

Diversity Coalitions in Rural Minnesota Communities

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Photo courtesy of Milo Larson, Faribault Diversity Coalition

The Faribault Diversity Coalition's Community Garden Project includes 20 foreign-born and U.S.-born families from the community who garden together on a plot provided by Our Savior's Lutheran Church. The project's purpose is to provide additional food resources for the families involved and to foster cross-cultural exchange among community members.

Although Minnesota has a predominantly White, native-born population, in recent years it has experienced large increases in its foreign-born population, leading to Minnesota being designated a “nontraditional destination state.” More than half of the foreign-born population entered Minnesota between 1990 and 2000, increasing its immigrant population by 138%, compared to 57% nationwide. Concentrations of immigrants are particularly notable in

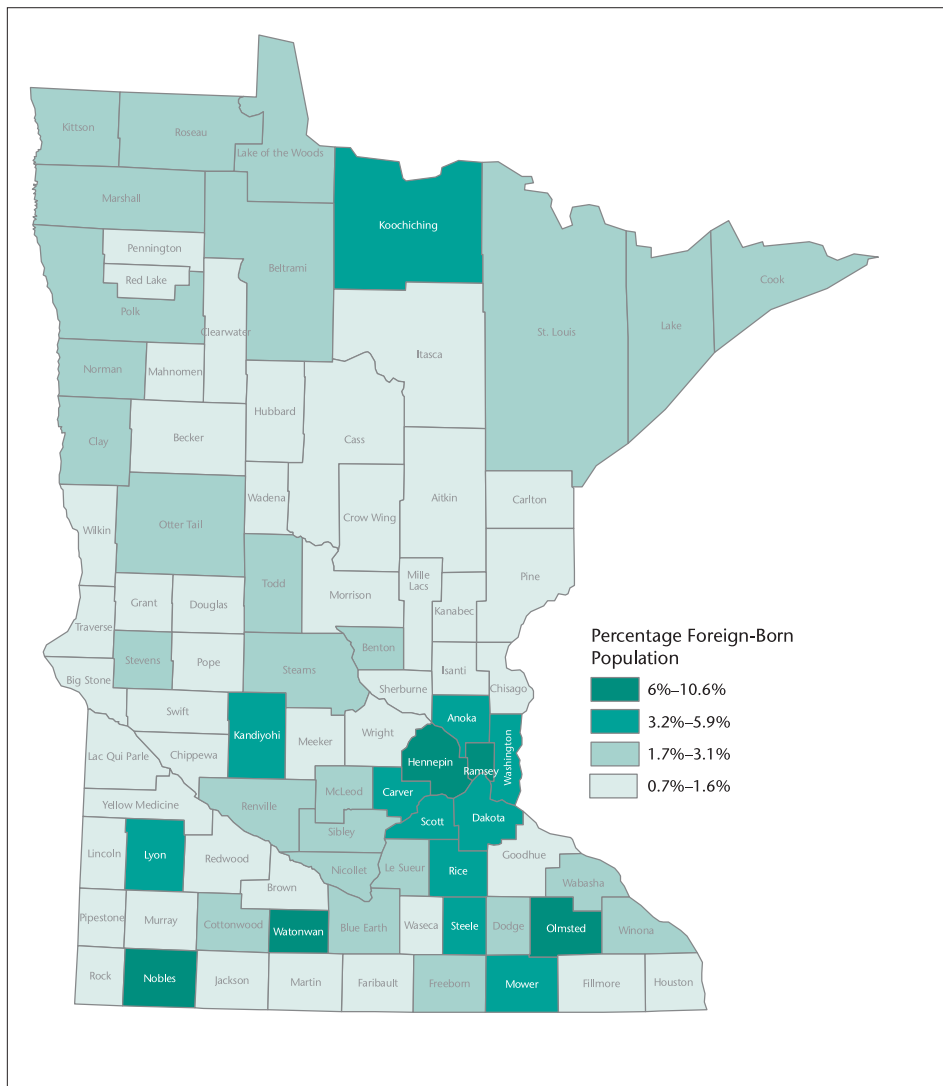
metropolitan-area communities and in rural towns and counties with meat- and poultry-processing plants (Figure 1).

As the number of immigrants has grown, some U.S.-born residents have been welcoming, while others have responded with fear and resentment. Negative attitudes toward immigrants can be particularly strong in rural and exurban areas, both nationally and in Minnesota (Table 1). As a result, immigrants living outside of central cities may find themselves in hostile

environments, isolated from needed services.

