

AUGSBURG UNIVERSITY®

Riverside Innovation Hub Thriving Congregations Project

The Riverside Innovation Hub, an initiative of Augsburg University's Christensen Center for Vocation, will continue helping congregations live into *placed-based vocational discernment in the public square for the common good* through two-year learning communities of twelve congregations. The first learning community runs July 2021 – July 2023 and the second learning community runs September 2023 – September 2025.

Place-Based

A claim that vocational discernment is always located in a particular place and the discernment process must take place in, with, and for that location. The particular matters.

Vocational Discernment

A way of moving through the world that allows us to be listening to God's promises, the demands our neighbors' stories place on us, and wondering how we are being called to respond.

Public Square

Vocational discernment in the public square is done out in the open and outside our comfort zones in conversation with our neighbors, seeking to bring all perspectives to the table.

Common Good

This approach claims an orientation towards becoming neighbor and giving ourselves away to the common good of one's community, not to maintaining our congregations or institutions.

Project Overview

This handout includes several components to help your congregation become familiar with the Riverside Innovation Hub Thriving Congregations Project. In its pages you will find:

- A description of the *Public Church Framework* which will guide the project's learning arc.
- A description of the structure of our *learning community for partner congregations*.
- A summary of *eligibility requirements and expectations* for participating congregations.

A summary of the application timeline is included below. More detailed application information can be found at:

www.augsburg.edu/ccv/2021/01/29/thriving-congregations-learning-partnership-application-process

Application Timeline

1. February: Information sessions offered and application goes live
2. Ongoing: "Letter of Intent" accepted on a rolling basis to be added to direct communication list
3. Ongoing: Complete application with a minimum of one pastor and one lay leader
4. April 15: Application deadline submitted online
5. May 15: Selected congregations invited to join the RIH Learning Community
6. May 28: Congregational deadline for accepting the invitation
7. July: RIH Learning Community launches with first large group gathering

The Public Church Framework

Congregations who are a part of this learning community will develop and deepen the knowledge, skills, habits, and values to engage in this work of place-based vocational discernment in the public square for the common good through a method we call the Public Church Framework.

The Public Church Framework consists of four movements that guide us into more intentional relationships with our neighbor, scripture, our core beliefs, and God's spirit as we seek to discern how our faith community is called to be and proclaim good news with and for our neighbors. It combines threads the church has historically kept separate – discipleship, outreach, relationships, justice, worship, biblical study, theological reflection, and prayer. The common denominator is the neighbor. We do these things for the sake of our neighbors.

Accompaniment - Our learning process will help congregations develop a deeper understanding of their contexts - who and how people live and work there, and their community's institutions, power structures, assets, challenges, etc. We will do this through the movement of accompaniment. Through accompaniment participants will explore and deepen their understanding of social and cultural trends that affect them and learn from their immediate neighborhoods, towns, cities, regions and/or broader areas of concern.

A note to predominantly white congregations: We have learned that congregations must address the complexities of racism and white supremacy explicitly if they wish to be able to engage their neighbors in mutually life-giving ways. Without challenging the blinders of whiteness and white supremacy, we will do more harm than good. Lament and confession must be a part of, if not pre-requisite to, accompaniment. The necessary work of confronting white supremacy will be woven into accompaniment early on.

Interpretation - Congregations will also learn to leverage their core theological commitments and the biblical narrative as an interpretive lens for understanding their neighbors' lived realities. We will do this through the movement of interpretation. Through interpretation they will gain clarity about their values and mission in light of their changing contexts. They will also deepen their understanding of their ecclesial traditions and denominational relationships and how they shape and expand their ministry opportunities.

Discernment – Congregations will develop Christian contemplative practices that will aid in their discernment of how they are being called by God to engage with their neighbors in specific ways that participate with good news in life-giving ways.

Proclamation - Lastly, our learning community will develop competency in organizing and empowering their congregations to become actively engaged in the particular proclamation of the good news they have discerned. Through this work of proclamation, they will learn to navigate change and partnerships with organizations and individuals in their locations, as part of their transformation into a public church.



Throughout this learning process, congregations will integrate historical Christian practices - accompaniment, theological reflection, prayer, and discernment - as a way of bringing coherence to their congregation's life of pastoral care, worship, Christian education, and outreach. Involving the entire congregation in this work - rather than leaving it to the paid staff - will build a sense of community among the members of these congregations. The knowledge, skills, and values needed to thrive in this way will be taught through a multi-layered approach including readings, case studies, small and large group processes, experimentation, visits from experts external to our learning community, communal worship and prayer, and cross-pollination within the learning community.

The Learning Community Structure

Congregations who partner with us in this endeavor will be joining a learning community. This is not a training, nor is it a train-the-trainer. The Riverside Innovation Hub sees itself as a convener, not a consultant. We gather as equals – curious and faithful communities desiring to learn and share new ways to be good news in our neighborhoods.

