

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: **APPROVAL OF CONTRACT WITH ISU COMMUNITY AND
REGIONAL PLANNING REGARDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT****

BACKGROUND:

One of the City Council's goals is to develop, test, and evaluate strategies to improve community engagement, particularly as it relates to underrepresented groups in the community. The specific task assigned under this goal is to work with Dr. Alenka Poplin and her Community and Regional Planning classes at ISU to host another "Play Ames" festival. The first iteration of Play Ames took place in fall 2021.

After further discussion with Dr. Poplin it was agreed to build upon last year's experience. However, rather than identify central locations throughout the City and expect underrepresented groups to come participate in playful engagement activities, a mobile pop-up van staffed by ISU students will this time come to the underrepresented groups in their neighborhoods or at the facilities of trusted entities, such as the faith communities. In this way, a comparison can be made to the effectiveness of either approach.

An additional goal of the research is to identify neighborhood leaders and influencers and develop strategies to establish a network the City can turn to for input from the underrepresented groups. This network would be different than relying on membership from the Neighborhood Associations in which underrepresented residents in the community rarely participate.

In order to make this research more relevant to the City, the citizen input derived from the play experiences will be designed around the City's efforts to implement sustainability programs to reduce the community's carbon footprint. This feedback will be beneficial as the City Council develops its Sustainability Implementation Plan.

Dr. Poplin has developed a proposal marked as Exhibit A to their proposed contract. The engagement activities are planned to occur over the Fall and Spring semesters and will cost the City \$10,000. Funding is available in the City Council's Contingency Account. This account contained \$69,403 in unreserved funding at the end of FY 2021/22 which staff expects to carry forward into the current fiscal year. An additional \$50,000 of new funding was added to this account as part of the adopted FY 2022/23 budget.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the attached agreement with Iowa State University for pop-up playful community engagement events and authorize \$10,000 from the City Council's Contingency Account to pay for this initiative.
2. Do not approve the attached agreement with ISU, and instead pursue some other strategy for continuing the City Council's goal of improving community engagement.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

In accordance with the City Council's stated goal to improve community engagement before making important policy decisions by working with Dr. Alenka Poplin and her Community and Regional Planning classes at ISU to host additional Play Ames events, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council approve Alternative #1, as described above.

EXHIBIT A

Play Ames 2.0: Imagine Your City | Moving pop-up playful community engagement and Establishment of the network of community leaders

Collaborating partners:

City of Ames, Community Engagement Living Lab and ISU Community and Regional Planning Department, College of Design

A. Project Significance

The project titled *Play Ames 2.0: Imagine Your City* concentrates on studying, developing, and testing playful, game-based approaches for community engagement in urban planning. The main focus is on engaging underrepresented and marginalized groups that rarely participate in the community engagement events organized by the city. They include low-income and low-education residents, Asian, African-American, students, children, and other marginalized groups. Based on literature and the experience as reported by the city officials these groups are among those that are traditionally difficult to engage.

The innovation and main contribution of this project can be summarized as follows:

1. **Designs and executes moving pop-up playful community engagement** in the identified neighborhoods with high population of low income, low education residents and other marginalized and underrepresented groups (Fall 2022).
2. **Established entities trusted by the marginalized communities**, such as faith communities that have a significant minority membership. Executes and tests movable pop-up playful community engagement integrating it with programs/events/activities already in place by these trusted entities (Beginning Fall 2022, Continue Spring 2023).
3. **Identifies neighborhood community leaders and influencers** and identifies strategic steps that need to be undertaken to establish a network of neighborhood leaders and influencers (Spring 2023).

The project focuses on moving community engagement utilizing a pop-up van that aims to visit a variety of neighborhoods. It also proposes to test novel technologies such as geographic information systems (GIS) and community mapping in the process of community engagement. The main topic is organized around sustainability and the acceptance of identified sustainability recommendations provided by the City of Ames. This project addresses the problem of engaging marginalized and underrepresented residents in urban planning that exists across the nation. The work accomplish in this project will be of a benefit to the City of Ames and can be applied to other cities.