Coexisting with xenophobic attitudes are the lesser known positive efforts of local residents who work tirelessly, and sometimes in isolation, to improve cross-cultural relations. These programs, which we will refer to as *diversity coalitions*, are the subject of this article. We define diversity coalitions as organizations that are open to community members and that have programs that aim to improve relations between U.S.- and foreign-born

Figure 1. Concentrations of Foreign-Born Immigrants in Minnesota by County, 2000



Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table 1. Community Attitudes in Minnesota Toward Immigrants, Minnesota Community Survey, 2004

Immigrants. . .	Percentage of respondents agreeing			
	Urban areas	Exurban areas	Rural areas	All
Are hurting our quality of life	36%	52%	51%	47%
Take jobs nobody else wants	27%	35%	37%	33%
Contribute to cultural diversity	17%	38%	34%	30%
Are a drain on public schools	30%	34%	22%	27%
Are hardworking, make a valuable contribution	33%	23%	21%	25%
Do not assimilate	4%	13%	4%	7%
Get too many government handouts	1%	8%	5%	5%

Source: Stan Greenberg, Anna Greenberg, and Julie Hootkin. *The Changing Shape of Minnesota: Reinvigorating Community and Government in the New Minnesota*. Washington, D.C.: Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research, Inc., 2004.

residents. Not all of the organizations we examined are coalitions in a formal sense, but all reach out to diverse community members and sponsor programs with the aforementioned goal.

The locations, membership, goals, or successes of diversity coalitions have not been previously examined in-depth. To remedy this, we conducted a census of these organizations in rural Minnesota communities. We studied the kinds of programs they conduct, their sources of funding, and how they document implicit and explicit objectives and accomplishments. We paid particular attention to the organizations' levels of inclusivity in goal-setting, governance, and membership, and the extent to which they advocate for immigrant rights or attempt to reduce xenophobia among U.S.-born residents, rather than merely perpetuating the status quo.

The project culminated with a networking conference in April 2007 to present the results of the research; to stimulate communities to critically examine the makeup, power structures, purposes, and expected outcomes of diversity coalitions; and to promote regional collaboration and communication.

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Methodology

To conduct the census of diversity coalitions, we began by identifying nonmetro Minnesota communities that had at least 5% foreign-born residents in 2000.¹ We then searched directories of ethnic organizations and Internet listings of nonprofits in these localities. We did not include programs that worked only with foreign-born residents. The searches yielded 50 potential programs. In the summer of 2006, we completed initial telephone interviews with 34 (68%) of the 50 programs (Figure 2). Efforts to reach the remaining 16 programs were abandoned after multiple unsuccessful attempts.

In the second phase of the project, we conducted in-depth interviews with a subset of the identified rural diversity coalition programs. We stratified

¹ We included a few rural communities with fewer than 5% foreign-born if we knew of diversity coalitions in the towns.

