

# Saint Paul Circulators

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## Determining the Public Value

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background Information**

The importance of out-of-school time programming for youth is well understood. However, barriers to accessing these programs continue and perhaps the most significant barrier to accessing programming in Saint Paul neighborhoods is transportation. Public transportation and school bussing fall short in ensuring youth access to various organizations and neighborhood programs and often, youth are left to their own devices to get to and from different programs. Ultimately, this severely limits youth attendance and participation in the programs that are so academically, socially, and physically beneficial to them.

In two areas in Saint Paul, free busses called “Circulators” have responded to this barrier to access. The intent of Circulator programming is to provide a solution to the barrier that many youth and organizations face and to increase awareness about neighborhood programming. The earliest Circulator in Saint Paul began in 2002 in the West Side through action by the Neighborhood Learning Community collaboration. A youth collaboration in the East Side, the East Side Learning Collaborative, also worked to address this issue. The Circulator in the East Side began in 2007 in the Dayton’s Bluff and Payne-Phalen neighborhoods (See Appendix B: Circulator History).

Based on the success of the Circulators in the West and East Sides of Saint Paul, the City is now looking to expand Circulator programming to address youth access issues in other neighborhoods in Saint Paul.

### **Project Purpose**

Student consultants from the University of Minnesota’s Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs were commissioned by the City of Saint Paul Office of the Mayor’s Second Shift Initiative to determine the public value of the Circulator busses in the East and West Side areas of Saint Paul. To determine if the Circulator busses add public value to these areas, the following assessments were made:

1. The impact on youth access to programs; and
2. The effect of the youth collaborations utilizing the Circulator on the individual participating organizations.

In the absence of data on youth access to programming before the implementation of the Circulators in neighborhoods currently operating them, a comparison of data on youth access to programming with two additional Saint Paul areas – Frogtown/Summit/University and the North End – was done. This comparison allowed us to assess the role of Circulators to youth access in neighborhoods with and without them. This comparison also allowed for an exploration of the role of youth collaborations in access to programming as Frogtown/Summit/University has a youth collaboration while the North End does not have a formal collaboration.

We were not charged with determining best practices for the implementation or facilitation of Circulator busses, nor were we charged with making recommendations for improvement of current Circulator busses. It should be noted that through our data collection however, some themes emerged that could potentially improve the current operation of Circulator busses as well as the implementation of busses in new neighborhoods in Saint Paul (see Additional Findings).

## **Assumptions**

In conducting our research, we made assumptions regarding the public value of out-of-school-time programming in general and in the specific geographical areas that are the subjects of our study. A moderate amount of research has preceded this study regarding the public benefit of quality out-of-school or after-school programming with mixed results. Some studies show that quality programs can divert youth from socially-expensive adult behavioral patterns (Temple and Anton 2007). Others show a concentration of benefits on “at-risk” youth populations only (Schweinhart, et al 1993; Karoly, et al 1998). Experimental estimates of return on investment from programs have varied widely from no benefit at all to as high as a \$9-12 return on every \$1 invested (Seftor, Mamun and Schirm 2009; Brown, et al 2002). Indeed, the evidence is inconclusive about the total public benefit of out-of-school time programming and our research does not attempt to weigh in on that discussion. Rather, we have approached the subject with the assumption that the out-of-school time programming available in Saint Paul is of high quality and the impact of these programs on children, youth and the community is positive. Our research assumes, as stated by Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, “Quality after-school programs connect children to caring adults and provide constructive activities during the peak hours of juvenile crime from 3 to 6 p.m. These efforts are among the most powerful tools for preventing crime, and they save more than \$3 for every \$1 spent, without even counting the savings from crime reductions” (After School Alliance).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

We employed a neighborhood based comparative study design to best determine the public value provided by existing Circulators by comparing neighborhoods with and without Circulators. In addition, we also attempted to determine if expansion of the Circulators would bring worthwhile benefit to the non-Circulator neighborhoods. As indicated previously, the determination of the public value of the two Circulator neighborhoods was based on two assessments: the impact of Circulators in addressing youth access to programs and effect of the youth collaborations utilizing the Circulator on the individual participating organizations. Accordingly, the neighborhoods were classified into three categories:

- 1- Circulator area with a youth collaboration: West Side and East Side
- 2- Non-Circulator area with a youth collaboration: Frogtown/Summit/University
- 3- Non-Circulator area without a formal youth collaboration: North End

## **Developed Instruments and Sampling**

Data was collected through two methods: a structured email survey and semi-structured interviews. The combination of these two methods allowed us to elicit the opinions of representatives, as well as information regarding the Circulator's affects, from a broad spectrum of organizations in a limited period of time.

### ***Structured Email Survey***

A total of 180 representatives from the 4 areas were polled to complete the online survey between March 22 and April 6, 2009. All organizations involved in the East Side Learning Collaborative (East Side), Neighborhood Learning Community collaboration (West Side), and Leap Forward collaborative (Frogtown/Summit/University) received the survey. All organizations involved in the loosely-based collaboration in the North End also received survey invitations.

Two sets of surveys were designed, tailored to Circulator neighborhoods and non-Circulator neighborhoods (See Appendix C – Developed Instruments). One week prior to the survey invitation, organizations were briefed by their leaders on the survey, and the objectives behind conducting the survey, in an attempt to increase the motivation of potential respondents. The survey was then sent out and up to three follow-up emails followed the initial survey. While all organizations were sampled, the responses received were representative of the different neighborhoods, as there was a relatively even mixture of small and large organizations, and a balanced proportion of Circulator and Non-Circulator respondents (17 Circulator respondents and 20 non-Circulator respondents). In all, 37 recipients completed the survey.

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

We met with leaders of the three collaborations and a lead contact in the North End area. We were then given contact information for youth workers and organization leaders to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Kari Denissen, Coordinator of the Second Shift Initiative in the Office of the Mayor, similarly presented us with a list of possible contacts. We contacted these individuals, who were specifically chosen due to their knowledge of the Circulators and/or willingness to participate.

