State of Minnesota Council on Black Minnesotans

Report on Phases I and II of 2012 Legacy Listening Tour

Submitted to
State of Minnesota Council on Black Minnesotans, &
Minnesota Humanities Center

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1. Overview

The State of Minnesota Council on Black Minnesotans ("COBM", or "the Council") was appointed by legislation to advise the governor and the legislature on issues related to the State's Black population. Since its inception, the Council has served populations with people of African descent by serving as a liaison between state agencies, community members, and organizations seeking a voice in state matters and access to the government. The Council, as a point of confluence for many diverse communities, facilitates communications, relationship building, and sharing of resources between these communities. The Council promotes the achievements of Black Minnesotans, and works to increase awareness of the rich diversity of cultures within Minnesota's African American and African immigrant populations.

Funding from the Minnesota State Legislature's 2011-2013 Legacy Funding appropriation supported programs and collaboration between the Council and the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) for community events and programs that celebrate and preserve artistic, historical, and cultural heritage. MHC has a rich history of partnership with the Council and other agencies that serve priority populations, leveraging the resources of the humanities to help strengthen communities. Using the unique wisdom, knowledge, history, and creativity of the cultures in Minnesota, MHC's partnership helps bring into public life the authentic voices of people that have often been left out or marginalized.

The purpose of this 2012 Legacy Listening Tour, titled "Our Voices, Our Stories" or OVOS, was to

- Reach out to outlying communities to discover, celebrate and preserve the artistic, historic, and cultural heritage of Black Minnesotans

- Build and improve the relationship of the Council with outlying communities
- Listen to the voices of concerns and hope from these communities

Women in traditional dress – St. Cloud

Food as a facilitator of conversation

The Listening Tour of 2012 was a series of outreach events within Black populations and groups outside of the immediate Twin Cities area. These groups tend to be isolated from the larger populations in the Twin Cities area, and are generally underserved and under-informed about the Council and its mission. The city of Minneapolis was included in the tour as a control, i.e., baseline city. Minneapolis has a long history of interaction with the Council, and is home to the largest number of people of African heritage.

Casual dress, children and familiar foods contributing to family ambiance

The outreach model developed by Marnita's ® Table for the Tour is a participatory methodology of cultural exploration, data collection, and problem solving using informal focus

groups. Employing an inclusive, multi-generational, family oriented approach, the model encourages respondents and investigators to participate actively in discussing ideas and concerns. In the OVOS processes, respondents discovered and celebrated each other, developed relationships, and talked about their concerns and visions for themselves and for their communities. The findings from this Legacy Listening Tour will inform and broaden the cultural capital of Minnesota's Black population and of the State of Minnesota. Data generated from the Tour was used to develop recommendations for further work by the Council and its partner, the Minnesota Humanities Center.

2. Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of the 2012 Legacy Listening Tour (or "Tour") was to a) visit Black communities in outer Twin Cites areas to help inform and update the cultural landscape, b) to develop and sustain relationships with these communities and the Council on Black Minnesotans ("the Council"), and c) to listen to success stories and concerns within these communities to help guide the work of the Council. Over the last decade, constraints in human and financial resources limited the ability of the Council to reach out to outlying communities, especially those with relatively new settlements of people of African origin. The funding from the Arts and Cultural Heritage (Legacy) Amendment provided an opportunity to increase the social and cultural capital of Minnesota's Black population through a series of events. The Tour provided valuable information to the Council regarding constituent needs and concerns while celebrating the cultural heritage of Minnesota's population of African descent.

Method

The Listening Tour model was developed by Marnita's Table® Inc. (or the "Table"). The methodology used was an innovative blend of community gathering within family-type environments, using participatory group techniques and cultural immersion to develop instant relationships, facilitate dialogue, and encourage speaking from the heart. This method of inquiry, validated by replicated use over seven years, was adapted with guidance from Dr. Michael Q. Patton's *developmental evaluation theory of program evaluation* (Patton, 2012). This approach emphasizes the importance of data utility in research for program development. In Patton's developmental evaluation, traditional methodologies are culturally adapted to ensure that data

generated is relevant and utile. The tour visited four outlying cities; St. Cloud, Duluth, Faribault, Rochester, and the city of Minneapolis. Minneapolis served as a control city because of its proximity to the Council offices, and its status as the city with the largest Black population.

Key Findings

Each city visit wove a new section into the cultural fabric, revealing new additions to Minnesota's people of African descent, providing stories of perseverance and hope, and developing critical relationships between community, local leaders, and the Council. From the dialogue with the Mayor of St. Cloud to the interaction with the Superintendent of Duluth's school district, and the table visit with State Senator Carla Nelson, the table talks were more than just about the immediate Black community. It was about building bridges of understanding, opportunity, and trust in a unique way across community boundaries, accumulating social capital in the process.

