

Summary Report
Building Hope, Countering Hate, Supporting Communities that Work for All
An Engagement with Minnesota Mayors Together and Inclusion Advocates
October 24-25, 2019

Bigwoods Center, Western Avenue, Fergus Falls, MN

Event description: A two-day event to bring together inclusion advocates with *Minnesota Mayors Together* participants for shared conversation and learning about how Minnesota communities are responding to newcomers and people who are different from each other. Participants heard presentations about the role of immigrants and refugees in Minnesota's social and economic fabric, shared experiences about countering hate, and imagined opportunities for building a more welcoming, inclusive Minnesota.

Rational Aims	Experiential Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion advocates and Mayors generate a shared understanding of the current state of response to difference in MN communities.• Introduce and connect mayors to equity advocates, their work and resources.• Brainstorm next steps.	<p>Participants feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More connected to one another.• More confident in talking about the benefits of inclusive communities.• Better equipped to respond to hate speech/actions.

What are you noticing in your life and work about community responses to newcomers and people who are different?

About Immigrant communities:

- Immigrant and refugee communities are experiencing an “urgency of now” –enough talking; we must act.
- Immigrants and refugees are tired of being asked to tell their story and recount their experiences.
- A woman wearing a hijab in public could be risking her life.
- Immigrant communities bond around their faith traditions. Faith leaders in immigrant communities often enjoy authority and influence. “That’s who you need to talk to if you want to get support for a school bond referendum.”

About Rural communities:

- Our communities have been the same for a long time and accepting new comers is hard. There is fear of losing our culture.

- Lots of work is being done at the community level: Willmar's 'friendship and conversation' meetings at coffee shops; Northfield municipal ID and welcoming resolution; Indigenous Peoples' Day; ministerial association in Worthington.
- "People fear what they don't know." Lack of knowledge about Islam feeds fear of the unknown "other."

About Urban majority communities:

- The highest suicide rates in U.S. are among middle aged white men with no higher degree education.
- "I hear: 'they' ...don't.. aren't.... – then usually some sweeping generalization of some group who are different than the speaker. Like, 'they dress differently. Eat differently. They are not assimilating.'"
- "My community is apathetic in its response to difference. In my community people don't respond to difference because they don't see it; they think it's somewhere else. In our community the way we deal with difference is put khaki on it and call it White."
- "Not a single issue related to diversity was raised during my campaign."

Among Mayors:

- Inclusion advocates in rural (mayors, economic development agencies) feel isolated and unsupported. Many participants described having experienced intimidation and threats of violence as a result of their inclusion advocacy.
- It takes courage to speak up against hate.
 - Many local officials (city and county) "don't know how to take a stand." "It's tough to be the first one out of the gate."
 - "It's difficult to find your voice when the loud voices out there are spewing hate."
 - "There's silence out there [from Mayors in response to hate speech]."
 - "The fear of elected officials and people [about the consequences of speaking up against hate] is real. It affects decisions."
 - "They [the city council] hate it when I use the bully pulpit because that's not what we do."
- "We [city government] are learning – trying to get better. We're trying to be more responsive/responsible to people's concern about police violence. It begs the broader conversation – when should you use lethal force."

In Philanthropy

Philanthropy as a field is experiencing a "sense of urgency" about improving its own cultural competence and becoming more effective grant makers and partners in support of organizations led by people of color. But "we don't know the answers about how philanthropy can be the best partners."

In Business

Employers are failing to adequately address the housing, transportation and English language learning needs of their immigrant employees.

The faith community:

“The higher up the [church denomination’s] hierarchy the whiter it gets.”

Reflections on approaches to the work to create open, safe, and welcoming communities:

Mayors have influence and are uniquely positioned to help shape community culture and norms.

- “We have an economic, social and moral case to build diverse and inclusive communities.”

Rural communities that are not yet diverse need to get ready for a more diverse future.

“Administrative and procedural changes aren’t enough; we need to change culture. Check lists won’t solve this. we have figured out to have meetings, but we get stuck and can’t act. We need to figure out how to move forward.”

Employees need to do more to meet the needs of their immigrant employees, especially in transportation and housing.

“Immigrants are our future.”

“We need to plan for resistance. Plan all the way to the end. Ask for help. You can’t do it alone. Find people who are like-minded to get it done.”

“Only good things happen when Mayors get together.”

White people should call out racial hate speech of other white people. Don’t leave it to POC. POC appreciate white allies.

As fear of “the other” increases, public will/ desire to invest in public goods decreases.

Personal relationships are an antidote to “otherization.”

“Philanthropy doesn’t want to get involved in religion and politics...and yet what we are dealing with right now is the toxic intersection of religion and politics.”

“Our audience is the movable middle.”