All interviews included a pre-determined list of questions based on if the organizations were in Circulator or non-Circulator areas (See Appendix C – Developed Instruments). The field data collection took place between March 20 and April 13, 2009. In total, 13 interviews were conducted from the four areas; three interviews in each area, except for the North End, where four interviews were conducted. Anecdotal information and descriptions that would otherwise go unrepresented in the survey were gathered here and furthered the scope of information obtained. Two person teams proved to be the most efficient for collecting the data, as one team member facilitated the interview while the other team member acted as the transcriber. Two interviewers and the collection of a transcript of the interview ensured that all information was recorded, with a high degree of validity.

## **Data Analysis**

The six researchers read the interview transcripts, and individually noted trends and themes in the interviews. The group came together to cross check the findings for accuracy, and to determine our final conclusions. This in-depth analysis of the interviews and survey data was synthesized into the following five main themes, deemed Points of Public Value: Circulators increase access, improve safety, foster innovation, build community, and promote collaboration.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Point of Public Value: Access**

One of the most important goals of the Circulator is to increase youth access to quality out-of-school time programming. Since our research assumes that participation in such programming has a positive effect on youth and the community, the Circulator's public value can be determined in part by its proven ability to ensure access and increase participation. Indeed, our research supports that the transportation barrier to access of programs is minimized in neighborhoods that have a Circulator in comparison to those that do not.

#### ***Access in Non-Circulator Neighborhoods***

Every youth worker interviewed in Frogtown/Summit/University and in the North End, both non-Circulator neighborhoods, identified transportation as a major barrier to youth participation in out-of-school time programs. One North End youth worker stated, "Definitely transportation is a huge issue. It stops me in my tracks a lot. We can plan a ton of programs, but if the kids can't get home, they're not staying, they're taking their school bus and getting home." Another added, "Kids live in one-parent homes where the parent is working a lot, and the transportation isn't there." A Frogtown/Summit/University youth worker declared, "Transportation is the main problem...the issue that comes up the most. It's hard to solve, for a lot of reasons."

This interviewee went on to illustrate the transportation problem by sharing an example in which an after-school program lost more than one-third of its participants when the school busses stopped dropping them off at the recreation center. Even the students that continued to participate came less consistently as a youth worker explained, "They would either go home first and try to get a ride, but they sometimes could not. They would go elsewhere. We wouldn't know where and maybe it was supervised, maybe not." Consistency of participation was a recurring theme. A North End youth worker reported, "We'd have better involvement if we had transportation for them [participants]. There are kids who come in once a week or once a month and you ask them where they've been and they say they live farther away. We'd see those kids more consistently if [there was] reliable transportation."

Youth workers interviewed in non-Circulator neighborhoods generally felt that a Circulator would increase access and therefore participation in their programs. A few interviewees,

however, did not feel that the Circulator would necessarily help their particular program specifically because it was already accessible (centrally located) or because the program had addressed the issue of transportation by moving programming to serve youth where they already are (such as in housing communities). However, even the programs that did not report a deficiency in youth participation due to transportation felt positively about the Circulator's ability and potential to help youth get to other sites of interest and find programming better suited to them. A public establishment on the North End shared, "There aren't many days that I've looked around and thought 'there aren't enough kids here' ... For kids to be able to get on a bus here and go somewhere else, that would be good."

Several interviewees brought up the possibility of using the Circulator to bring participants to take part in other activities in the neighborhood, thus increasing access to additional opportunities. When asked about how the issue of transportation affects their organization, one North End youth worker answered, "Sometimes I get free admission passes [to events or activities] and I can't take a large group because I can't get them there." A North End recreation center worker echoed the sentiment: "I think the Circulator would definitely help programming and help gain access to other resources as well [including] other programs, not just recreation centers."

Youth programs that have the means to do so have attempted to address the transportation barrier by operating their own costly transportation programs. One Frogtown/Summit/University agency shared that they are one of the few agencies that provide transportation for their programs. The interviewee expressed gratitude for the resources to operate transportation for participants but admitted, "It does affect the financial condition of the agency." The operation of a transportation system requires the purchase of a reliable vehicle(s), a paid driver, fuel costs, maintenance, insurance, and is staff intensive for coordination. When asked how many youth would be unable to access the program without the transportation provided, the youth worker answered that at least 40 students would be unable to attend the program. However, despite their efforts, agency-provided transportation does not always solve the issue: "...some families who are out of the [pick up] boundaries [established by the agency] and who cannot transport their own kids, have dropped out of the program." The cost of operating transportation was echoed in another interviewee from the North End who said, "we do have a van, but we only use it for field trips. It's expensive and unreliable but we can't afford a new one." Therefore, even organizations that do have access to transportation often find it limiting and not serving the needs of the community.

Many youth workers interviewed in non-Circulator neighborhoods named the school busing policy as a primary cause of the transportation barrier to access. When asked if some young people are unable to access their program, one North End youth worker answered, "Yes, because of transportation. I know that there are kids at Chelsea High who want to attend 'Rec Check' at Northdale, but they can't because there is no way to get there. We checked with the school bus to see if they would give them a [ride], but they won't unless it's a licensed day care so they can't come." When asked what might increase access, another North End worker answered, "If we had a way to pick kids up at the schools and bring them out to the programs, that would help—and some way to get them near to their

homes when the program is over.” This individual went on to say, “If we could just sit down with the schools and figure out a way to do this, it would be much more efficient than coming up with the money for a Circulator.”

To address the issue, organizations and youth are forced to try and circumvent the school bussing policy. A North End youth worker admitted, “I do know some kids that have lied and said that their licensed day care is by their after school program.” A similar story was given by a Frogtown/Summit/University interviewee who explained, “Because [our agency] has a licensed day care program on premise...it was OK for awhile as schools believed the kids were attending day care—but [when the] district found out the students were not coming to the day care it was identified as a problem [and restrictions were tightened].” Consequently, we heard that due to this regulation, youth are provided school-sponsored rides to their home, but not to after-school sponsored programming. This necessitates alternative means for youth to access these programs, or go without these activities.

While most youth workers interviewed in Frogtown/Summit/University and the North End expressed with certainty that a Circulator would help address the transportation barrier, some voiced broader concerns such as lacking sufficient programming in the North End. “A Circulator in the North End would be like putting the cart before the horse. You can see that the North End is way underserved. There are so many kids in this neighborhood, and there isn’t anything for them. A Circulator bus would help kids if you had the programs for them.”

