THE MILESTONES CITY™

A Prospectus

Picture this. . .

On a warm summer evening, four downtown blocks are closed to traffic. The streets and sidewalks are filled with people—laughing, talking, eating and dancing. From a corner stage, a succession of bands belt out salsa, reggae, African drum songs, and Indian ragas. At booths lining the sidewalks, people in blue jeans and hijabs, saris and business suits, purchase Caribbean jerk chicken and Ethiopian injera, Middle Eastern falafel and Mexican tamales. It is the biggest block party in the city's history—put on by and for the city's citizens who represent 22 different nations.

But tasting these national dishes is not new to the people of this city—for downtown and in every neighborhood are restaurants from around the world. Every supermarket stocks Indian naan alongside white bread and Greek tsatsiki next to the yogurt. Japanese rice crackers have become almost as popular as Goldfish.

In the Temple Beth El synagogue on Saturday morning, the rabbi is joined by the imam of the local mosque, and members of the mosque's congregation share the pews. The two congregations are meeting regularly to explore the commonalities between their traditions and to develop joint projects to promote Middle East reconciliation.

On Saturday night, all across the city, families will be hosting Community Dinners, casual get-togethers in which residents open their homes to others for the purpose of meeting people whom they might otherwise never meet. Some are loose, unstructured conversations; others are designed as focused discussions on particular civic or cultural issues. Often these dinners lead to ongoing connections between participants.

Every Monday morning, the mayor and a rotating member of the City Council hold "Coffee with the Mayor" meetings at a restaurant somewhere in the city, soliciting unvarnished input and encouraging dialogue from the city's citizens.

During the school year, children at all grade levels participate in a curriculum customized to the cultural mix of their city. Students teach each other about their traditions, study the countries represented in their school, hold school-wide festivals celebrating their school's many cultures. High school Social Studies students study the international issues related to the countries represented in their class. In the summer, children from different neighborhoods and backgrounds play and learn together at weeklong summer camps.

Monthly at City Hall, committees of diverse citizen volunteers meet to address issues of importance to the city's cultural groups and neighborhoods: crime, schools, public transit, zoning. . . The committees are addressed by experts in each area, and their input is considered an integral component of all city decisions.

In the last five years, this smorgasbord of activities has had a surprising effect on life in the city. Crime has dropped, the number of new businesses in the city has risen, property values have climbed. Reversing a ten-year trend, enrollment in the public schools has begun to climb as families have begun returning to the city. The city has been written up in Money and Parents magazines as one of the best to live in America.

The city is a Milestones City™

And across America, in communities of 10,000 and cities of 300,000, similar events are taking place. For these visionary cities have recognized what others have yet to see: that their future prosperity resides in their ability to tear down walls of difference and division and build, instead, a city of ongoing, cross-cultural communication. A city in which every citizen feels welcome, every one feels heard, every one feels like a contributing member of the whole. America—built on the backs of its immigrants—owes its strength to those who have come from other lands. The cities that build on that wisdom and history today will be America's leaders in the 21st century.

What is a Milestones City?

A Milestones City is a city that has made a choice.

It has decided to make itself the most *inclusive* city it can be—because it knows that divisions between citizens—whether based on ethnicity, nationality, religion or socioeconomic class—invite deterioration of the city's health.

A Milestones City is a city that actively promotes connections and exchanges between its citizens because it knows that interaction is the antidote to fear and stereotyping. It knows that only by coming together will people from different backgrounds appreciate the tremendous commonalities between them.

A Milestones City is a city in which all people feel that their voices are heard, in which opportunities are truly open, in which no people are underserved and no neighborhood is a ghetto. A Milestones City is a city in which the dropout rate has declined, as has the incidence of violence in the schools; in which the number of new businesses is rising and the rate of business failures has declined; a city in which the number of people who come to civic meetings is increasing, as is the diversity of civic leaders.

A Milestones City is a city that recognizes that diversity is an asset that enriches the city's fabric. It is a city in which government, nonprofits, business leaders, neighborhood representatives, citizen activists, school district personnel, and countless others have come together to create a host of programs that draw people from every neighborhood and every culture into the thrum of city life. It is a city that deliberately, proactively, has chosen to make itself a model of inclusion and respect because it knows that those qualities, in the 21st century, are the keys to the future.

