



**Community Outreach and
Engagement Division**
Celebrating
2024

Partnering with Community



CONTENTS

PAGE 3: COED’S VISION AND MISSION

PAGE 4: COED’S STRATEGIC PLAN, 2025-2027

PAGES 5-7: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

PAGES 8-13: DECISION-MAKING

PAGES 14-18: RELATIONSHIPS

PAGE 19: ACCESS

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MESSAGE FROM THE COED MANAGER

It’s important to feel a sense of belonging and connection wherever you are, especially in the community you call home. And that is our endeavor here in the City of Bloomington and on this Community Outreach and Engagement team. Our work focuses on ensuring access to critical services, building connections across the community, supporting opportunities for you to be involved and flex your civic muscles, and shaping the community in which you choose to live and grow. Enjoy these stories of pride and partnerships, based right here in Bloomington. Thank you for the dedication and teamwork.



MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER

The COED team provides meaningful and expert direction for the city’s outreach and engagement efforts. In 2024, the team hosted a variety of fun, engaging, and well-attended events that fostered community and supported the Bloomington Tomorrow Together Strategic Plan. This report highlights numerous examples of COED’s dedication to creating an environment where people feel valued, connected, and proud to be part of the Bloomington community.





Left (top to bottom): Eric Holthaus, Nancy Brewster, Jackie Doncavage, Emily Larson
Right (top to bottom): Tracy Smith, Amanda Crombie, Kayla Dvorak-Feld

COED'S VISION AND MISSION

Vision: Bloomington has a vibrant culture of engagement where people are valued, connected, and proud of the city we cultivate together.

Mission: COED enriches our organization and community by building trusted relationships, civic engagement, and inclusive decision-making across Bloomington.

COED's 3 Mission Pillars

1. **Relationships:** We build relationships with our community to cultivate connections and belonging.
2. **Civic Engagement:** We support opportunities for community members to lead, serve, and be involved in the community they call home.
3. **Decision-making:** We collaborate with our colleagues to involve community members in the decisions that shape their community.

COED STRATEGIC PLAN, 2025-2027

DIRECTION AND CONTEXT

- **Bloomington. Tomorrow. Together. (BTT)** – COED’s work advances BTT, the City’s strategic plan, focusing on building a more welcoming and connected community.
- **Public Participation (P2)** – COED aims to see Bloomington residents participate in shaping and leading the community we build together.
- **Participation barriers** – The City’s community survey identified the top barriers to resident participation. COED works with staff and community to overcome these barriers, seeking to sustain and grow participation across Bloomington.
 - Awareness (being informed of the opportunity to participate)
 - Confidence (believing what they know is important to share)
 - Trust (feeling that what they shared was valued by the City)



CORE EXPERTISE

- **Facilitation** – COED utilizes Technology of Facilitation (ToP) methods to facilitate decision-making with staff and community— methods like focused conversations, consensus workshops, action plans.
- **Public Participation (P2)** – COED utilizes the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework to team up with City staff to integrate P2 best practices into their community projects—practices like ensuring clear expectations, transparency, and follow-through.

PRIORITIES FOR 2025

- **Community connections** – Identify community connection strengths and gaps and strategy to maintain connections and fill in gaps.
- **Service delivery** – Clarifying our service, roles, and partnerships with Communications and OREIB
- **P2 practice** – Collaborating with other City outreach staff on best practices for maximizing and diversifying public participation
- **P2 department support** – Refresh our model for providing departments with public participation support and expertise

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

WHAT WE DO: COED supports residents to serve and lead in Bloomington.

VOLUNTEERING



Interested in volunteering? There's something for everyone. Volunteers support senior recreation, invasive species removal, ushers at local plays, public safety, special event setup and logistics, litter removal, membership on one of many board and commissions.

COED coordinates the Citywide volunteer program, supporting volunteer supervisors in each department and creating a consistent and positive experience for our valued volunteers.

- For more information: blm.mn/volunteer
- Get in touch: volunteer@BloomingtonMN.gov

2024 highlights

- More than 500 people volunteered across City programs.
- The City hired a full-time Volunteer Coordinator.
- New volunteer management software was launched, called Volunteer Local, which is creating a smoother volunteer experience.
- The annual Volunteer Appreciation event recognized held in May celebrated 161 volunteers.