1. Twelve congregations will be selected for each learning community.
2. Congregations will recruit a leadership team of five members to steward this work for two years.
3. Each congregational leadership team will be in a cohort with three other congregational teams.
4. Each cohort of four congregations will have a part-time facilitator who will be a paid staff member of the Christensen Center for Vocation.
5. Each cohort will also have a mentor congregation who was part of the first five-year project with the Riverside Innovation Hub.
6. The faculty, staff, and students at Augsburg University also become assets available to help these congregations with their place-based vocational discernment.
7. Every other month, these teams will either gather in cohorts or the entire learning community.
 - a. Seven learning events for the entire learning community over the course of the two years. In-person if possible (otherwise they will happen virtually). At these events, congregational leadership teams will deepen and develop the knowledge base, skill set, and attitudes necessary to lead congregations towards becoming public churches.
 - b. Congregational leadership teams will also gather with their cohorts on-line or in person with their facilitator and mentor congregation for support and reflection on their learning and implementation. Cohort gatherings will happen at least four times a year.
8. During the alternate months, congregational leadership teams will also be expected to gather for regular leadership team meetings on their own to plan and work on integrating the Public Church Framework in their congregation.

Partner Congregations

An ideal partner congregation would embody and/or be seeking to develop the following characteristics. The RIH team will be looking for evidence of these characteristics (or the desire to deepen them) in our application process.

1. ***Seeks the cross instead of glory*** - Is drawn into the brokenness and despair of the world and its neighborhood. Believes these are the places God is at work and the places God is calling them.
2. ***Nimble and engaged in their neighborhoods*** - as partners in the wellbeing of the neighborhood. Has found ways to move to places of brokenness and despair with a promise of healing and hope.
3. ***Willing to take risks*** - Not afraid to try new things nor are they afraid to abandon things whose time has run out. Can admit when they have failed and are able to recalibrate, learn, and try again.
4. ***Moves at the speed of relationships*** - not in a hurry to create something on their own for the sake of attracting large crowds. Builds relationships and partnerships and creates ministry across this web of connections.
5. ***Aware of and informed by their theological convictions*** - Leadership consistently thinks theologically about the congregation's mission and ministry practices. These leaders also do the steady work of inviting their people into this particular theological vision.
6. ***Demonstrates shared leadership across the congregations*** - Ministry leaders are present and involved, but the responsibilities and decision-making are shared with the larger congregation.
7. ***Has developed a variety of unique context specific practices*** - Teach and incorporate practices that nurture, challenge, sustain, and empower people to actively live their faith in the public square.
8. ***Embodies a vocational orientation*** - Their people move through their days and their neighborhoods vocationally aware and engaged.

Eligibility and Expectations for Participation

Each two year learning community will have room for twelve congregations who will be invited to join the learning community after completing an application process. Eligibility requirements for applicants and expectations for participation are as follows:

1. Augsburg's RIH project is open to all Christian congregations.
2. Our target geographic reach is the Twin Cities area and surrounding communities. This is to allow in person learning opportunities and relationships to develop (when public health circumstances allow.) Over our two year time together, this will include 7 large group gatherings at Augsburg, small group cohort gatherings and site visits to your congregation with an RIH facilitator.
3. Congregations further outside the metro area are welcome to apply if:
 - a. Your team can commit to travel to Minneapolis for our seven large group gatherings. The exception would be if Covid forces us to facilitate any of these gatherings virtually.
 - b. Your team is comfortable participating in the small group cohort via zoom.
 - c. Your team is comfortable doing work with our RIH facilitator assigned to your congregation via zoom.
4. A moderate fee of \$1000 for the two-years will be requested from congregations invited to join the RIH learning community. The Lilly Endowment funding supports roughly 70% of our work planned over the next five years. We are looking to our institution, donors, and congregational participants to help fully fund this work. If the cost is a barrier for participation, please reach out to our staff to discuss options.
5. Most importantly, consistent participation is expected from congregational teams. Specifically, this will include:
 - a. Recruiting a team of 5 people from your congregation to steward the learning between the RIH learning community and your congregation over the two year period of the partnership. This team should consist of one staff person with the influence to create culture change in the congregation and four congregational leaders who have capacity and characteristics of faithfulness, leadership, creativity, collaboration, and drive.
 - b. We understand unexpected circumstances can arise. If team members need to step down, recruiting a new team member would be expected.
 - c. Each team member can expect a minimum of monthly meetings related to the RIH learning community. This will rotate between large group gatherings hosted at Augsburg, small group cohort gatherings with an RIH facilitator, and individual team meetings hosted by your team.
 - d. Additional commitments of team members would include: efforts you design to integrate your work and learnings with RIH into your congregation and neighborhood, phone calls or check-ins with your RIH facilitator, and occasional reflections/updates RIH will request in writing to help us steward the project effectively.

For more information and next steps:

Attend an information session: [RSVP Google Form](#)

Application Process: [Thriving Congregations - Application Process](#)

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