Why become a Milestones City?

City watchers have long known that one of the root causes of city decline is polarization. Cities with sharply fractured populations—whether split along racial, ethnic, religious, and/or socio-economic lines—are more prone to a host of urban problems. As segregation increases between people of different backgrounds, fear and stereotyping climb, crime rates begin to rise, the middle class flees, property values decline, the tax base shrinks, and infrastructure and public services suffer. The city gets caught in a seemingly unstoppable downward spiral.

For some cities this is already the case; for others, there are only alarming trends: a growing gap between citizens at the top and bottom of the income scale, declining school enrollment, a slow uptick in business closures. For these cities, the trends are like writing on the wall: warnings that they must take prophylactic action. But how? How to reverse the trends? How to avoid the problems that seem intractable in other places?

Smart cities—creative, forward-thinking cities—have found an answer. They have understood that the diversity that leads to polarization need not lead to decline. On the contrary, it can be a city-strengthening *asset.* These cities know that cities that work proactively to bring diverse populations together make themselves attractive to business, residents and investment. They know that diversity—when managed like any other city asset—increases the city's vibrancy and makes it a place where more people want to live.

Smart cities see that this is the new reality that American municipalities are facing. They see that actively promoting inclusiveness is not an optional, feel-good program, but rather an essential part of city governance. They know that only by remaking themselves as places of uncommon inclusion, acceptance and respect will they solidify their prospects for the future.

Programs in a Milestones City

Milestones Cities are notable for the breadth of programs they offer that bring people together across racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic divides. Programs vary from city to city but include such things as:

- *Public and private dinners* at which people from across the city gather to eat and talk together
- *Interfaith services and service projects* in which congregants from different religions pray, learn and work together
- *Library collections and programs* that feature the diverse cultural groups in the city
- *School curricula* in which students teach each other about their cultures
- *Civic meetings* in which individuals from different cultural groups come together to discuss issues of common interest
- *Film festivals* featuring films from the homelands of the city's citizens
- *Cultural fairs* featuring dances, folk music, puppetry and theater from the citizens' homelands
- *Discussion groups* in homes, libraries and meeting halls on civic and cultural issues
- *Extension courses* in local high schools, community colleges and colleges in which residents teach others about their history and culture
- *Welcoming committees* for new residents made up of people from diverse backgrounds
- *Exhibits* in libraries, retail windows, community centers, and other venues featuring photos and text prepared by population groups to explain their culture to others
- *Oral history projects* in which population groups record the stories of their elders and share them by making them part of the public library collection

- *Video projects* in which teens work together across group lines to create YouTube-ready videos
- *School field trips* in which students from different neighborhoods visit each other for a day
- *Pen-pal programs* in which students from different schools write letters and emails to each other
- *Cooking demonstrations* in which residents share their recipes and food traditions, held in local supermarkets
- *Citizen juries* in which diverse groups of citizens meet, jury-style, for two days to cross-examine experts on particular civic issues, then prepare recommendations to the City Council

Milestones City Products

As a by-product to many of the programs, Milestones Cities will produce products:

- *Cookbooks* featuring recipes and stories from the city's cultural groups
- *Photo books* featuring photos and text from the various cultural exhibits
- *Books of photos and text* captured as part of each group's oral history project
- *Books featuring photos by children* who have been asked to document their culture

These products will be tangible examples of the city's cultural change, sharable products that advertise its vibrant, inclusive nature. Sale of the products online, in city bookstores and in other local and national venues will help fund future programs.

Becoming a Milestones City

What does it take to become a Milestones City? Above all, it takes commitment—the commitment of a core group of supporters who will advocate for the program; the commitment of government officials to endorse and support the program long-term; the commitment of local businesses, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood groups, religious communities, service organizations, school districts, and institutions of higher learning to contribute time, money and personnel to bring the program to life.