Figure 2. Diversity Coalitions in Nonmetropolitan Areas of Minnesota, 2006–2007

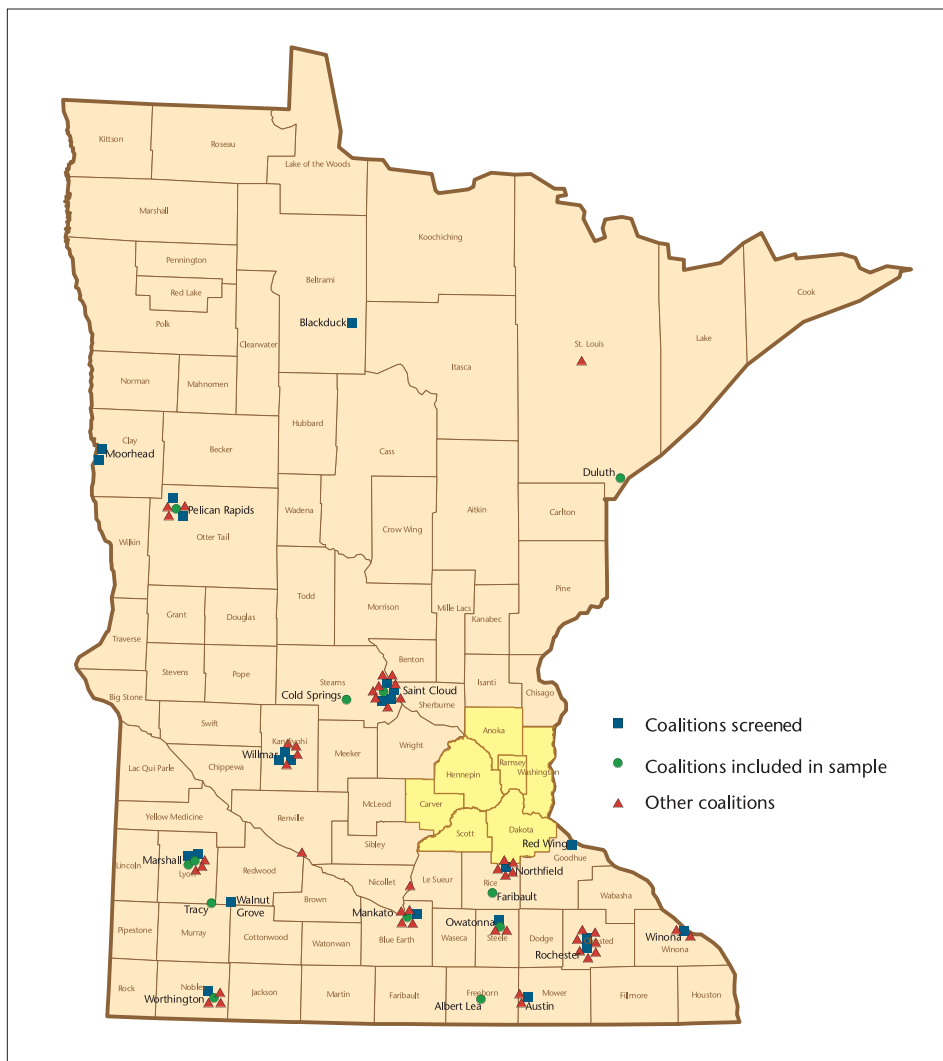


Table 2. Percentage of Student Enrollments in K–12 that Are Students of Color in Selected Rural Minnesota Communities, 2001–2007 (by School Year)

City	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007	Percentage change 2001–2007
Albert Lea	14%	15%	15%	15%	16%	18%	+ 29%
Cold Spring	1%	3%	4%	4%	5%	5%	+ 400%
Faribault	17%	18%	20%	22%	23%	25%	+ 47%
Mankato	10%	11%	12%	13%	14%	14%	+ 40%
Marshall	17%	17%	16%	17%	18%	19%	+ 12%
Owatonna	13%	14%	15%	16%	16%	17%	+ 31%
Pelican Rapids	20%	23%	25%	27%	29%	32%	+ 60%
St. Cloud	11%	13%	14%	16%	18%	21%	+ 91%
Tracy	19%	19%	22%	22%	23%	21%	+ 11%
Worthington	35%	38%	41%	42%	44%	46%	+ 31%

Source: Data Center, Minnesota Department of Education. “School and District Enrollment Files.” <http://cfl.state.mn.us/datactr/enroll/index.htm>

the 34 screened programs by the kinds of services they offered and randomly selected 10 programs that represented 2 programs from each of five program types: recreational programs; K–12 programs; community educational forums; community festivals/dinners; and civic engagement/organizing/lobbying organizations. We added two human rights commissions from nonmetro counties, for a total of 12 targeted interviews with diversity coalition program staff.

We conducted an additional 14 interviews with African and Latino community members in the target communities to provide immigrant perspectives on the programs. These individuals were identified and interviewed by bicultural, bilingual interviewers who approached the leaders of local immigrant-serving organizations or businesses. Only one interview was refused, yielding a completion rate of 92.9%.²

Community Context

In Minnesota, as in the United States as a whole, White student enrollment in rural areas has declined, whereas enrollment of students of color has increased. According to an article by Martha McMurray in the April 2005 issue of the Minnesota State Demographic Center’s *Population Notes*, total enrollment in rural Minnesota districts fell 17% between 2001 and 2006. In the communities in our study, enrollment of students of color ranged from 5% in Cold Spring to 44% in Worthington during the 2005–2006 school year (Table 2). In five of the communities—Worthington, Tracy, St. Cloud, Pelican Rapids, and Faribault—students of color accounted for one-fifth or more of the K–12 enrollments in 2006–2007. Twenty years ago, these towns had almost no children of color in the schools. These increases parallel the changes in other Midwestern towns with meatpacking plants.³ With the

² In the fall of 2006 and spring of 2007, we completed 11 of the 12 targeted interviews with program staff (91.7%). A nonrandomly selected interview in Albert Lea was added to the sample, for a total of 12 completed interviews with diversity coalition staff.

³ The exceptions are Marshall and Tracy. The impact of the packing plants can be seen by the flat and declining school enrollments in these towns after the closing of the Jennie-O Heartland Foods in 2001, and the resulting loss of 1,800 jobs. See Cameron Macht. “Regional Spotlight: Southwest and South Central Minnesota—Changes in Local Economies.” *Minnesota Employment Review* (November 2003): 12–14.

establishment and expansion of meat- and food-processing plants, the children of immigrants have kept many of the schools from closing or consolidating—a significant economic boon for school districts that depend upon per-pupil enrollment dollars from the state.