### ***Access in Circulator Neighborhoods***

Our survey results showed that 76% of youth-serving organizations in Circulator neighborhoods named the Circulator as the way youth get to their programs. Of these same organizations, 88% named walking or biking and 82% named drop-off by an adult as methods youth may also use to get to their programs. While there may be multiple options for children to access programming, our survey results showed that despite these other solutions, the Circulator is a vital means of access. Seventeen out of 62 total organizations affiliated with the Circulators responded to our survey questions regarding access to programming. These organizations asserted that an estimated 432 – 493 children that ride the Circulator during the school year and summertime, would not otherwise have access to their programs. These organizations also estimated that 552 – 613 youth have joined their programming due to the Circulator. (Please note that these youth may both be youth that use the Circulator who would otherwise not have access, and also be youth that have joined programming due to the Circulator.) While the number of responses to these questions is not sufficient to infer fact, the result is illustrative of the Circulator’s ability to increase youth access to out-of-school time programming. Furthermore, as this data comes from only 27% of youth organizations affiliated with the Circulators, there is potential that many more children also benefit from increased access that are not represented in these numbers.

The Circulator neighborhood interviews revealed differing results for the East Side and the West Side. In the West Side, no youth worker interviewed considered transportation a main barrier to youth access of programming since the Circulator has been operating for



over eight years. When asked directly if some youth were unable to access their organizations, a West Side youth worker stated, “No, not now that the Circulator is running...Before the Circulator, we didn’t get kids from the Baker/higher up area...[youth] wouldn’t come down here.” This same West Side youth worker estimated that 60% of the participants in the program would not otherwise have access. The Circulator is so popular and high functioning in the West Side, it has seemingly eliminated the transportation barrier for youth in the neighborhood.

In the East Side, however, transportation is still considered a main barrier to the access of out-of-school time programming. The Circulator has proven helpful in some regard, as one youth worker noted, “Fifteen teens get here [on the Circulator] and a bunch of kids take it home.” Another respondent said, “...The kids take it to work, take it to the Y in the summertime [and] take it to rec centers.” However, the East Side interviewees all pointed to the inconvenient and inconsistent schedule of the Circulator as its primary problem; “I think you’d have more ridership if you expand them [Circulator schedules and hours].” According to another East Side youth worker, “I asked my kids why they aren’t using the Circulator. Their thing is the wait is too long and they have to go through a huge loop before they finally come...they’d rather walk.” On a promising note, when asked what could increase access, one interviewee responded, “Better transportation...I’m going to try to coordinate my programming with the Circulator this summer.”

### **Point of Public Value: Safety**

Respondents in Circulator neighborhoods stated that the Circulators are improving safety, while the respondents in non-Circulator neighborhoods stated that they envision that Circulators would improve safety. Specifically, the neighborhoods have seen or envision an improvement in the safety of the children and neighborhood by 1) engaging the children in meaningful activities that will prevent idle time, and 2) by providing safe and reliable transportation so children spend less time walking or biking through unsafe areas.

Several interviewees responded that neighborhood youth that are not kept busy with programming become idle, and are much more at risk to falling in with the “wrong crowd.” For example, a youth worker in the North End stated that the youth at her organization are unaware of the resources the organization can provide them, and it is thought by staff here that due to the youth’s idleness, they have formed behavioral problems, leading them to act inappropriately at her organization. The situation became so bad that a permanent police officer has been assigned to the organization. As there is not a Circulator in this neighborhood, the youth cannot access transportation to another community center that may provide more appropriate programming for them. Another youth worker in the North End said, “I think the Circulator would definitely help programming, and youth would gain access to other resources as well; other programs, not just recreation centers...if the Circulator becomes available, I think it will help drop juvenile crimes, and we’d be able to keep them safe, and off the streets.” This staff member went on to state that the North End has a youth gang problem, and again, engagement of these adolescents in programming would give these youth more positive options.

While youth walking and biking to access after-school time programming may be positive from a physical health perspective, there is a concern in many of these neighborhoods regarding the safety of these youth walking or biking to and from programming and home. Several neighborhoods, such as the North End and Frogtown/Summit/University, have vast highways bisecting them, which create physically dangerous barriers. One youth worker on the West Side similarly reflected that, "The West Side is huge and split by highway 52 and hills over there. It is economically and socially diverse. Kids can't walk to our programs. Older kids can, but it takes 20 minutes, half an hour. But kids under 14 shouldn't walk." The fact that many of her participants, especially the young children, are able to take the Circulator greatly reduces their risk. Also, two of the three West Side youth workers interviewed volunteered that they accompany young children on the Circulator to help them navigate their way safely until they learn the route and how to use it independently. It appears that workers on the West Side are highly invested in the safety of the children, and feel that the Circulator is an appropriate means for children to navigate their neighborhood safely.

Many areas of the neighborhoods of our research also have high crime rates that make it risky for youth to walk around without an adult, particularly younger children. Many organizations voiced support for a Circulator bus taking these youth to programming or to their homes in order to cut down on the amount of time youth spend walking around the neighborhood. As a Frogtown/Summit/University youth worker said, "From a safety standpoint, if they could come right to the door, rather than walk, it would be great." In the East Side, youth workers also discussed the potential danger of the neighborhoods. As one worker related, "More children could come to our program if the Circulator was more consistent, if it ran more - especially the after school Circulator. In the winter, it gets dark so early, parents aren't going to let their kids walk in this neighborhood when it's dark." As the East Side Circulator does not run with the same consistency as the West Side Circulator (see Other Insights / Evolution and Development), children cannot utilize the East Side Circulator to the same extent. Therefore, safety concerns during the inconsistent school-year programming remain in the East Side. We infer that if children had more consistent programming on the East Side and utilized the Circulators to a greater extent, safety would become less of a problem. The West Side, on the other hand, runs five hours every day after school enabling youth to attend programming, and still get dropped off at or near their homes after programming.

