



STATE OF MINNESOTA
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Governor Dayton, Lt. Governor Smith to Partner with Women's Foundation of Minnesota to Improve Opportunity for Young Women

Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota will bring together nonprofits, businesses, and government to improve equity in outcomes for young women in Minnesota who experience the greatest disparities

ST. PAUL, MN – Governor Mark Dayton, Lt. Governor Tina Smith and the Women's Foundation of Minnesota today announced the launch of the Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota (YWI MN), a new effort aimed at improving opportunity for young women in Minnesota. YWI MN will bring together nonprofits, businesses, government, philanthropies, and young women to create a plan to build equity in outcomes for young women in our state, allowing them to lead safe, prosperous lives. It is the first statewide initiative of its kind in the nation.

"We must continue working to build a state where all Minnesotans have equal opportunity to succeed," said Governor Dayton. **"This partnership is an important step in improving equity and opportunity for young women in Minnesota, especially young women of color. I thank the Women's Foundation of Minnesota for their leadership on this critical issue."**

The Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota is focused on young women between the ages of 12 and 24. The first phase of the program will engage three core committees in development of an Action Plan to create opportunities for young women in Minnesota to achieve equity in outcomes. The Action Plan will be released in April 2017.

“This effort will bring together young women from throughout Minnesota, and ask what we can do together to expand opportunity for all of them,” said Lt. Governor Smith. **“This is important: young women of color, American Indian young women, those with disabilities, young women from Greater Minnesota, and youth who identify as LGBTQ today face an opportunity gap. If we don't see this gap and develop an action plan to address it, nothing will change. We can't afford to waste any of the talent and potential of these young women.”**

Minnesota is often ranked a top state for women, but disparities persist for young women of color, American Indian young women, young women from Greater Minnesota, LGBTQ youth, and young women with disabilities. Young women of color and American Indian young women in Minnesota experience significantly higher rates of homelessness, teen pregnancy, poor health outcomes, foster care, parental incarceration, involvement in the juvenile justice system, and sex trafficking. Data show that LGBTQ youth and young women with disabilities can face similar challenges.

“While there is a lot of innovation by communities, philanthropies, government, and the private sector to advance equity for young women, that work is not linked to a broader plan,” said Lee Roper-Batker, president & CEO of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. **“Until today, no state in the nation has established a formal statewide initiative whose sole purpose is to pull all that innovation together into a cohesive, strategic, cross-sector model and plan of action addressing the opportunity gaps for young women – we have now done so with the Young Women's Initiative MN.”**

“We want every young woman in Minnesota – and every Minnesotan – to have access to equal opportunity in order to create and lead safe and prosperous lives,” said Roper-Batker. **“We know that when young women do better, their communities do better, and we all do better.”**

The Young Women's Initiative MN is a parallel response to My Brother's Keeper, a coordinated federal effort to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color.

"The White House Council on Women and Girls has made a lot of progress over President Obama's time in office pushing the issues that women and girls of color face to the forefront, and we're conscious of how much work remains. That's why I'm thrilled that the Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota will be carrying forward this important work to ensure that all of our girls have the opportunities and support to achieve their dreams. Minnesota's example is a testament to what strong local and state leadership can do for our communities," said Valerie Jarrett, Senior Advisor to President Obama and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls.

Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota

The Young Women's Initiative of Minnesota is designed to be as participatory and inclusive as possible, and make the invisibility of disparities visible. The Initiative is made up of three core committees: 1) Community-Specific Working Groups; 2) Young Women's Cabinet and 3) the Young Women's Initiative Council. These three governance groups will drive the process to a statewide Action Plan to be released in April 2017.

1. **Community-Specific Working Groups** – The Community-Specific Working Groups will be at the core of the community action engagement process. Collectively, 120 cross-sector leaders comprised of young women and youth (ages 16-24), nonprofit representatives, elected officials, and community leaders will be selected to represent the following groups: African American;

African Immigrant; American Indian; Asian American/Pacific Islander; Disability; Greater Minnesota; Latina; and LGBTQ.

2. **Young Women’s Cabinet** – The Young Women’s Cabinet, comprised of 24 young women and youth leaders (ages 16-24) from the eight designated communities, will ensure that the efforts of the Working Groups and Council stays grounded in the lived experiences of the young women and youth from each community, the community-specific challenges and solutions they identified, and guided by their leadership.
3. **Young Women’s Initiative Council** – The Young Women’s Initiative MN Council will comprise 30-40 cross-sector leaders from elected office, the business community, philanthropy, and the community. Three young women co-chairs from the Young Women’s Cabinet will also sit on the Council. The purpose of the Council will be to sequence the statewide Action Plan and to inspire and catalyze resources to move it forward after its release in April 2017.

Funding For The Initiative

The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota will invest \$8 million over six years in research, grantmaking, policy, and strategic communications for the Initiative. The Women’s Foundation has made a grant to the University of Minnesota’s Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center to conduct research, develop and run an intensive community action engagement process, and the manage project implementation. Additionally, The Women’s Foundation has made a grant to the YWCA St. Paul to facilitate the Young Women’s Cabinet and to provide leadership development for the young women who serve as leaders on the Cabinet.

To Apply:

Governor Dayton and Lt. Governor Smith will make appointments to the Young Women’s Initiative MN Cabinet. Applications are available through the Governor’s Office [here](#) and are accepted through Nov. 4, 2016.

About the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota

The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota is a statewide community foundation investing in innovation to drive gender equity. The Foundation envisions a world of equal opportunity where women and girls – *and all people* – hold the power to create and lead safe, prosperous lives. Through grantmaking, research, and public policy, the Foundation is building pathways to prosperity for girls and women in Minnesota. Founded in 1983, it is the first and largest statewide women’s foundation in the country. More at WFMN.ORG.

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