Developing and fostering good cross-cultural relations is difficult to achieve in rural communities with large percentages of non-English-speaking residents and few interpreters or translators. A Somali community leader in one town estimated that only 2% of some 600 Somalis residing there were proficient in English. These percentages are much lower than in urban areas because immigrants and refugees who cannot get better paying jobs in the cities often migrate to rural towns where some firms will hire them without evidence of English proficiency.

Finally, because the U.S. government issues very few visas to low-skilled workers, and because the employment available to immigrants in rural communities is predominantly in low-wage meat-processing and manufacturing plants, a high percentage of Latinos in rural communities are undocumented. Their lack of legal status is a significant impediment to fair treatment and political organizing.

Interviews with African and Latino Community Leaders

This section summarizes our findings from interviews with African and Latino community leaders. These interviews provided illuminating commentary about the environment that new residents encounter and the challenges faced by organizations working to improve cross-cultural relations.

Immigrant/Nonimmigrant Relations. When we asked Latino and African community leaders to tell us about relations between immigrants and nonimmigrants in their towns, their responses varied, but a majority said either that there were limited interactions of any kind, or that relations were mixed. Some described serious tensions, exacerbated by Americans' ignorance about who immigrants are and why they have come to rural communities.

One Latino community leader commented,

They don't think about why our families are here, why we came, why we left some family members behind; they don't understand or don't think about why these

things happen. Maybe they think that people cross the desert and put their lives at risk just to be able to have a plasma television.

Another Latino community leader we interviewed described the effects of overt prejudice.

In my experience and from what I've heard from people I know, almost all immigrants in this town and in others have been victims of racism. When this happens to you it's very difficult to leave it behind you; it's very difficult to forget this humiliation and to try to be friends with Americans. I'm not saying that all are the same, but you become suspicious of all Americans, and you are waiting to see if the same thing is going to happen to you again. We all live with racism, it doesn't matter how old you are—it happens in the schools, in the stores, and at work.

One African community leader felt that Latinos face less discrimination than African immigrants. He attributed this to what he perceived as the longer history of Latino-Anglo interaction, and closer cultural and religious ties. Conversely, some Latinos resent what they perceive to be the "special treatment" of African Muslims, who are given time off at work to pray.

One African educator we interviewed described how immigrants

were blamed for poor school district outcomes. Another African community leader lamented the service provided by a local school.

Americans often hire unqualified immigrant people for important jobs that deal with immigrants. Recently, the school district hired a person with no high school degree to be the district liaison for Somalis. Schools are already our biggest problem, but when you place unqualified people to serve the immigrants, it's even worse.

On the other hand, some of the African and Latino leaders described cross-cultural relations in a positive light. One African community leader said, "I have visited many towns, and relationships between Somalis and Americans are the best here in this town." A Latino community leader in another town commented that "we have a good relationship with the school system; our kids go to public schools and the relations are good."

Relations with Employers. In rural communities with one major industry, the employer dominates the institutional context. Chambers of commerce and local elected officials may support programs for immigrants, but they do so only if those programs do not threaten the interests of the large employers. In such instances, the lack of legal status for undocumented workers may



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be viewed as an economic obstacle, rather than a human rights problem.

It is therefore not surprising that almost all of the community leaders interviewed in our study described serious tensions between local employers and their immigrant workers, with particular examples of exploitation faced by undocumented Latinos. Community members related stories of mistreatment, including threats, dangerous or damaging working conditions, poverty-level wages with no hope for raises or advancement, and no access to benefits or time off.

Some Somali interviewees were concerned about a lack of religious tolerance, leading to workplace discrimination and tension. One religious leader related that a local employer initially banned Muslim employees from praying—even on their breaks—and followed them to the bathroom to see if they were complying. Another noted that the lack of a common religion precluded some opportunities for social interaction.

We don't go to bars and night-clubs where native-born [people] usually socialize. . . . There are social relationships in limited capacities, not widely open relations.

It may also be true (as one individual suggested) that the Somalis who move to rural communities tend to be more conservative and self-segregating than their urban counterparts. However, in some locations workplace relations have improved over time. Some companies now employ Somali supervisors, provide prayer rooms, and allow women to wear the traditional hijab scarf that covers the head.

Tensions between workers and employers in rural communities have been exacerbated by the recent government raids on meatpacking plants in Worthington, Willmar, and Austin. An Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid on the Swift meat plant in Worthington occurred during the time that we were in the field interviewing diversity coalition staff and community leaders. In April 2007, after the fieldwork for this study was completed, there were additional ICE raids in Willmar. Not only have the raids made Latino residents extremely fearful, but they also have lent legitimacy to expressions of overt prejudice by some xenophobic members of the community.

Despite these tensions, there seems to be a trend toward improved

cross-cultural relations in some of the communities in our study. One example comes from the head of a Somali organization who compared contemporary and historical relations.