Civic leaders and Table participants enjoy the outdoors in St. Cloud

A majority of the attendees (over 65%) were making first direct contact with the Council through these tours. The issues of concern were quite consistent across each city. Major themes of concern were *Education, Jobs/Economic Independence, Criminal Justice System Inequities,*

Community Cohesiveness, *Housing*, *Health and Wellness*, and *Civil Rights and Human Rights Violations*.

One of the reasons that so many attendees were making first contact was the fact that some individuals with a history of attending such meetings, and of fighting battles for equity and justice, were skeptical of the benefits of coming to these events, and declined to attend. Based upon pre-visit feedback and comments from community leaders, there was concern that the issues voiced would not be prosecuted, and that relationships developed during the visits will not be sustained. In response to these concerns, the Council explained that resources were a significant challenge, but promised that efforts will be made to follow up with issues and develop additional resources to help the Council improve its capacity to serve the communities.

Recommendations

Following an evaluation of the data collected, some recommendations were developed:

They included the following:

- Review of the data; include community feedback in the Council's strategic planning
- Follow up on visits with key community leaders
- Establish strategic satellite offices in outlying areas to maintain connections with the communities and improve the Council's services.
- Establish committees to address the thematic concerns expressed during the Tour
- Improve regular communications and connectivity; upgrade and maintain an interactive website; explore use of social media

3. **LEGACY TOUR -** Celebrating Culture and Building Social Capital

The methodology developed by Marnita's® Table (The "Table" or "Marnita") for the Our Voices/Our Stories (OVOS) Legacy Listening Tour project used a Participatory Action Research method to achieve the three goals required by the Council and the Minnesota Humanities Center. The Table was contracted to develop and apply a community-based methodology to address three key areas:

1. Develop information to enable the COBM to effectively advise the governor and the legislature on the nature of the issues confronting Black people in the state. This can be most effectively accomplished by the Council's presence in the community, actively seeking and fleshing out the issues that are affecting African/African-American communities.
2. Provide voice and empowerment to those community members who desire change but do not have access to elected leaders and services.
3. Provide solutions-oriented forums to enable a change in attitudes from defeatism to unlimited possibilities.

One of the key components of the methodology is the use of the Table's proprietary model of Intentional Social Interaction (ISI). ISI acts as a catalyst for the formation of sustainable professional and personal relationships. The relationships formed at the tables provide a safe reference for sharing feelings and ideas. For the Legacy Tour events, the ISI processes of interaction were designed to address the three goals described above within the spirit and intent of the Legacy Funding. ISI processes were adapted to address the cultural characteristics of populations in each of the five cities; Minneapolis and St. Cloud (during Phase One) and Duluth, Faribault, and Rochester (during Phase Two).

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR is a collaborative, iterative approach to inquiry where researchers join members of the community or organization under study to discuss and find solutions for a specific issue, or a range of issues, with the objective of enabling some transformational change (King & Stevahn, 2013, Patton, 2002, Patton, 2012). As an approach, a PAR design can be qualitative or quantitative. Marnita's® Table design is a qualitative approach adapted for this Listening Tour through evaluations based upon Dr. Michael Patton's *Developmental Evaluation* theory of program and investigative evaluation.

Patton's approach focuses upon the utility of the information developed, and not necessarily on arm's length, standard processes of evaluation (Patton, 2010). Fagen et al demonstrate the applicability of Patton's evaluative method to poorly understood, complex systems such as high profile, tension-creating events, or persistent problems affecting a priority population (Fagen et al, 2011). Akom (2011) incorporated PAR and Critical Race Theory (CTR) into the race-specific Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR) model, an ethnographic model of research and evaluation targeted at Black populations. Incorporation of Patton's developmental approach enabled iterative action-and-reflection cycles that generated qualitative information and quantifiable data.

Project Approach and Sampling Process

The Table was designed to be a safe environment for participants to celebrate each other, develop relationships, and share concerns. The Table design invoked a family gathering atmosphere where conversations, with some guidance, can be casual but profoundly informative. Epistemological theories encourage a blend of *best practices* with *next practices* in social

research. Next practices are forward looking innovations that adapt best practices to achieve useful information (Freeman, 2006; Morris & Calamai, 2009). Marnita's® Table methodology is a blend of best and next practices. The culturally relevant food selection was central to the sense of a family table, as choice meals from various parts of the world were served, with sensitivity to cultural and religious restrictions. Table conversations were expertly guided and recorded by Directors from the Council Board and by community leaders that work with the Council. Children were encouraged to be part of the gathering and to offer opinions.