B. Background and Previous Collaboration

In 2020, the City of Ames manager Steve Schainker, the City Council represented by Dr. Gloria Betcher and ISU Community and Regional Planning Department (CRP) represented by Dr. Alenka Poplin signed a Request for Assistance (RFA). The City of Ames was seeking help in exploring ways in which they could increase engagement of underrepresented and marginalized communities in Ames. The collaboration envisioned the involvement of the students enrolled in two studio courses and their work on research and implementation of novel engagement methods, strategies and technologies. A group of four student leaders was formed during the summer 2021 which worked under the leadership of Dr. Alenka Poplin (ISU, CRP). The team developed a set of playful learning engagement methods with the focus on engaging underrepresented groups. This work resulted in the organization of the 1st community engagement festival *Play Ames: Imagine your City*, on September 25, 2021. This proposed project represents the continuation of the work accomplished in the previous collaboration.

C. Research Methods

Research envisions a creation and design of novel community engagement methods, strategies and technologies; testing them in the selected neighborhoods; and reporting on the acceptance of those by the residents. The methods developed may include sustainability games, gamified community mapping, barefoot path, origami, and others. The research methods applied to study the effectiveness of the proposed engagement methods may include photoethnography, surveys, mapping, and photovoice.

D. Project Team

The project team will be led by Dr. Alenka Poplin, ISU Community and Regional Planning department. A call for collaboration will go to all students that previously participated in *Play Ames: Imagine your City*, the 1st community engagement festival. If possible, some of these students will be engaged/hired for this project. Additionally, students in Dr. Poplin's courses will be engaged in the execution of the pop-up community engagement and identification of the neighborhood leaders and influencers. Students active in the CRP Undergraduate Club may join some of the activities on a volunteered basis.

E. Application of research

The concept of a set of games and playful, learning activities that aim to engage local residents is applicable to other cities. Games and playful-learning activities can be replicated in the cities of different sizes. This work will lead to the proposal writing for the funding by the NSF Smart &

Connected Communities program¹ and the Knight Foundation². Additionally, a journal publication or a book chapter that summarizes research results is planned towards the end of the project.

F. Project Phases and Tasks

The project will be started in Summer 2022 with some fundamental preparatory work and continued in two phases which will be linked to two semesters. The more detailed work is described as follows.

Summer 2022

- Preparation work by Dr. Poplin
- Developing the curriculums for two courses: CRP 455/555 Smart and Sustainable Cities and the CRP449/549 Geodesign for Sustainable Futures
- Identification of students that can be hired
- Meeting with students, hiring process of the students
- Start the collaboration with the CRP Undergraduate Club
- Meetings with the City of Ames to define the goals of the collaboration

Fall 2022 (July – December): Moving Pop-up Playful Community Engagement

Students enrolled in the CRP 455/555 Smart and Sustainable Cities and the CRP449/549 Geodesign for Sustainable Futures will participate in the project. The list of tasks:

Phase I. Preparation and organization of the neighborhood visits

Moving pop-up playful community engagement

- Design of playful gamified community engagement activities
- Link the activities with the identified sustainability recommendations
- Equip the pop-up van with the needed materials
- Identify the neighborhoods
- Schedule visits of the neighborhoods
- Develop strategies to advertise activities
- Work on active social media appearance
- Develop promotion materials such as cards, posters
- Buy T-Shirts for the team

Trusted entities

- Identify volunteered organizations, faith communities and other trusted entities
- Organize appearances at their meetings and/or other events

¹ NSF Smart and Connected Communities (S&CC): <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2022/nsf22529/nsf22529.htm>

² Knight Foundation: <https://knightfoundation.org/>

Phase II. Execution: moving pop-up playful community engagement

- Visits of the selected neighborhoods
- Visit of the trusted entities including some faith communities

RESULT: REPORT summarizing the results of the moving pop-up playful community engagement activities visiting neighborhoods and trusted entities

Spring 2023 (January – May): Network of the City Neighborhood Leaders and Influencers

A group of two undergraduate students will work on this task. Additionally, the CRP Undergraduate Club will be involved and possibly another CRP course. The main goal is to develop the network of neighborhood leaders and influencers. This network will slowly grow and enable the city to connect with these leaders. We call it the **Network of the City Neighborhood Leaders and Influencers**. Additionally, the pop-up van will visit the neighborhoods in the same way as developed in the previous semester.