When you talked to some people in the old days, they looked surprised and uncomfortable. Somalis were seen as intruders and uninvited Black people in a small city that's overwhelmingly White. So there was a little bit of suspicion. That has changed since then. Native-born communities learned more about us now. They realized that we Somalis are not violent. They saw that there were no major crimes during the decade . . . just simple traffic violations or domestic issues—just like everyone else. I think there's a learning curve everywhere. I think there's a visible welcoming environment right now. You can see people smiling and welcoming us, not with suspicion. People, including officials, are opening to us.

His was not an isolated comment; a few other Latinos and Somalis we interviewed described relations in their communities in glowing terms. Their comments confirm the findings of social psychologists that familiarity reduces fear of "the Other" and can lead to decategorization—that is, seeing people as individuals, rather than as members of a denigrated group.

On the other hand, this kind of social contact is precluded in many rural communities because of language barriers and housing and employment segregation. As Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp explain in their 2005 book *A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory*, if social contact is to reduce prejudice, groups must have equal status sufficient to produce friendship potential, the interaction must be cooperative (rather than competitive), and the contact must be sanctioned by authorities. These conditions are difficult to achieve in rural communities where meatpacking and manufacturing jobs tend to employ low-wage workers without high levels of social status or English proficiency. Furthermore, local leaders vary greatly in the extent to which they are concerned about the welfare of immigrant residents. Reactions of local council members, mayors, and police chiefs vary from active support and advocacy for local immigrant groups

to outright hostility toward some (particularly undocumented Latinos). These attitudes are important factors that affect the success of prejudice-reduction efforts by diversity coalitions.

Diversity Coalition Program Characteristics

This section summarizes our findings with respect to the characteristics of the diversity coalition programs we contacted.

Program Origins. Although our focus was on cross-cultural relations, a majority of the diversity coalition founders mentioned the provision of basic services to new immigrant communities as a rationale for the establishment of their programs. About one-third mentioned the need for education to help immigrants and native-born residents learn to understand each other.

Several programs focused on the reactions of the community to new immigrants, as illustrated by one interviewee who commented that "some people in the community were against the newcomers." Other programs identified a need for educating their own employees about immigrants, such as one health program director who said, "Our staff knew very little about their culture, or how to communicate with them." In some cases, programs were begun because of the commitment or vision of one individual, such as a charismatic police chief, a religious leader, or a member of the local chamber of commerce who saw economic advantages to immigration.

We identified a mix of "founding organizations" (Table 3). Churches initiated close to one-quarter of the programs in rural Minnesota. This is not surprising because a number of new evangelical Latino churches have been established and Mexicans and other Latinos have reversed declines in membership in the Catholic Church, which has become very active in organizing immigrants in the United States. In addition, Lutheran and other Protestant churches have been engaged in refugee resettlement and coalitions advocating for immigrant rights. Often functioning as a first stop for new residents, churches have been well positioned to observe and address the basic necessities that many immigrants and refugees lack or the difficulties that they encounter when interacting with other community members.

Nearly one-quarter of the programs we studied were initiated by chambers

Table 3. Organizational Characteristics of Rural Diversity Coalitions in Minnesota, 2007

Question	Responded "Yes"	
	Number	Percentage
Does the organization have 501(c)(3) tax exempt status?	24	70.5%
Do you have a board of directors?	28	82.4%
Do you have paid staff? (<i>median number of staff = 3</i>)	30	88.2%
Do you know of any other organizations in town that are working to improve relations between immigrants and U.S.-born residents?	20	58.8%
What about organizations that used to do this kind of work, but that closed down?	5	14.7%
Did the founders of the organization represent particular groups or organizations?		
School	11	32.4%
Church group	8	23.5%
Chamber of commerce	8	23.5%
Existing nonprofit organization	9	26.5%
Government agency	15	44.1%

of commerce in response to new immigrants in rural communities who are opening new stores and restaurants and staffing local meat-processing and manufacturing plants. The expanding supply of foreign-born customers and employees has created opportunities for local businesses, and has introduced a need for new conversations and approaches to managing staff and serving the public. As a result, some chambers of commerce recognize the potential benefit of reaching out to new members of the community.

Many of the programs in our study arose because of desegregation legislation that provides funding from the State of Minnesota for racially isolated school districts and racially identifiable schools. The funding is administered by the state to qualifying school districts and schools, which are then charged with direct implementation of desegregation programming. Schools and school districts have introduced a wide variety of programs under this initiative.

Some of the nonprofit organizations that we interviewed were formed with the express purpose of serving the needs of underserved immigrant and refugee communities. Immigrants and refugees are frequently founding members of these organizations and, in many cases, are represented in staff or board leadership positions.