"What I learned as a teen volunteer helped me get every job I've ever had"

"It was truly a pleasure to be recognized. I came towards the end but good to see the Mayor and City staff greeting us with joy. Thank you for all you do."

"I started volunteering over 6 years ago in the City of Bloomington! And I have met so many wonderful people! As a Youth Human Rights commissioner, I loved to learn about everyone's stories. It has made my experience very happy, and I will never forget the City."

"Volunteering as ushers for Artistry, and a variety of city events, has given us the opportunity to have an inside glimpse into the cultural advantages offered in the City of Bloomington. Volunteering gives interested people an opportunity to make new friends and give back to the community with time and talents to make Bloomington a great place to live!"

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS (B&Cs)



Join a board or commission! COED coordinates the recruitment and selection of B&C members and collaborates with B&C members and staff liaisons for a cohesive and positive experience.

Here’s a list of all City Boards and Commissions: Advisory Board of Health, Charter Commission, Creative Placemaking Commission, Housing and Redevelopment Authority Board, Human Rights Commission, Local Board of Appeal and Equalization, Merit Board, Parks Arts and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission, Port Authority, Sustainability Commission.

- For more information: blm.mn/boards
- Get in touch: volunteer@BloomingtonMN.gov

2024 highlights

The November World Café discussion brought together members of Bloomington’s boards and commissions to reflect on the City’s mission to cultivate an enduring and remarkable community where people want to be. The event showcased a shared commitment to collaboration, actionable steps for involvement, and a clear vision of Bloomington as a community where all voices are valued, and everyone feels welcomed.

“...I appreciate that the city is moving towards best practices of sharing interview questions in advance and providing opportunities for folks to submit in writing or by video, this is very helpful for neurodivergent folks! :)”

“I liked the transparency of the whole process from the application, interviews and appointment. I have a story to tell and share.”

“This is a really great program. More people need to know about it.”

BLOOMINGTON LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (BLP)



COED coordinates BLP! Consider applying for the annual program, a cohort of 20 engaged residents in Bloomington! BLP seeks to promote civic engagement, develop leaders in the Bloomington community, break down barriers and increase understanding of local government. And most importantly, BLP aspires to build strong connections and relationships within each resident cohort.

BLP alumni have gone on to serve on boards and commissions, City Council, and local boards and continue involvement in City decision-making.

- For more information: blm.mn/leadership
- Get in touch: outreach@BloomingtonMN.gov

A look at the 2025 program underway (week by week)!

1) Introduction & Insights, 2) Government 101, 3) City Services (public safety), 4) City Services (built and natural community), 5) Leading in the Community, 6) Public Participation (P2), 7) City Council and Boards and Commissions, 8) Welcoming and Connected Community, 9) South Loop Tour, 10) Graduation:

"I look forward to Thursday nights. It's (BLP) the highlight of my week!"

"This is a really great program. More people need to know about it."

"The variety of the activities, the format, the level of engagement, the music, the guidance – all terrific! ...EXCELLENT work! Thank you for all you do!!"

"I have long wanted to be more civically engaged with the community I live in. Being a part of the BLP helped widen my perspective on what I can truly make an impact on. The session on City Council, Boards & Commissions was truly a highlight for me"

DECISION-MAKING



WHAT WE DO: COED supports public participation in City decisions.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (P2)

COED is committed to ensuring residents who are impacted by decisions are able shape those decisions. We partner with staff across the City to design and implement P2 strategies, finding answers to these important questions:

- What decision needs to be made?
- How can we engage the public to make the best decision?
- How can we involve residents who are harder to reach?
- How will residents know their participation mattered?

Each P2 project is unique—based on scope, budget, duration, complexity, if consultants are involved, how familiar the public is with the topic, and more.

COED'S P2 WORK INCLUDES

- Facilitating staff and community discussions on goals and experiences
- Designing and launching tools on Let's Talk Bloomington to provide digital engagement opportunities
- Collaborating to design meaningful and effective survey questions
- Partnering with project teams and consultants to design public participation (P2) plans for stakeholder input and outreach
- Identifying harder to reach residents and determining the best engagement method—for youth and older adults; people not fluent in English; parents with

young children; homeowners or renters; people with disabilities; people who walk, bike, or bus; people who are underrepresented in conventional outreach or are under-resourced

- Providing follow-up info on how public input impacted the decision



SIX IMPORTANT DECISION-MAKING STORIES FROM 2024

1. COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER

The new Community Health and Wellness Center project, slated to open in 2027, offers an exciting opportunity to create a modern and forward-thinking space that will support a wide range of recreational and community programs.