The list of tasks:

- Pop-up van visits of the identified neighborhoods
- Pop-up visits of the identified volunteered organizations and faith communities
- Identifying the neighborhood leaders with interest in collaboration
- Building a network of the city neighborhood leaders and influencers
- Work with city planners, councilors, and staff members to identify how they could meet and collaborate with the neighborhood leaders and influencers
- Creating a strong social media presence for the Network of the City Neighborhood Leaders and Influencers.
- Focus on discussing how to get engaged, how to engage others, how to create a collaborative atmosphere in the neighborhoods.

Contacting trusted entities

- Continue working with identified and new volunteered organizations, faith communities and other trusted entities
- Organize appearances at their meetings and/or other events

RESULT: REPORT summarizing the list of neighborhood leaders and influencers with a proposal for their network, activities, and social media presence

G. Budget Justification

Fall 2022

Item No.	Description	Cost in \$
1.1.	Undergraduate research assistant (URA) to Dr. Poplin helping to organize the work, working on the report, purchasing needed materials, working on the website, social media presence 5 hours/wk x 16 wks = 80 hrs x \$15/hr = \$1,200 in wages \$1,200 (wages) + \$7 (benefits) = \$1,207	1,207
1.2.	An additional URA who will go – together with the student assistant (1.1.) – to the trusted entities and organize events at the faith community gatherings 4 Sundays x 2 hours (= 8) + 10 weekly meetings x 1 hour (= 10) + preparations for Sundays 4 hours = 22 hours x \$15/hour Wages (\$330) plus benefits (\$2) = \$332	332
1.3.	Summer work of Dr. Alenka Poplin Organization of the team, activities, preparation for the activities, meetings with the students, developing playful activities, developing the changed curriculum (fixed sum). Salary (\$1,500) plus benefits (\$394) = \$1,894	1,894
1.4.	Material costs including printing cards, posters, purchasing t-shirts, maps, materials for the playful learning activities, mileage, missing equipment, printing maps. [mileage (\$200), assorted M+S (\$1,913) printing (\$600)]	2,713
1.5	Indirect Cost rate for the State of Iowa at 8%	492
	Total 1	\$6,638

Spring 2023

Item No.	Description	Cost in \$
2.1.	Two URA working together on the execution of some additional moving pop-up playful community engagement activities with the goal to identify the neighborhood leaders and influencers. Working on identifying those leaders and creating a social media platform for their exchange. Additionally visiting other trusted entities to strengthen the connection with the community	2,113

	7 hrs/wk x 10 wks x \$15/hr x 2 students = \$2,100 plus benefits (\$13) = \$2,113	
2.2.	Material costs including printing cards, posters, maps, materials for the playful learning activities, mileage, missing equipment, printing maps. [mileage (\$200), assorted M+S (\$400) printing (\$400)]	1000
2.3	Indirect Cost rate for the State of Iowa at 8%	249
	Total II	3,362

The total budget is estimated to \$10,000 for two semesters.

H. Tangible results for the partners on the project: City of Ames and the CRP department including ISU students

In summary, the City of Ames will benefit from the collaboration in many ways. The tangible results of this collaboration:

- Design and execution of moving pop-up playful community engagement targeting underrepresented and marginalized communities (Fall 2022)
- Report describing the design and execution of moving pop-up playful community engagement with the evaluation of the engagement (Fall 2022)
- Identification of trusted entities such as volunteered organizations and faith communities with the goal to establish the Network of Community Leaders and Influencers (Fall 2022/Spring 2023)
- Establishment of the Network of Community Leaders and Influencers (Spring 2023)
- Concept for strong social media presence for the the Network of Community Leaders and Influencers (Spring 2023)
- Report summarizing the efforts relate to the establishment of the Network of Community Leaders and Influencers (Spring 2023)

ISU Community and Regional Planning department will involve students in the project. Dr. Poplin will reach out to the CRP Undergraduate Club students and motivate them to join the effort. The main benefit for the students is to test innovative ideas in a practical application and to get in touch with the residents of the City of Ames. This is a very valuable and beneficial experience for them. Many student that participated in Play Ames community engagement festival organized on September 25, 2021 reported the experience to be very valuable for their job interviews, CVs and brought a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction to them. Creating more opportunities like that for the students is very beneficial for the community, the involved students and the CRP department.