFG) has designed a comprehensive and potentially transformative model to workforce development. Shaped with direct input from men from the community who have experienced persistent unemployment themselves, as well as advisors from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, North@Work identified six essential workforce innovations that, together, will increase the sustainable, livable-wage employment of Northside African American men.

Once the initiative design was complete, NFG selected community partners through an RFP to deliver on those innovations. (See next page for the Innovations and Partners.) Partners were selected for their successful track records serving African American men in North Minneapolis, their understanding of the barriers these men face, and their willingness to innovate, collaborate, and contribute to the broader goal of a new workforce model.

"North@Work is a perfect fit with Twin Cities RISE's mission and history of service to those facing the greatest impediments to sustainable employment," notes Tom Streit, President & CEO of North@Work partner Twin Cities' RISE. "We're confident that together we can make north Minneapolis and its residents more economically secure and independent."

Mike Wynne, President & CEO of EMERGE, another North@Work partner, observes that “while there have been many promising projects over the years to create employment opportunities with African American men in North Minneapolis, we have long suffered from scarce resources and a fragmentation among efforts. The comprehensiveness and collaboration of North@Work is a refreshing ‘new day’ for our work and gives us a real chance to change the outlook for men in our community.”

To evaluate and ensure the success of the pilot and seamless service delivery to the participants, all partners are required to: track participant progress in a common database; participate in semi-monthly North@Work meetings; make real-time program adjustments as needed; and share lessons learned.

The 2016 pilot will lay the groundwork for the initiative with modest placement and retention goals for an initial cohort of 25 Northside African American men. The goal is for the cohort to maintain continuous employment, moving along an identified career pathway, toward earning permanent, living-wage employment within 18 months of program entry, and will continue to track and support the men two years post-placement. The pilot will also track improvements in employers’ hiring and retention practices.

“I’m proud to be part of the movement to revitalize North Minneapolis through meaningful employment for African American men – and to be joined by so many capable and committed partners in this work,” says Kevin Murray, Program Officer for Workforce Development of the Northside Funders Group, which designed and is spearheading the North@Work initiative. “As a Black man and Northside resident, this initiative is especially personal to me. I’m pleased that our approach really respects the participants, having been shaped in great part by them, and trusts employers to do so, too. As awareness grows about the “employment gap” and systemic barriers that have locked so many of our neighbors out of work, I hope recognition also grows about the depth of talent and ideas Black men in North Minneapolis offer to lead our region to civic and economic growth.”

The demonstration pilot in 2016 will lay the groundwork as the initiative scales up, from the initial 25-man cohort to an anticipated 400 men participating by the end of 2017, to the final goal of 2,000 men in sustainable employment by 2020.

Steven Belton of the Minneapolis Urban League, another initiative partner is also optimistic. “North@Work will help these men build a fresh future for themselves and their families and produce a new narrative of success for the North Minneapolis community.”

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The Northside Funders Group (NFG) is a collaborative of private, public, and corporate funders investing together to catalyze comprehensive, sustainable change in North Minneapolis by changing the way that philanthropy works. Each year, Northside Funders Group members independently invest \$12 to \$17 million in nearly 200 organizations serving North Minneapolis. Despite this significant financial support, unaligned efforts do not always translate into a better quality of life for our residents. NFG was formed to help its member funders align efforts, develop new solutions to Northside needs and explore a cooperative philanthropic approach to investing in solutions that produce results. NFG’s coordinates investments in three primary focus areas: economic development, education, and social capital. Learn more at [www.northsidefunders.org](http://www.northsidefunders.org).

## 1. OUTREACH & RECRUITMENT

*Innovation: Trusted Networks*

*Partner: Minneapolis Urban League*

*Challenge:* Many unemployed Northside African American men have personally participated in or know someone who has participated in job training programs – often multiple times – without success. As a result, they’ve grown skeptical.

*Solution:* The Minneapolis Urban League will engage trusted referral sources such as faith leaders, community organizers, and others to encourage and recruit individuals to participate in North@Work.

## 2. ENROLLMENT, ASSESSMENT, COACHING, & SUPPORT SERVICES

*Innovation: Aspiration and Aptitude Testing*

*Partner: EMERGE*

*Challenge:* Most workforce programs don’t account for the natural strengths and goals of participants, the kind of setting they’re likely to be successful in, and the areas that match their interests – all of which negatively impact job training completion and job retention rates.

*Solution:* EMERGE will help participants understand their strengths and opportunities and will identify the individualized support – from training through placement to retention – each participant will need. EMERGE will coordinate placement of the participants with hiring agencies to ensure a good match and coach men throughout the journey.

## 3. JOB TRAINING

*Innovation: Customized & Occupational Training*

*Partner: Dunwoody College of Technology*

*Challenge:* Job training programs are often one-size-fits-all, with everyone being prepared for the exact same job, or they’re so employer-specific that the skills are not portable, limiting the individuals’ options over time.

*Solution:* Dunwoody will offer customized training in soft skills, technical skills, and job-specific skills targeted to each participant’s need and interest. Participants will then be matched appropriately with work in a meaningful, permanent job in a high potential industry like healthcare, automotive technology, or construction.

## 4. EMPLOYER MANAGEMENT

*Innovation: Hiring and Retention Support for Employers*

*Partner: Commonsense Consulting at Work*

*Challenge:* When employees feel valued and engaged, productivity increases. The opposite is also true. Well-intentioned companies may have hidden biases in hiring, retention, and workplace culture that unintentionally exclude individuals who could contribute significantly to the company both near and long-term.

*Solution:* Commonsense Consulting will be the liaison to the hiring companies, initially assessing them for fit with the program and then ensuring their staff are well-prepared and supported in working with the participants. This may include training on cross-cultural supervision methods, a company diversity analysis, or other means.

## 5. COHORT SUPPORT

*Innovation: Creating a Support Network among Participants*

*Partner: Twin Cities RISE*

*Challenge:* Men re-entering the workforce after many years, who are still learning the ropes, not economically stable, and don’t have coworkers they can relate to face reduced chances of job engagement, success, and retention.

*Solution:* Twin Cities RISE will create cohorts of participants, connecting men with similar life goals and challenges, and host weekly support sessions. They’ll focus on personal growth, support, and advancement and cover a variety of life management and workplace behavior topics, along with individual check-ins and peer sharing.

## 6. POLICIES & PRACTICES

*Innovation: Advocacy*

*Partner: no partner*

*Challenge:* Workforce programs’ effectiveness is limited by policies and practices that diminish participants’ success.

*Solution:* NFG will address public and employer policies and practices that present barriers to sustainable employment.