COED has played a key role, offering strategic direction and coordination of engagement efforts that provide ongoing and inclusive opportunities for public input. The team has worked alongside Parks and Recreation to ensure that the project reaches residents who currently lack access to these types of amenities, as well as to understand the perspectives of those currently using Creekside Community Center. The goal has been to design a space that serves a wider community while thoughtfully balancing the needs of current users.

Highlight

A notable achievement in the engagement process was the partnership between COED Staff and the Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging to facilitate two consensus-building workshops with high school students. These workshops gathered crucial input on what would make young people feel most welcome in the new center. Key themes that emerged included:

- Showcasing Bloomington's diverse culture
- Creating spaces for connection and socializing

- Providing restorative and reflective areas for study and relaxation
- Designing bright, inviting spaces that feel open and accessible

These insights have directly shaped the center’s design, ensuring the final space is inclusive, vibrant, and relevant to the needs of all users.

2. NINE MILE CREEK CORRIDOR PROJECT

The Nine Mile Creek Corridor Project is a community-driven planning process guiding improvements for Moir/Central Park, with design principles reflecting priorities identified by the community in the Park System Master Plan, including natural resources, park facility needs, trails, mobility and equity.

As one of the most ecologically diverse natural areas in Bloomington, Central Park requires proper maintenance to protect the area from invasive species. Ensuring native plants and wildlife thrive into the future and residents continue to have access to enjoy and experience the park is a top priority.

Predesign engagement for this project has been focused with community in mind. Specific engagement events were created to allow people to share their stories of the corridor, talk about accessibility needs, discuss bike connections and access, help design Moir park and key elements in the park and learn about the ecological needs of the natural environment.



Highlight

The Creek Walk was a unique engagement bringing together community members with subject matter experts from the city and consultant teams to share natural resources such as stream restoration, invasive species, wetlands, erosion and woodlands and upland restoration. Over 50 community members visited the 9 stations along the walk. This event helped build trust and understanding around the importance of the natural environment and the experienced staff working on the project.

“Thanks for organizing this very informative event. We learned a lot and got a chance to ask our questions. We see the hard work the Bloomington and NMCWD staff are doing to plan. Please consider continuing to maintain the natural fill of the creek for walkers. We love seeing bird watchers, fishing kids, elderly, kids, and dog walkers along the trail. Thanks.”

3. VOTER OUTREACH

In the spirit of decision-making and civic engagement, the City cares about residents knowing how and when to vote. Recognizing gaps in resident knowledge about elections, COED partnered with the City Clerk's office to identify multi-unit properties who historically have low voter turnout.

COED worked with City stakeholders, translation services, and multifamily property managers to provide voting locations, dates, and voter requirements so residents who wished to vote had the correct information at-hand.

Highlight

More than 12 large multifamily properties (with at least 50 units) were reached and provided accurate and timely information on how and where to vote.

"I am happy the City is doing Voter Outreach, I've always though we need to do a better job in getting renters involved."

4. START WITH HI!

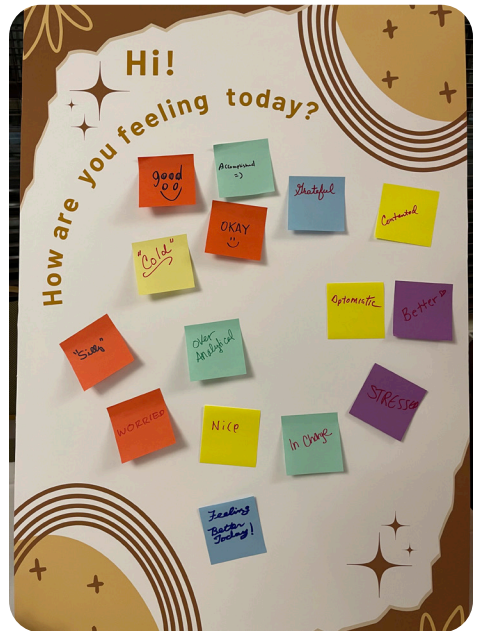
COED partnered with Public Health to design and launch the Start with Hi! Campaign, providing guidance on the program's direction, identifying key audiences, engagement methods, and messaging.