“We need to realize and talk about the fact that there are people in our community that don’t feel safe.”

Learn appreciation for the other – build empathy.

Hateful messages are coming thru, how do we get above the noise?

“if you don’t do your own work you don’t have integrity. It’s not authentic.”

“I believe diversity is the answer. Without immigration we are a dead community. We will not prosper without our diversity. We have a lot of good things going on I need to stay at the table. Your actions speak louder than your words.”

“When I get discouraged, I think about the leadership in POC communities.”

People need an emotional connection to break through stereotypes. Facts don’t matter. “What makes a difference is a person’s lived experience of interacting with Muslims.”

What can we do together to make more Minnesota communities open, safe, and welcoming? What next steps might we take together?

Create mentorships between mayors.

Give Mayors information and tools (fact sheets; talking points; sample resolutions)

Implement on three levels of action: personal, institutional, and societal/systemic.

Focus on perspectives, not positions.

More story-telling – we need to tell our own stories and not let social media do it for us. Tell stories about how “our lives are interconnected.” Minnesota Humanities Center is poised as a partner to help do this. As a state we have a history of welcoming immigrants. Most of us have immigrant ancestors. “We can shape the future by understanding our past.”

- “It would be nice to help remind older immigrants of their original immigration story – remembering that we all were unwelcome at one point.”

Assume good intent on the part of people who engage in cross-cultural conversations.

Increase public understanding of Islam through social contact with Muslims and mosques.

- “What we have learned is that it is intimate shared experience, not just a group of people who come together, that enables change. “

Serve food at community meetings.

Incent and support employers to meet their employees’ transportation, housing, and English-language learning

Develop and promulgate effective messages:

- “Get granular about refuting distorting myths like ‘Just get over it – that was then, this is now.’ ‘Muslims attacked us on 911 – they are all committed to forcible conversation of the entire world.’ This is the kind of thing people believe. We need to have more voice and cover to folks working against this.”
- Use the frame of personal benefit as well as public good. Help articulate how diversity helps people and their families.
- Message that it’s okay to change your mind (ala the marriage/love debate.)

Increase the proportion of philanthropic dollars going to POC-led organizations.

Help build awareness and support for the Equity Blueprint for Minnesota at the 2020 legislative session and use it as a jumping off point for more conversations about equity.

Support/join efforts to ensure a fair and full census count.

Offer/fund conferences/training on “how to affect change” in rural communities.

Sponsor neighborhood picnics as a way to stimulate community conversations.

Muslim American Society has a speakers bureau.

Individual commitments offered:

I will:

- Visit a local mosque
- Attend an Iftar dinner
- Connect with the Minnesota Council of Churches
- Continue participating in Minnesota Mayors Together
- “I’m asking myself: ‘what’s my part in equity?’”
- Lead my organization in doing our own DEI work.

Hosts: Anna Wasescha, West Central Initiative Foundation, Ben Schierer, Mayor of Fergus Falls, Caren Dewar, Minnesota Mayors Together, Bernadine Joselyn, Blandin Foundation

Participants:

Susie Brown, President, Minnesota Council on Foundations
Emmett Coleman, Strategic Partner, Tunheim
Molly Cummings, Member, Met Council
Caren Dewar, Executive Director, Urban Land Institute
Curtiss DeYoung, CEO, Minnesota Council of Churches
Wade Fauth, Vice President, Blandin Foundation
Warren Hanson, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund
Sarah Hernandez, Program Officer, The McKnight Foundation
Cheryal Hills, Executive Director, Region Five Development Commission
Monica Hurtado, Health Equity Organizer, Voices for Racial Justice
Judy Johnson, Prosperity Front Door
Jane Leonard, President, Growth & Justice
Kevin Lindsey, President & CEO, Minnesota Humanities Center
Rep. Mohamud Noor, District 60B, and Director, Confederation of Somali Community
Alan Roy, Secretary-Treasurer, White Earth Nation
Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund
Anna Wasescha, President & CEO, West Central Initiative
Asad Zaman, Executive Director, Muslim American Society of Minnesota

Mayors:

Rita Albrecht, Bemidji
Marv Calvin, Willmar
Jim Hovland, Edina
Jonathan Judd, Moorhead
Mike Kuhle, Worthington
Mike Maguire, Eagan
Rhonda Pownell, Northfield
Ben Schierer, Fergus Falls

Presenters:

- Maureen Ramirez, on DEED's equity priorities and programs
- Laura Bordelon, Senior Vice President for Advocacy, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce on the role of immigrants and refugees in Minnesota's economy
- John Fallon, CFO, All Flex Flexible Circuits, LLC on their experience working with an immigrant work force
- Rhonda Pownell, Northfield and Mike Maguire, Eagan, on Minnesota Mayors Together

Facilitator: Bernadine Joselyn