Program Goals and Activities. We asked staff from each program to describe their goals and what kind of activities

they offer to improve cross-cultural relations. Responses are summarized in Table 4. The goals ranged from the very general (building understanding and trust) to the specific (offer language learning opportunities). Some programs were primarily focused on immigrant groups (e.g., helping East Africans access services and succeed in school, or helping immigrants find health resources); others targeted the majority community with festivals, public speakers, educational programs, or meetings with legislators.

Many of the programs try to encourage community members to interact with each other in nonthreatening settings. One example comes from Casa Guadalupe's partnership with the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University, where students learn firsthand about new immigrants while volunteering as English tutors in Cold Spring. In Faribault, more than 25 families cultivate plots at a new multicultural community garden, with plants donated by local businesses.

Education occurs in various settings. African youth in Mankato give dance and drumming performances in local schools, the Emerging Leadership Investment Program in Marshall trains immigrant adults for leadership roles and involvement in city programs, and healthcare professionals in Tracy receive training to address the needs of diverse patients.

Two of the programs in our study had goals and activities explicitly related to civic engagement. Centro Campesino conducts political organizing

in Owatonna to "empower the Latino community" and Casa Guadalupe in Cold Spring offers a presentation to community members about immigration and encourages them to write letters to their representatives supporting comprehensive immigration reform.

Funding. Diversity programs in rural Minnesota are fairly structured (Table 3). More than two-thirds of the organizations we identified had 501(c)(3) status and boards of directors, and 88% had some paid staff, with a median of three staff members. A number of the coalitions had regular sources of funding, particularly from foundations (Table 5). The Otto Bremer Foundation is an especially important source of support for this work, funding 10 of the 34 coalitions where we conducted interviews. Next in significance were the McKnight-sponsored Initiative Funds and the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Foundation.

Another important category of funding for diversity work in rural Minnesota comes from the aforementioned legislation mandating funding to promote integration in racially isolated public school districts. The decision was implemented statewide and in 2005, 80 school districts received almost \$79 million in integration revenue. According to the Program Evaluation Division of the Office of the Legislative Auditor of Minnesota:

School districts are eligible to receive integration revenue if they have a

Table 4. Locations, Goals, and Activities of Selected Rural Diversity Coalitions in Minnesota, 2007

Organization	City	Program Goals	Activities
Chamber of Commerce Diversity Education Committee (defunct)	Albert Lea	Bridge gaps between immigrants starting businesses and local establishments; provide opportunities for larger companies and employers to expand products and services	Hold yearly festival for immigrant community members to bring food, art, "and other good things"
Casa Guadalupe	Cold Spring	Educate general public on the rights of immigrants; connect Latino and White communities	Arrange for educational speakers; encourage public to contact legislators
Faribault Diversity Coalition	Faribault	Build understanding and trust between community and immigrants coming into the community	Help people connect with resources (dentist, doctor); sponsor forums to educate White community; built a bus shelter at the mobile home park; sponsor learning circles; hold monthly meetings
Community Assistance for Refugees	Mankato	Create a better and more open environment to improve the communication and understanding between the different cultures with the hopes of enriching the community, strengthening the workforce, and improving services to the new members of society	Provide drumming lessons and performances; produce a CD demo recording and a video; sponsor music exchange with nonimmigrant groups; train music instructors to instill positive developmental assets in children
Marshall Community Services	Marshall	Advocate and create a diverse leadership for the community	Recruit minority members with knowledge of English and work to develop small-group skills; discuss Northern European cultural nuances; educate about agencies and organizations in town
Iftiin	Marshall	Increase self-sufficiency in the community; nurture East African culture; integrate East Africans into local community	Help East Africans access employment training, job retention, and housing services; work with schools and families to support school success; work with health-related issues (e.g., women's exercise program); initiate Somali TV program to educate community
Centro Campesino	Owatonna	Empower the Latino community in southern Minnesota	Support activities that teach children about their cultures (artist series, Aztec dance classes); support youth organizations that work with legislators to combat injustices
West Central Minnesota Multi-District Cultural Collaborative	Pelican Rapids	Increase cultural awareness and appreciation in local and surrounding schools; offer language learning opportunities; provide student support	Take students on field trips (Mixed Blood Theater, Science Museum "Race" Exhibit, retreats); provide tutoring; offer scholarships for ACT prep classes
Sioux Valley Tracy Medical Center	Tracy	Educate staff to work with culturally diverse patients; educate immigrant patients about the U.S. healthcare system	Conduct staff education workshops; engage Center for Cross Cultural Health to examine policies, procedures, charts, and handouts for cultural sensitivity
Nobles County Integration Collaborative	Worthington	Increase cultural integration and student achievement	Create opportunities to learn Spanish and increase cultural awareness; work with employers and employees to address cultural concerns in the workplace; provide family support; provide staff development in schools; develop a student achievement program