The campaign launched in November with a heartwarming event that demonstrated the power of connection and kindness in our community. The event fostered over 104 new connections among 23 participants, with 16 individuals pledging to prioritize saying "hi" and connecting with others, 6 committing to community engagement and involvement, and 3 pledging to perform meaningful acts of kindness, such as holding open doors and greeting others while shopping.

Highlight

A highlight of the event was the Gratitude Tree, where attendees expressed what they were thankful for. Several gratitude themes emerged, showcasing the depth of community values:

- Family



- Friends and pets
- Health and wellbeing
- Home and the feeling of joy, peace, warmth, and love
- Significant others, nature and the outdoors, and community
- Hobbies and interests
- Kindness

These reflections illustrate the campaign's mission to enhance social connections and inspire collective kindness in our daily lives. Together, we are building a more connected, compassionate, and resilient community—one “hi” at a time.

“Without [COED], Start with Hi would have remained a public health initiative rather than evolving into a citywide effort that now reaches a broader segment of the population. Additionally, her efforts significantly accelerated the process and facilitated quicker communication with leadership.”

5. FACILITATION NETWORK

COED staff, in partnership with dozens of trained and dedicated colleagues, coordinate the Facilitation Network. In the spirit of meaningful, transparent, and inclusive decision-making, COED brings best practices in decision-making to City teams making important decisions.



More than 60 staff are trained in the Technology of Facilitation (ToP), a leading facilitation method. Serving as the Facilitation Network, trained staff respond to facilitation requests (via an intake form), working with the requestor to understand the decision to be made, who will be involved, and the facilitation method that will produce the best result. 2-3 facilitators then design and lead the facilitation for the requesting team—utilizing methods like focused conversations, consensus workshops, and action planning—to address important issues on topics like budgeting, team performance, engagement principles, work plans, process improvements, and many more.

Highlights

- In 2024, almost 40 staff responded to over 60 requests for facilitation across the organization. 17 staff completed training and joined the facilitation network.
- To support the practice and expertise of facilitators, 20 trained staff facilitators completed the first M and M (“mentor and mentee”) Facilitation Mentorship Program.

- The FacT Team (Facilitation Core Team, the coordination committee) coordinated 12 learning sessions to foster a community of practice with growth and development.

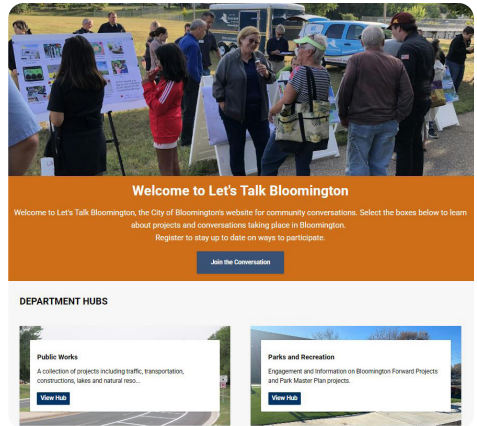
"It's always cool to see the different techniques facilitators use, and I was appreciative of their ability to dive in and facilitate an area that was new to them."

6. LET'S TALK BLOOMINGTON

Let's Talk is the City's public portal for project updates and public input.

- Number of subscribers: 979 (2022), 1,109 (2023), 1,257 (2024)
- Number of projects: 36 (2022), 44 (2023), 51 (2024)
- "Sign up for Let's Talk Bloomington: <https://letstalk.bloomingtonmn.gov/>"

In 2024, COED introduced Hubs on it's Let's Talk site. Hubs allow projects to be grouped according to key themes. The Public Works hub organizes information by traffic and transportation, construction projects, lakes and natural resources, and utilities. The Parks and Recreation hub hosts information about the Moving Bloomington Forward projects, Neighborhood Park improvements and Parks Master Planning. A Community Development hub will be introduced in 2025.



Key Dates



March 2025

Public Engagement and Education Begins

March 1 - Let's Talk Bloomington Page and Survey (notice in Briefing)

March 8 - Visit us at the Farmers Market in the black box theatre.