Funds for the project will come from a variety of sources: service clubs, local businesses, the city budget, local foundations, and even national foundations and federal government agencies that are interested in promoting new models of municipal health are all potential sources of funding.

In most cities, garnering this support and fully operating the program will take three years. Year one will be a year of recruiting support and planning. In year two the first programs will be held and evaluated. By year three, the program will be fully operational, with systems in place to sustain it long-term.

The Milestones City Designation

Most awards or "seals of approval" are bestowed by external bodies. But the Milestones City designation is different. It is bestowed by the city itself—with monitoring by the Milestones Project and under a rigorous set of conditions.

At the beginning of the Milestones City project, participants from every facet of the city will come together to develop a set of criteria on which they will be judged.

- *What will we look like when we are a Milestones City?*
- *How will we be different then from how we are today?*
- *What will other cities admire when they come to examine us closely?*

These broad questions will be broken down into a myriad of quantitative and qualitative measures—from many "how events did the city hold?" and "how many people attended each?" to measuring attitude changes among the citizens. For each question, the city will set measurable objectives, the number or result it hopes to achieve. Finally it will determine the percent of its objectives it must meet in order to qualify for Milestones City designation.

In this way, each city will design its own evaluation—not to make earning the designation easier, for it will not be—but because every city is different and what is important, or achievable, in one may be different from what is important or achievable in the next. By designing its own evaluation tool, each city will, in effect, design and implement its own Milestones City project—a project that meets its own particular needs.

Designing and implementing the evaluation is, in fact, an integral part of the Milestones City program—for it is a chance for the city's cultural groups to come together and meaningfully examine the current state of affairs. Answering the questions will require conversations with their constituents and probing of neighborhood concerns. Successes will be measured but new challenges will be revealed. And from those challenges will come the objectives for the next phase of Milestones City programs. An external evaluation conducted by an outside source who comes in and surveys residents, delivers a verdict and then leaves might result in the bestowal of an official seal. But this internal evaluation, developed and implemented by the program's participant themselves, will have a much more meaningful and constructive impact.

Evaluation will occur after the third year of the program. The process will be coached and monitored by the Milestones Project. Cities that award themselves the Milestones City designation will be promoted by the Milestones Project to both national and local media, as well as to realtors and business groups. They will receive the Milestones City seal for use in their promotional material.

Even more importantly, they will have the pleasure of knowing that they have improved the quality of life for their citizens, and that, when they might have acted otherwise, they have chosen to do the right thing.

About The Milestones Project

The Milestones City project is administered by the Milestones Project, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to reducing distrust and hatred among the world's peoples. The Milestones Project's principal tool is photographs: arresting photos of the world's children, all celebrating the commonalities we all share, whether it's the universal milestones of childhood or the commonalities of the world's major religions. Over and over, in different ways, Milestones books, exhibits, puzzles, and other products convey the same message: regardless of our country of origin, or the color of our skin, or the clothes we wear, or the God we worship, we are more alike than we are different.

The Milestones Project has received numerous awards for its work inspiring social change.

- In 2008 we:
  - received the Human and Civil Rights Award from the National Education Association
  - received the Martin Luther King, Jr. Distinguished Service Award from the city of Littleton, Colorado and Arapahoe Community College
- In 2007 we:
  - were named Purpose Prize Fellows, in recognition of our passion, creativity and determination to make lasting change.
  - received the Make a Difference Award in recognition of our efforts to promote non-violence.
- In 2005 we:
  - received the Ambassadors of Peace Award from the Conflict Center, recognizing our efforts at reducing levels of physical, verbal and emotional violence.
- In 2003 we:
  - received the Global Peace and Tolerance Award from the Friends of the United Nations in recognition of our efforts to advance the cause of tolerance.

The Milestones Project will assist cities in implementing the Milestones City program by helping advocates build support for the project among diverse constituencies in the city, advising on fundraising for the project, helping design project activities, helping plan the project roll-out, and acting as project advisor through the first three years of implementation. At the end of year three, the Milestones Project will conduct an evaluation to determine eligibility for the Milestones City designation. Once the designation is awarded, the Milestones Project will promote the city to the national media.