Table 5. Sources of Financial Support for Rural Diversity Coalitions in Minnesota, 2007

Question	Responded "Yes"	
	Number	Percentage
Does your organization receive outside funding for any of your work on improving cross-cultural relations?	32	94.1%
Foundation grants	25	73.5%
Government funding	21	61.8%
Membership or fund drives	9	26.5%
Other (church, business group, endowment)	16	47.1%
Foundation support from:		
Blue Cross/Blue Shield Foundation	4	—
Minneapolis/St. Paul Foundation	1	—
Southwest Initiative Fund	4	—
West Central Initiative Fund	2	—
Southern Minnesota Initiative Fund	1	—
Otto Bremer Foundation	10	—
Winona Community Foundation	1	—
Grotto Foundation	1	—
Excel Energy Foundation	1	—
United Way	1	—
Duff Foundation	1	—
Jones Family Foundation	1	—
Red Wing Foundation	1	—
Bush Foundation	1	—
Hormel Foundation	1	—
Do you have any long-term funding that helps keep the organization going?	15	44.1%

“racially identifiable school”—that is, a school with a significantly greater minority concentration than the school district as a whole for the grade levels served by that school. Districts are also eligible for integration revenue if they are a “racially isolated school district”—a district that has a significantly higher concentration of minority, or “protected,” students than surrounding districts. Districts that meet this requirement must, in cooperation with adjoining districts, establish a multidistrict collaboration council to identify ways to offer cross-district opportunities to improve integration. These

multidistrict councils must develop an “integration plan” that identifies the councils’ integration issues, the goals of the integration effort, and how the districts intend to achieve their goals.

Ten communities in our screening sample receive school integration funding from the state: Pelican Rapids, Tracy, Worthington, St. Cloud, Duluth,⁴ Austin, Blackduck, Rochester, Walnut Grove, and Willmar. This government funding promotes collective action

⁴ Duluth is not a racially isolated school district, but it includes two “racially identifiable” elementary schools.

and planning. Programs with desegregation funds have more resources than many other similar programs, although their continuation beyond a given funding period is not guaranteed. Furthermore, the school integration program is coming under increased scrutiny from the Minnesota legislature.

In spite of these varied sources of funding, a majority of diversity programs have difficulty paying staff and maintaining a programmatic focus. Two-thirds of the coalition staff we interviewed said that they had experienced budget cuts in the past few years that had posed either moderately serious or very serious problems for the organization. When asked about the biggest unmet need for cross-cultural work, one founding member responded, “Up to now, it’s been money.”

Organizational Diversity. Representation of diverse groups in diversity coalition leadership positions is a means of achieving some legitimacy in the community, as well as a type of accountability. Diversity coalitions in rural Minnesota are remarkably successful at including immigrants in leadership positions within their organizations. More than two-thirds of those with boards had immigrant members, and half of the programs with paid staff had immigrants in these roles (Table 6). In addition, 41% said that immigrants held other leadership positions in the coalitions and 59% had collaborated with immigrant-led organizations in their towns. This is particularly notable given the fact that rural communities often attract immigrants who have lower skills, education, and English proficiency and higher rates of undocumented status than do urban areas—characteristics that can make it challenging to find or recruit diverse members for leadership positions. Yet, precisely because of the disenfranchisement of rural immigrants, such representation is critically important.

Challenges. We asked diversity coalition staff, “What is the biggest problem that your program has faced in trying to bring different groups together?” Staff responded with a diverse and difficult set of challenges. Cultural differences, historical conflicts, and lack of understanding and ownership of the issues are consistent problems. Misinformation, negativity, and fear are perpetuated in historically White communities through the media and local letters to the editor. Additionally, time available for diversity work is limited for staff and community members because of

Table 6. Reported Diversity within the Organizational Leadership of Rural Diversity Coalitions in Minnesota, 2007

Question	Responded "Yes"	
	Number	Percentage
<i>(Of those with boards)</i> Are any of the board/committee members foreign-born immigrants?	22	78.5%
Does the board or committee have other members who are people of color but who are not immigrants?	13	46.4%
<i>(Of those with paid staff)</i> Do you have staff who are immigrants?	15	50.0%
Do you have any paid staff who are people of color, but who are not immigrants?	8	26.7%
Do immigrants or people of color currently hold any leadership positions or roles that we haven't talked about?	14	41.2%
Have you collaborated with any (immigrant-led) organizations in town on particular projects?	20	58.8%

demanding work and school schedules and family commitments.