March 18 - Virtual Open Houses
Noon or 6:30 p.m.

- Click your preferred time to register.

Screenshots of a 2025 project – Sidewalk Snow Removal

REGISTER

to get involved!

Who's Listening

Dave Hanson

Assistant Director - Parks and Natural Resources
City of Bloomington

Phone 952-563-8765

Email dhanson@BloomingtonMN.gov



When you join Let's Talk, you'll see public participation projects, a description of each project, engagement opportunities, a point of contact, and timelines for each project.

RELATIONSHIPS

WHAT WE DO: COED partners with residents and organizations to bring community together.

BLOOMINGTON ENGAGEMENT VEHICLE (BEV!)

The Bloomington Engagement Vehicle (BEV) is an engagement tool used to help the city connect with the community, used by city staff over 25 times in 2024! BEV is reservable by City staff. Supplies include:

- Yard games (giant Jenga, Yardzee, Hula hoops, etc.)
- Tents, chairs, and tables
- Supplies (clipboards, pens, tablecloths, A-frame signs, etc.)



In 2025, COED will acquire a newer van from the city’s vehicle pool and design BEV 2.0 to continue to make City engagements recognizable, engaging and fun.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND NEWS NEWSLETTER

COED’s monthly newsletter shares important community news, updates, job postings, and helpful information to a wide audience of residents, nonprofits, and leaders—totaling 475 recipients in 2024.

“I made copies of each event and hung them on the board at church. When our guests arrived to shop, many took pictures (to avoid wasting paper) and are thankful for the resources. I appreciate how you spread the word to take care of people.”

“I’m thankful for your newsletter because I was able to refer needed resources to my students at Normandale.”

FAITH COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

COED curates a bimonthly newsletter to faith community partners, totaling 60 recipients in 2024.

“Thank you for keeping faith communities engaged through your newsletter, every time I see it in my inbox I open it immediately to learn of the new happenings at the City”

CIVICS BEE

COED partners with community to bring the best and brightest of Bloomington’s public school civic-minded students



together in a friendly and competitive competition.

Community Partners: League of Women Voters, Bloomington Public Schools

"You can't be successful in life unless you know the game and Civics does that. It teaches you how to be a good citizen."

FOOD CO-LAB

COED partners with area partners to identify strategies, needs, and solutions for providing food-insecure residents with nutritious food!

Community Partners: Nativity of Mary, St. Bonaventure, St. Vincent de Paul (Twin Cities), Potter's House, Good in the Hood, VEAP, Bloomington Schools, St. Nicholas, Ruby's Pantry, Loaves and Fishes, The Food Group, Second Harvest, Bloomington Covenant, Tapestry Church



We've seen a rise in families needing food. As a result of the Food Co-Lab, VEAP is partnering with Nativity of Mary to provide food distribution on Saturdays in 2025.

BLOOMINGTON PRIDE

2024 saw the creation of a new non-profit in Bloomington. In 2019, COED, began conversations with residents on how the City could support the LGBTQ+ community. These conversations led to events in celebration of our diverse community and the eventual transition of the events to a resident group who formed a new non-profit, Bloomington Pride MN.

Community Partners: Bloomington Pride MN, Twin Cities Pride



"The City of Bloomington's support for Bloomington Pride MN has been instrumental in fostering a community where all residents feel seen, valued, and celebrated. ... The city's commitment to diversity and equality has not only strengthened our LGBTQ+ community but has also enriched Bloomington as a whole. Together, we are building a future where everyone can thrive."

BABY RESOURCE FAIR

COED’s partnerships bring critical education and services to families with young children (ages 0-5).

Community Partners: Early Learning Services (BPS)

“Excellent presentations, we acquire a lot of new information and knowledge.”

“All vendors were very welcoming and helpful with tons of information.”



IMMIGRATION RESOURCE FAIR

COED partners with community orgs and pro bono attorneys to support immigrants seeking info on identification, legal processes, and basic education.

Community Partners: Immigrant Law Center, St. Stephen Church, Tapestry Church, St. Vincent de Paul-Nativity of Mary, Bloomington Covenant Church

“We know a couple families are going to receive the help they need thanks for this event for free!! They are so thrilled about it! Thanks for organizing and making this happen.”