While there are benefits of the Circulator in increasing the safety of youth and the community, there were also safety concerns voiced regarding the Circulator. Some individuals voiced liability concerns, and logistical questions about how the Circulator will ensure that youth get where they need to go. For example, one Frogtown/Summit/University youth worker asked, "Who will watch the kids on the bus? Who will make sure they don't change their mind? Who will be responsible?" As a solution to these problems, the Circulator's insurance plan covers all youth riding the bus, although there seems to be several organizations that are unaware of this fact. Also, several organization leaders suggested that a Youth Worker be placed on the bus who knows the youth, is able to help them find where they need to go, and ensures that any disturbances or altercations on the bus are immediately addressed. Also, many organizations supported youth having an

identification card for access onto the Circulator, and to ensure that the bus driver has contact information of parents and guardians in case of emergency situations.

It should be noted that the issue of safety of children on the Circulators has been addressed in both the East and West Side. An East Side youth worker explained that, “problems on the Circulator bus with kids occurred and there needed to be more coordination. So we got youth workers on it, and that really helped; it’s not an issue now.” The West Side also related that it had a few altercations that have been resolved at this point. As a West Side worker said, “There are procedures to respond to [any problems. The bus driver] calls the Safeway Project, and Derrick Johnson [from the Center of Democracy and Citizenship] is brought in on it. They’ve shut it down as a consequence when kids were being disruptive, and then it becomes a peer issue...The bus driver is strong, and not afraid of throwing kids off the bus.”

### **Point of Public Value: Innovation**

Circulator programming has provided innovative opportunities in Saint Paul neighborhoods that previously would not have been possible. The innovations that can be attributed to the Circulators include expanded programming, more age-appropriate programming, a decrease in the duplication of programs, the pooling of resources among organizations, and an increase in youth leadership opportunities. Overall, these lead to better results for the youth involved and for the youth organizations themselves.

In many of the interviews, respondents stated that the Circulator helped increase communication between organizations, and this increased communication lead to the ability to more effectively work together in scheduling programming. A youth worker in the West Side stated that youth that ride the Circulator report back to him on the programming available at other organizations. He went on to say that he is then able to more effectively network with the other organizations in the collaboration, plan appropriate programming, or plan intra-organization events. For example, when their organization closes in the evening, it is suggested that youth go to the Boys and Girls Club via the Circulator, when they would have previously been sent home.

Another youth worker in a West Side organization agreed that the Circulator has brought about increased communication and collaboration among the organizations. She stated that the Circulator has expanded programming to youth:

The Circulator is an intricate piece of the collaboration as it’s allowed people to feel more comfortable. There is no more hoarding kids to your individual program. All of my kids are now members of the organization on the first floor of the building where I go to teach my cooking classes. If they come too early to cooking class, I send them downstairs and they [staff] know they’re [my] kids... Other organizations plan events together so that they can share resources while expanding programming to children.

Further, this youth worker stated that in addition to the fact that there is, “a lot more intentional programming that the Circulator can connect people to,” her organization itself has benefited. For example, she explained that “two or three years ago I wasn’t hearing about after school stuff, and now I’m hearing much more about what else is going on. I know a different population of kids than when I first started. The collaboration and the Circulator got our name out.” And because the Circulator brings youth to her programming, she no longer has to spend roughly 1.5 hours driving around the neighborhood each day picking them up and taking them home. Therefore, she said the Circulator has, “lessened my workload” and allowed a greater focus on youth, while also, “helping me expand my programming.”

The Circulator has also helped many organizations save money. For example, the partnership of different organizations, which has been strengthened through the Circulator, has led to in-kind donations of office space. One organization in the West Side has been able to “have meetings [at a Recreation Center], though we don’t rent space there and they let us use their space for free.” Also, events are shared in order to pool resources. In one East Side neighborhood, Arlington Library will be partnering with Wilder in their summer program and reading carnival. In addition to the benefit of Wilder being able to share this event, the library will in turn benefit, as Wilder will be bringing their jump castle for free.

Additionally, the pressures of the economy are causing organizations to partner more and come up with new programming ideas. As one East Side youth worker articulated, “With the economy, we have to work together, and we’ve learned a lot about working together.” Field trips that were previously financially unfeasible have also been developed in response to the Circulator. As one East Side youth worker stated, “With how the budgets are now, I think I’ll be using it [the Circulator] for different projects. I’ll be using it up there (during the summer) for a lot of library field trips.” Outside of organization-sponsored field trips have also been developed. All Around the Neighborhood is a summer camp developed along the Circulator route and utilizes the Circulator to connect youth with different programming opportunities all over the West Side.

Finally, the Circulator has led to youth being able to take on leadership opportunities that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. A youth worker from Parks and Recreation on the West Side discussed the Teen Power program that he helps coordinate with other organization staff. Some of the Teen Power participants use the Circulator to attend programming at the Westside Citizens Organization, and here they learned about the Peace Jams program. The adolescents decided that they wanted to perform at this event, and used the Circulator to attend meetings where they helped coordinate the Peace Jams event, and performed in it. The youth worker described this program as almost entirely youth run, and was very proud of these students as they were able to “structure activities” themselves, and became “strong leaders” in the process.

## **Point of Public Value: Community**

According to the City of Saint Paul's Second Shift Initiative website, one of the purposes of the Circulators is to, "encourage young people to get out of the house and get to know their neighborhood" (City of Saint Paul; Second Shift). Our research shows that the Circulators have done just that; youth have developed a greater sense of community and their place within that community. One West Side interviewee shared how the Circulator has increased youth awareness of different parts of the neighborhood:

"There's no [Metro] bus service that connects the different locations. A lot of people that live on the flats don't feel comfortable going to the Heights, and vice versa. There's division in the community of who goes where... The Circulator ties them together, and gets people comfortable with exploring different parts of the neighborhood."

Furthermore, the youth workers attempt to connect children with programming throughout the neighborhood that will be the most effective and meaningful to them. For example, one East Side youth worker said, "Circulators give youth workers an opportunity to know what each other are doing, what else is out there. If I can't serve somebody, I can say [to the youth] that it's going on over there – go check it out." Ultimately, youth workers are working to empower children, stimulate their curiosity, and catalyze them to become strong leaders in their community.