Several program staff complained of a lack of awareness in the White community that any problem exists; others bemoaned the difficulty of making connections with foreign-born residents and cultivating community leadership. One program director commented that once immigrants receive their Certificate of General Educational Development or become proficient in English, they no longer wish to be identified with the program.

The diversity coalitions employ a variety of strategies to address their challenges. Some organizations deal with time constraints by organizing small groups of people or working with people individually. Some network with local schools and organizations and build upon preexisting events and activities to be cost- and time-effective.

Given the lack of political capital among immigrants and the organizations that serve them, as well as the hostile political climate in which they operate, diversity organizations face an uphill battle in achieving full cooperation. The staff of diversity coalitions identified a variety of changes needed in their communities to improve cross-cultural relations. When asked what advice they would give to someone starting an organization to improve cross-cultural relations, at least half suggested the need to promote quality interaction between immigrants and nonimmigrants. Others cited the importance of patience,

sensitivity, listening, developing trust, and creating forums for discussion.

Program Evaluation. Given the breadth of program goals and limitations of time, funding and staffing, it is not surprising that only four of the diversity coalition staff we interviewed said that they conduct evaluations of their programs. Nevertheless, several had clear opinions about the success of their work based on attendance and personal feedback from program participants. The only concrete evaluations came from a leadership program in which immigrants had been placed on local advisory boards and commissions and an advocacy organization that tracked the outcomes of discrimination cases.

There is scant evidence of the effectiveness of most programs, or even signs that they are following strategies that would logically lead to desired outcomes. Given the depth of the need for improved relations between immigrants and native-born Americans and the threats to program funding, it is imperative for diversity coalitions to clarify their goals, review the alignment between programming and desired outcomes, and gather evaluation information that will allow staff to assess and revise program strategies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Meaningful integration requires a true commitment to multiculturalism. The split in American attitudes toward immigrants and the anti-immigrant

sentiments among rural native-born residents pose significant challenges to communities and to organizations trying to improve cross-cultural relations. The immigrants who settle in rural communities tend to have lower levels of education and English proficiency than their compatriots who reside in metropolitan areas. Many have tenuous legal status. These factors lead to serious power imbalances, which impede efforts to achieve meaningful cross-cultural communication.

The rural communities described in this article have made some notable advancements. A number of African and Latino community leaders commented on their greater acceptance by native-born residents over time, and comments from program staff and volunteers demonstrate an impressive level of commitment and passion. Nevertheless, diversity programs operate within highly politicized climates in which undocumented immigrants are vilified as "illegals" and criminals—adjectives that some residents broaden to stereotype all immigrants.

Diversity coalitions are dynamic and difficult to categorize as successful or unsuccessful. Much depends upon changing leadership goals and the political, social, and economic climate, as well as the ability of leaders to be inclusive and strategic. The marginalization of immigrants and recent setbacks due to recurring ICE raids make a focus on empowerment an essential component of plans to promote their integration.

The comments of the coalition staff we interviewed confirm academic research regarding the importance of more intentional and focused attention to the education of White, U.S.-born residents. In most communities, cross-cultural work is focused on services for immigrants, without recognition of the ways in which the attitudes of U.S.-born residents facilitate or impede these efforts. Indeed, for all the conversation about the need for immigrants to assimilate, very little attention is paid to the lack of policies that actually promote integration. To be successful, educational efforts need to have clearly articulated objectives targeted for particular audiences.

The question of how to engage native-born residents in discussions of privilege and discrimination is a challenging one. Evaluating program outcomes is also challenging, but crucial to ensuring success and to demonstrating



Some diversity coalition programs target the majority community with festivals, speakers, or educational programs. The 2007 International Market celebrated the diversity of cultures in Faribault with a variety of foods, crafts, and entertainment.

that diversity programming is effective and should be continued. The need for additional funding described by the respondents in this study is confirmed by a recent report by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees titled *Immigrant and Refugee Funding Trends in Minnesota*. Based on surveys of Minnesota foundations that make grants to programs serving foreign-born residents, the report concluded that funding for programs in nonmetro areas of Minnesota is “sparse” and it noted that foundations are asking for more measurable outcomes.

Finally, efforts to improve cross-cultural relations in rural communities can be lonely work. Similar programs in urban areas have the advantage of greater diversity and awareness of need, greater public tolerance of diversity, and closer proximity to institutional and financial resources. For this reason,

the creation and sustenance of strong networks with like-minded organizations need to be a high priority for rural diversity coalitions. Nationally, proponents of comprehensive immigration reform include representatives of varied groups, including business, labor unions, church groups, nonprofits, and immigrant advocacy organizations. Rural coalitions need to consider this same strategy. Given the demographic trends of an aging population and greater diversity in Minnesota—and indeed, across the United States—the success of efforts to improve cross-cultural relations has profound implications for us all.

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