BLOOMINGTON LEARNING LINK-UP

COED partners with public schools and City staff to showcase all the excellent programs, services, and education the City has to offer for students and families heading to school – 700 attended in 2024.

Community Partners: Bloomington Public Schools, Normandale Community College

“I am so grateful to belong to a community that is truly about serving everyone! Also, I can not thank you enough for the partnership we have established in order to make Bloomington a lighthouse of what the best community does to support families and businesses.”

“This team is amazing in every way. I am overwhelmed with the support and love shown during this community event.”

VETERANS APPRECIATION EVENT

COED honors Bloomington veterans who have served our country and community.

Community Partners: American Legion, Bloomington Remembers Veterans, Masonic Heritage Center

"Thank you for the nice coin and certificate for veterans day. I have never lived in a place where they recognized veterans the way Bloomington does. While I do not seek out recognition, I appreciate it when Bloomington does this for me. Thank you for your support! It is a privilege to live here in Bloomington."



WELCOME MEAL - SOUTHGATE APARTMENTS

Through a Bloomington Crime Prevention Association Grant, COED partnered with multifamily properties to share educational information and grow connections.

Community Partners: Tenant leaders

"We are simply blessed today. This was really fun. Thank you for having this here."

WELCOME MEAL - ASIAN AMERICAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER (AANHPI) HERITAGE CELEBRATION

Through a Bloomington Crime Prevention Association Grant, COED partnered with our diverse community to create a welcoming and connected community.



Community Partners: Asian community leaders

"There were a lot of great stories and conversations and questions at my table on Tuesday. I think people's realizations or learnings of how the different cultures can be distinguished and appreciated was great to see. I loved to hear people ask with authentic curiosity how to learn to identify markers of different cultures."

WELCOME MEAL - BLOOMINGTON EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COUNCIL

Through a Bloomington Crime Prevention Association Grant, COED partnered with parents and teachers to grow connections and relationships.

Community Partners: Bloomington Early Learning Advisory Council

"It was an end of the year school event that brough families across all our Early Learning programs from ECFE, ECSE and preschool. Families were able to reconnect with previous classmates, see current classmates and meet new families they might have classes in the future."

UKRAINE STUDENT EXCHANGE

COED facilitated a day of learning and connection for our Ukraine student delegation to connect, share community practices, and learn from each other.

Community Partners: Global Synergy Group



LATINO CONSERVATION WEEK

COED partners with City staff and community partners to celebrate Bloomington's Latino culture and community—754 attended in 2024.

Community Partners: National Wildlife Refuge, Huellas Latinas, Indigenous Roots



“I love the activities for the whole family. I also like to meet new people, it looks like we are many Latinos here in Minnesota.”

“COED partners with City staff, notably the Creative Placemaking to played a major role, and community partners to celebrate Bloomington’s Latino culture and community—754 attended in 2024.”

EDUCATOR EXTERNSHIP

COED facilitated a City staff panel to share with educators the many pathways to careers in local government.

Community Partners: Minneapolis Regional Chamber



“This event was the highlight of my day last week – it was so much fun and the majority of the group were highly engaged and asked great questions. I learned so much from the panelists and their personal journeys and I enjoyed connecting with the group over lunch.”

ACCESS

WHAT WE DO: COED supports access to services, programs, and basic rights for the Bloomington community.

AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) COORDINATION

A member of the COED team is the City's ADA Coordinator, providing education, implementation, compliance, and responsiveness to public requests regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Highlight: The City's ADA coordinator worked with Parks and Recreation to provide engagement opportunities for the community to weigh in on the City's first fully inclusive playground being built in Bryant Park. The new playground construction got underway in 2024 and is slated to be complete in 2025.

LANGUAGE SERVICES

COED staff administer interpretation and translation vendor contracts and provide education to City staff on how to utilize services. In 2024, 152 staff were trained. Top language services requested include: Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Cambodian.

"Thank you for the training. We used it twice in the days following training and our staff felt totally prepared."

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



The HRC aids and advises the City Council in ensuring equal opportunity in the areas of human rights protected by law and the social standards of the city for all community members in the city of Bloomington. The COED manager liaises to the HRC, supporting their annual work planning, events and programs, proclamations honoring peoples' rights and cultural heritage, and partnerships with the community, City commissions, and important partners.



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