This sense of community that youth gain is very important as with this sense of community comes a greater sense of individual identity. The programming that is offered to youth, that they are connected to through the Circulator, attempts to be as culturally appropriate to youth as possible. According to an interviewee, the West Side of Saint Paul "is economically and socially diverse with a Native-American and large Hispanic-American identity." Programming has been designed around this identity. For example, one organization interviewed stated that,

"During the summer we run an 8 week summer gardening program. We also have an internship program for 8 students during the school year who help run the program in the summer. Food gets distributed to El Burrito Mercado (a grocery store and restaurant in the West Side) and to youth farm families... It's a huge benefit to be connected [to the Circulator and West Side Learning Collaborative]. It helps me to be better in touch. The food we grow is specifically based on the community's wants and needs – so being in touch with organizations that have connections to these people, all of that helps us determine what to grow and get kids and families engaged."

As can be seen, the youth in this program are encouraged to think of their community and give back through providing produce to the local grocery store; similarly, the community benefits from the fresh produce grown by their own community members in their neighborhood.

The non-Circulator neighborhoods also have very community-oriented organizations. A Frogtown/University/Summit youth worker related how the Leap Forward Collaborative worked together to create Black History Month programming. According to this interviewee, “groups came together, to develop a larger sense of community around an event like that. On a meeting-to-meeting basis it’s planning, sharing what’s going on in your program, helps to know where kids can plug in.” As related above, children in this neighborhood unfortunately have several transportation barriers to accessing services. One could deduce that if a Circulator was to help with the transportation problems, more youth could attend these community-building events.

In the West Side, efforts are currently underway to more fully integrate the Circulator itself into the community. The Center for Changing Landscapes at the University of Minnesota is working with different community groups to design unique Circulator stops and install them at different collaboration organizations. This will give the Circulators higher visibility that was not previously possible. It is hoped that through this permanent establishment of the Circulator in the community, engagement with and ownership of the Circulators will increase, ultimately leading to better outcomes for youth, organizations, and the collaborations.

### **Point of Public Value: Collaboration**

In determining the public value of the Circulator, we assessed the effect of the youth collaborations utilizing the Circulator on the individual participating organizations. In doing so, we used the following definition of collaboration: “Collaboration is the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by the organizations separately” (Bryson, et al 2006). Our research showed that the “outcome that could not be achieved by the organizations separately” not only includes the facilitation of the Circulator but many other benefits of shared resources discussed below (also see Point of Public Value: Innovation).

### ***The Circulators have Increased Collaboration***

The Circulators have provided the benefit of increased collaboration among youth organizations, which in turn leads to better outcomes for youth. The West Side and East Side truly value these collaborations as every survey respondent in these neighborhoods identified “Ability to coordinate programming with other organizations” as a benefit of participating in the collaboration. The youth workers interviewed in Circulator neighborhoods highlighted the fact that the Circulator plays a significant role in developing and strengthening the relationships and linkages among the organizations in the collaboration. Specifically, one East Side youth worker stated that they, “weren’t working that closely with other youth organizations before the collaborative” and she, “doesn’t think I would have been involved with other youth organizations” without the Circulator. Another youth worker on the East Side stated that the Circulator, “has been great; we’ve built a lot of relationships... We’ve strengthened our relationships personally and professionally. We’ll go to a café and talk about how to work together with youth. This is all from the East Side collaboration, and the Circulator has helped.”

The West Side collaboration was also strengthened through the Circulator. As networking is often difficult for busy youth workers, the Circulators and the information youth provide have become invaluable for many youth workers. A youth worker explained:

It would be difficult for us, for me, to have a relationship with the other staff in other organizations. It would be difficult for them to have a relationship with us, to pass around information and keep each other updated on what each organization is doing. You're concentrating on activities, trying to get kids into it. Of course you want to do the networking, but it's easier to be able to have the kids to have access to it first, because then you can have access to it a lot easier.

The Circulator has also increased collaboration through youth organizations working together to discuss how to work on behalf of the Circulator itself. As a youth worker on the East Side stated, "It's brought organizations together to talk about how to better advertise it, and what can we do differently at our organizations to get kids involved in the organizations. People have really supported keeping the Circulator going, even with the low numbers [on the East Side]." Furthermore, some youth leaders use the collaboration discussions about the Circulators to better steer programming and determine areas of improvement. For example, a different East Side worker said,

"I think the benefits of the collaboration are that they help the Circulator. The people that show up for collaboration meetings...it's good for them. I think a lot of other organizations don't know what's going on. We are able to point out that using the Circulator will help them improve their programming, and it's a more positive way of saying, 'You're not doing your job to promote the Circulator.' Also it's helped to pinpoint if our ridership is low at another organization. If we have a relationship, I can easily call them and talk to them about it to brainstorm. I feel it's really going to help us all."

Clearly, the Circulators have helped the existing collaborations grow and work together in more effective ways. Organizations in non-Circulator neighborhoods similarly stated a desire for Circulators as a way to help youth access services, but to also help improve relationships among organizations. As one North End youth worker said, "I think a Circulator in the North End would be great. I think it could help organizations working together."

### ***Benefits of Increased Collaboration***

The main benefits that have come about through the increased collaboration among youth organizations in the West Side and East Side of Saint Paul include the pooling of resources, improving organization operations, coordination of programming, increased efficiency, and ultimately catering more effectively to the community's needs.

Many organizations spoke to the increased networking, program coordination, and efficiency brought about by strengthened collaborations. For example, many of the organizations have age-oriented programming that excludes some children. As a result of

the Circulator, youth may be able to access age appropriate services at other organizations. As one East Side youth worker said, “We can pool together our resources, or I can learn about what you have going on for teens (as this youth worker’s organization does not provide services to teens). In the past we’ve kept to ourselves.” Another youth worker in the West Side asserted that the Circulator has helped them, “work on relationships with other youth organizations. The Circulators have been a huge benefit to all organizations. They [the other youth organizations] will be able to tell you about the huge increase in attendance and more consistent programming.”

Organizations in neighborhoods without Circulators have also related how collaborations help them improve programming and organizational effectiveness. We infer here that their vignettes about the benefits of collaborations can also be applied to benefits that the Circulators bring, as Circulators would tie organizations together to an even greater extent (as previously discussed). As one youth worker in the Frogtown/Summit/University area stated,

We coordinate with programming back and forth. Other groups bring special events and opportunities we can participate in.... On a meeting-to-meeting basis it’s planning, sharing what’s going on in your program. It helps to know where kids can plug in. If you don’t have something for a kid, is there a way to direct them to a different program that would serve them better.

Another Frogtown/Summit/University youth worker agreed with the overall finding that increased collaborations may help promote efficiencies and decrease duplications in services, as they state, “Program wise, the programs we partner with, they have connections with youth, they are with them 3-4 days a week. We access their knowledge of kids and families, so we work with them to use their existing connections. There is a separation of labor.” Finally, another worker in this neighborhood stated that, “knowing who else is operating what services and knowing what they are providing...if there’s a service one of your kids could benefit from, it’s a good way to get them involved.”

The organizations themselves benefit from this increase in networking and communication. As one youth worker in the Frogtown/Summit/University area said, “A large part [of the collaboration] is getting together, sharing events, professional development.” Another youth worker in this neighborhood agreed with this assessment, as she explained that as a result of the collaboration, they share, “best practices. You’re not reinventing the wheel. There’s a general sense of connectedness. You have other people you can go to.”

Overall, we found that the Circulators better address community needs, and we infer that Circulator implementation in non-Circulator neighborhoods would also help communities improve services. As one Frogtown/Summit/University youth worker stated, Circulators could, “potentially grab members’ attention...[The youth organizations] would want stops at their programs, and would be hopeful it would support access...I think it would draw people in to talk about it and see how it can help them.”

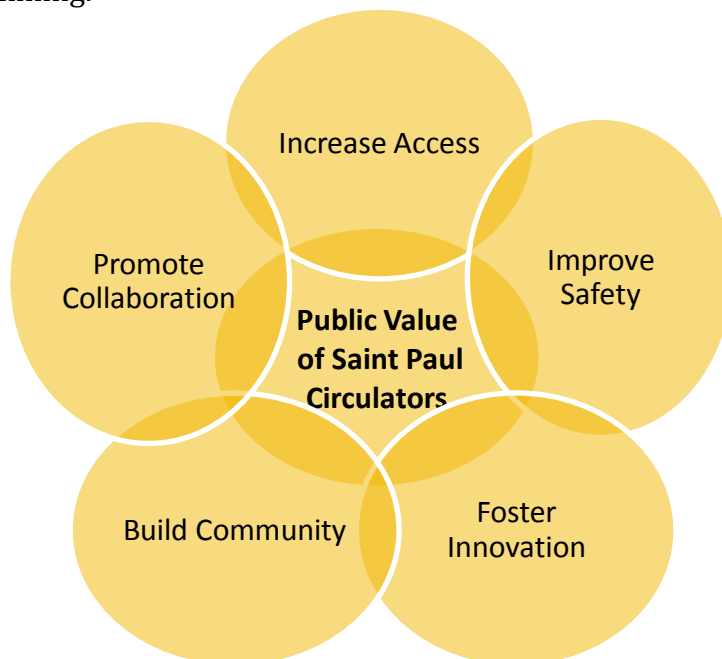


It is important to realize that these organizations see the benefits that collaborations bring, but they by no means see collaborations, or collaboration improvement, as a ‘magic bullet’ for solving all of their programming challenges. For example, one Frogtown/ Summit/ University youth worker explained that collaborations entail, “a lot of planning and aligning goals of different organizations. It takes a lot of work, and people don’t always have time to devote to that... There are different goals, language, and thinking.” Another youth worker on the East Side stated that there is, “a problem in that there are not enough agencies coming to our collaboration meetings, and they weren’t really promoting the Circulators at their organization.”

Clearly, collaboration improvement can lead to better programming and outcomes for youth. However, collaborations need to be functional with many, if not all, parties invested before the Circulator will be able to bring about the increased collaboration and programming benefits.

### **Interconnection of Points of Public Value**

Overall, we found that Saint Paul youth workers are passionate and enthusiastic about promoting effective programming to best serve youth in their neighborhoods. Mayor Chris Coleman’s office has made it a mission to attempt to close the gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ through effective programming (City of Saint Paul: Education). A West Side youth worker speaks to this as she said that without the Circulator, “We’d still get kids, but it would be the kids whose parents could drive.” The Circulator helps many more youth receive safe access to these programs, helping close this gap. As youth collaborations come together to increase access to youth programming, innovation in youth programming is realized and the community is strengthened. The points of public value are thoroughly integrated and interconnected and when combined clearly demonstrate the public value of Circulator programming.



## **ADDITIONAL FINDINGS**

The following are additional findings and points of consideration that could inform discussion around possible expansion of Circulator programming.

### **The Role of Organization Buy-In**

The notion of “ownership” of the Circulator regarding its scheduling, registration and overall facilitation has the potential to impact individual organization buy-in and participation in the collaboration and therefore, the success of the Circulator. This theme emerged through interviews in areas currently operating Circulator busses. According to one interviewee in the East Side, the limited involvement of organizations in the collaboration could be due to the perception that their participation is not needed as one organization seems to be operating the Circulator (Saint Paul Parks and Recreation). What is problematic is that the benefit of collaboration participation extends beyond the operation of the Circulator through networking, shared resources and program expansion (see Points of Public Value: Collaboration and Innovation sections). Additionally, each organization plays a vital role in promoting the Circulator within their programs, encouraging its use and ensuring its success. One interviewee on the East Side stated,

A problem is that not enough agencies came to our collaboration meetings, and they weren't really promoting the Circulators at their organization. And they didn't change their programming, like they said they would, to coordinate with the Circulator. During this fall, our ridership was really low. We did a survey to find out why and we went out to Johnson High School, Arlington Hills Library, Rec Centers, and the Boys and Girls Club to find out from the kids what was going on. A lot of kids didn't know about it.

In the West Side, the Circulator is seen as being owned and operated by all participating organizations. This has led to a strengthening of the collaboration and more buy-in from individual organizations. As one interviewee from the West Side illustrated, “The Family Center first surfaced the idea of needing a Circulator which led to more support to actually finance and make it happen. The idea and need for it has been in the community for a long time.”

This idea of organization buy-in also emerged when discussing the scheduling of the Circulator routes. Some interviewees expressed frustration regarding the schedule and its incompatibility with their current programming. As a worker on the East Side explained,

The timing doesn't work with the kids, and we've talked about that with the staff. I think the last stop is at 6:30pm. The kids would rather walk than wait that last complete round. The bus does almost a complete loop before it gets to the housing unit where the kids live, and it's not worth it for the kids to wait. The kids also stay until 8pm or 9pm, and end up walking home or getting a ride from parents - but

mostly the kids walk. They walk home in a group, which isn't necessarily a good thing.

If the Circulator was not running when their program needed it to, then the organization felt little stake in its success and did not promote its availability. Some organizations had or had begun to adapt their programming to the schedule of the Circulator allowing more youth to attend their programs. This kind of adaptability may be difficult when the Circulator is initially being implemented and there may be more upfront costs to organizations as far as time and rescheduling of programming. Yet the long-term gains of increased youth access and attendance may offset these costs in the future as ridership as well as innovation increases.

### **Evolution and Development**

The idea of evolution and development of Circulator programming was demonstrated in our research when comparing the West and East Side areas. The West Side has an established Circulator and the collaboration seems to be highly functioning with buy-in from individual organizations. The East Side has frequently experienced low ridership on the Circulator during the school year and the collaboration has faced challenges regarding buy-in from individual organizations. In comparing these two areas, it is important to recognize some essential differences.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the number of years Circulators have been operating in each area. The West Side Circulator has been in operation five years longer than those operating on the East Side. This is a substantial amount of time for development and implementation. Secondly, the East Side Circulators have not been able to run as often and consistently as the West Side Circulator due to limited funding. Currently, the Circulator on the West Side runs five days a week, five hours each school day, and eight hours each day throughout the summer, excluding weekends. East Side Circulators also run eight hours each day during the summer, excluding weekends. As of this year, The East Side Circulator operated during the school year (2008 – 2009), providing rides to children three hours each day, two days each week. It is not surprising that the limited availability on the East Side has impacted ridership and the ability of programs to utilize the Circulator to expand programming.

A third difference highlights the variation in the initiation of Circulator programming in each of the areas. The youth collaboration on the West Side, the West Side Learning Community, initiated the implementation of the Circulator as a response to the transportation barrier to youth access in the neighborhood. In the East Side, the City of Saint Paul initiated Circulator programming while the organizations of the youth collaboration, East Side Learning Collaborative, worked together in its implementation. In assessing the role of the collaboration in the success of the Circulator, this is an important point – particularly when looking at organization buy-in. Given the collaboration came together to implement the Circulator, the collaboration is still in its formative stage.

When looking at these differences, it is clear that Circulator programming is also still in its formative stage in the East Side neighborhoods. And though there are differences between these two areas, it is not to say that the East Side does not have the potential for the same success as the West Side. Instead, this demonstrates the need for further development, increased resources and potentially expanded hours of operation to create consistency in Circulator programming. In fact, in gathering data, several interviewees from North End and Frogtown/Summit/University commented on the need to “see how things work in the East Side.” It may be advantageous to ensure that the East Side Circulator is highly functional given its perceived potential as an example for other neighborhoods before implementing Circulator programs in new neighborhoods.

### **Uniqueness of Individual Geographical Areas**

When considering replication of Circulator programming, the uniqueness of individual areas and neighborhoods will affect implementation and potential success. This may be especially relevant when looking at existing Circulator programs as models when implementing new programs. And though our research did indicate that non-Circulator areas may be looking to the East Side as an example, it cannot be assumed that each neighborhood should implement and operate Circulator programs in the same way. This is not to say that Circulator neighborhoods do not have much to share with new Circulator neighborhoods. In fact, much can be learned from existing Circulator programs about the trials and tribulations of implementation. The history of youth collaborations, geographical boundaries, availability of resources and current youth programming will all impact the implementation and success of Circulators.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through our research of four areas in Saint Paul, we have concluded that Circulator programming does indeed provide public value in the neighborhoods in which they operate. Circulators not only address the significant barrier of transportation to youth access, but also improve safety, foster innovation, build community, and promote collaboration. Through the organizations of the youth collaborations that work together to ensure the success of Circulator programming, all five points of public value intersect in mutually beneficial ways to improve the lives of Saint Paul youth.

## **Appendix A: Mayor Coleman and the Second Shift Initiative**

Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman became the 45<sup>th</sup> mayor of the City in 2006. As an attorney, community leader, former city councilmember, and investment advisor, he is well suited to the job of running the City. His key agenda items are education, neighborhood reinvestment, city sustainability, the Central Corridor, and the redevelopment of the Ford Site.

The Second Shift Initiative strives to connect youth with out-of-school time programs throughout the City. Only 20% of children's waking hours are spent in school, the remaining time could and should be spent in high-quality programs geared to improving their overall abilities for success, not just success in school but success in life. The Second Shift provides connections for families to utilize the plethora of out-of-school time programs available in the City as well as bridging the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" through accessible programs (City of Saint Paul; Education).

## **Appendix B: Circulator History in the West and East Side of Saint Paul**

The Neighborhood Learning Community began in 2001 with the goal of improving learning for children and families on the West Side of Saint Paul. In 2002, it banded together in an effort to improve the transportation issues that were preventing so many youth from being able to attend various community-based learning activities. The Circulator was born as a community solution to transportation for youth in the neighborhood. It runs on a fixed route with designated stops at various organizations, libraries, recreation centers, and housing units throughout the neighborhood. It operates after school and during the summer, giving any child or teen the opportunity to reach an array of out-of-school time programming. This comprehensive and inclusive bus is free of charge to all youth providing them with ways to further connect with caring adults in their community in engaging ways.

The East Side Learning Collaborative has a different origin than its West Side counterpart. In 2007 the City of Saint Paul wanted to implement a Circulator in East Side neighborhoods to improve children's access to quality out-of-school time programming. Due to their knowledge of the West Side's Circulator, the City felt that a collaboration of youth organizations should be in place to ultimately take ownership and responsibility over the Circulator, and thus improve outcomes. As a result, the City acted as a convener and catalyzer in facilitating community partners to implement the Circulator, in addition to motivating the partners to stay together as the East Side Learning Collaborative once the Circulator was in place.

The East Side has two separate Circulators that began operating in 2007 serving the Dayton's Bluff and Payne-Phalen areas after school and during the summer. These buses also provide free transportation along a fixed route providing youth with a means to attend quality programs and activities to enhance their learning. These Circulators began operating in the summer only and have expanded this school year (2008-2009) to include service during the school year as well. Unlike the West Side, the East Side requires youth to be registered (by a parent or guardian) in order to ride the Circulator, which then provide the child with a East Side Circulator bus pass needed to get on the bus.

## **Appendix C: Developed Instruments**

### ***Structured Email Surveys***

Our online surveys aimed to provide quantitative data to triangulate our qualitative data gathered through interviews. Below is a list of the questions asked.

#### *[Introduction with variances per neighborhood]*

The Second Shift Initiative at the City of St. Paul has asked us to conduct this survey in order to collect quantitative data regarding your organization's and/or program's youth-based activities. We are also hoping to gain information about youth participation and access to your programs. The results of our findings and report will go to relevant stakeholders, including policy makers and funders. Contact information will be used *only* for follow-up purposes (if necessary). All data collected will be stored in a secure place and destroyed at the end of the project. The IRB has approved this project (0902S59401).

### **Contact and Organization Information**

Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

---

1. Is your organization involved in a neighborhood youth collaboration? If so, what is the name of the collaboration?
  
2. If your organization is involved in a youth collaboration, what have been the benefits of participating in this collaborative? (Check all that apply)
  - Network or Build Relationships with colleagues
  - Gain access to professional development opportunities
  - Opportunity to access funds or apply for collaborative grant options
  - Ability to get out word about programs
  - Allowed us to expand a program
  - Allowed us to offer new programs
  - Allows us to recruit new participants
  - Ability to coordinate programming with other organizations
  - Ability to run or collaborate on designing/operating a youth program
  - No benefits to participating in the collaborationOthers, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

3. For each youth program offered by your organization, please list its name, program type, age range of participants, and the number of youth participating (or your best estimate if you do not have exact numbers; if an estimate, please say so).

Name of Program	Program Type (check all that apply)	Age Range of Participants	Number of Participants
	<input type="checkbox"/> Organized Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Arts <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation & Drop-in <input type="checkbox"/> Career Building <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring <input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring/Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Science/Technology/Environmental Other_____		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Organized Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Arts <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation & Drop-in <input type="checkbox"/> Career Building <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring <input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring/Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Science/Technology/Environmental Other_____		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Organized Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Arts <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation & Drop-in <input type="checkbox"/> Career Building <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring <input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring/Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Science/Technology/Environmental Other_____		

4. How many total unique (un-duplicated) youth participants are involved in all of your programs (or your best estimate if you do not have exact numbers; if an estimate, please say so)?

5. How many youth programs does your organization offer on a yearly basis?

6. How do youth get to your programs? (Check all that apply)

- Transportation provided by your organization (bus, van, etc.)
- Transportation provided by another organization (bus, van, etc.)



- City bus
- School bus
- The Circulator
- Dropped-off by parents or other adults
- Walk or bike
- Drive themselves
- Other; please list\_\_\_\_\_

7. How many unique/individual youth participants ride the circulator bus to your program in a given month (or your best estimate if you do not have exact numbers; if an estimate, please say so)?
8. How possible is it that additional youth participants ride the circulator that you are unaware of?
  - Very Likely
  - Somewhat Likely
  - Somewhat Unlikely
  - Very Unlikely
9. Of the youth you know that ride the Circulator, how many would not otherwise have access to your programs?
10. In the last year, how many youth have you seen join your program because of the Circulator?

FURTHER COMMENTS:

## **Appendix C: Developed Instruments (continued)**

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

Two sets of questions were created for interviewees in Circulator neighborhoods and for those in non-Circulator neighborhoods. They are as follows:

#### **Circulator Neighborhoods**

1. What, if any, are the barriers to youth accessing your organization's programs? (Follow up: Has the Circulator helped solve this problem?)
2. What could increase access to your programs? Is there room for improvement?
3. What have been the benefits to your organization or program of participating in this collaborative? Can you give an example please? Have there been any negative consequences or problems with the collaboration? Do you have an example?
4. How has the circulator affected your organization? Have you observed any changes or innovations in programming since the implementation of the circulator? Can you give an example?
5. What proportion of circulator riders, do you think, would not otherwise have access to programs? (Follow up: Is the circulator truly granting access or simply substituting for another readily available mode of transportation?)
6. Describe your relationship with other youth organizations in this neighborhood and with your collaboration. Has the Circulator affected these relationships? Can you give an example?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how the circulator has impacted your organization?

#### **Non-Circulator Neighborhoods**

1. How has the issue of transportation affected your organization? Can you give an example?
2. Are there children not able to access your programs? What are the barriers to this youth access? Do these children fall into any particular categories, for example certain age groups, neighborhoods, cultural backgrounds, schools?
3. What could increase access to your programs? Is there room for improvement? Have you heard of other neighborhoods that have circulators? [See how answer first question then prompt with: How do you think a circulator would address issues of access in your neighborhoods?]

4. Describe your relationship with other youth organizations in this neighborhood, and with your collaboration (if applicable). If you are a member of a youth collaborative, what have been the benefits to your program or organization by participating in this collaborative? What might be some issues that could prevent a successful partnership?
5. How would a circulator affect these relationships (with other youth organizations)? Are you interested in having a circulator in your neighborhood? (Probe: Is part of the reason that you want a circulator in order to develop relationships with other organizations? Can you provide an example?)
6. Is there anything else you want to tell us about how you envision your org being impacted by the circulator?

**Appendix D: Map of Saint Paul Geographical Areas**

# Saint Paul, Minnesota



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