The underlying premise of Marnita's Table is that relationships are the currency of social change. Relationships facilitate dialogue and engender trust, helping to break down barriers and improve social capital. Each call and dialogue with persons invited was designed to promote awareness of the Council and its mission, along with the promise of new relationships.
The first step before inviting people to the Table was an environmental scan to map the assets in the social-cultural infrastructure. These assets include demographic data, small businesses, houses of faith and worship, schools, and safe, family friendly spaces where members of the community can gather. Other community assets included networks and associations, recognized community leaders, and government agencies.

Next, the Table collaborated with the Council's Legacy Committee and members of the African immigrant and African American community to identify additional individuals and networks that would help in contacting and inviting people within the community. People from the following sectors were contacted by phone for assistance and for their attendance:

- State and local government agencies
- Public and private schools from elementary through trade to college
- Public health institutions

- Other public service institutions such as recreation centers and libraries

Each phone call and connection was used to heighten awareness of the Council as well as bring together various communities who were willing to participate. Furthermore, at every public and private school and government agency contacted, efforts were made to identify a diversity or outreach/inclusion officer or program. Such a person would presumably be helpful in reducing the time and stress involved in obtaining diversity information about the locality. In many cases, there was no such person or program to provide assistance or access.

Community Accessibility Profiles

Each community profile is a summary of findings, insights, and dialogue responses during the *community accessing phase*. The results are summarized in the five community profiles below. Each of the five communities was classified for the degree of community service infrastructure along a continuum from *emerging* on the one end, *intermediate* in the middle, and *well-developed* at the other end. A community's position along the continuum was determined according to the degree or scale to which a community had the following:

- accessibility of social services available to community members
- extent of the community's awareness, relationship and trust of the Council
- number of community leaders and degree of civic/social interaction among its leaders
- number of organizations, groups, coalitions that provide services to the African, African immigrant, or Black community, and
- depth, breadth, and reliability of community services available to community members

There was a significant degree of difference between the activities necessary to secure participation in the Minneapolis and St. Cloud communities during Phase One, and what was required for Duluth, Faribault, and Rochester in Phase Two. The differences were related directly to the level of infrastructure as it relates to the city's social assets and communications

networks within the Black communities. Minneapolis and St. Cloud were relatively highly developed in comparison to Duluth, Faribault, and Rochester.

In a developed community, only one or two people in each sector had to be contacted to produce a number of leads and networks. These individuals would then contact their networks, often resulting in a cascade of names and contacts. In an intermediate community, network reach required contacting anywhere from five to ten people in each of the sectors. In an emerging or isolated community such as was found in Faribault, ten or more points of contacts within the sectors were required.

MINNEAPOLIS:

- Large urban center with a mature community service infrastructure
- Organizations collaborate cross culturally
- Strong degree of familiarity with the Council
- Highly knowledgeable about Black Minnesota
- Participants expressed varying degrees of interest in participating on a regional committee
- Highest desire to re-establish trust and use the information
- A number of established African American leaders were resistant to participating due to past unsatisfactory interactions with the Council
- Fairly sophisticated community structure with engaged organizations
- Diverse group of non-profit and community service organizations
- Community organizations not necessarily supported compared to larger organizations
- Organizations easy to identify and easy to leverage networks and contacts
- Community representatives at all levels (social economic, leaders, workers) participated
- Used peer-to-peer, common art, shared food, and common cultural references with this community
- Opportunities for engagement with Council were identified
- More collaboration with existing agencies and organizations collecting stories (NAACP, Urban League)

- Informal translation used, community participants provided translation for dialogue

ST. CLOUD

- Suburban community with intermediate-to-developed community service infrastructure
- High degree of engagement of people at every level
- Easy to get people in the room
- Some funding available for existing structures in Black community
- Ready to collaborate with others in the state about working with immigrant communities
- A mix of people, new immigrants, that have been working together
- Cultural navigators available in hospitals, schools, public health, housing
- Public and private sector participation interested and willing to collaborate
- Visible community foundation
- High degree of cultural infrastructure
- Developed systems of networks and community connections
- Valued Marnita's® Table as an opportunity to build on their strengthens
- Significant interest expressed by mayor to build relationship with policy makers and educate on issues of emerging immigrant communities across the state
- Informal translation used, community participants provided translation for dialogue

DULUTH:

- Outlying urban community with limited intermediate community service infrastructure
- Low level of community gathering and cultural infrastructure
- Denial of community of color by dominant population (communities of color make up only 2%)
- Native American and Black communities collaborate
- Some sections of community isolated
- Low profile nature of temporary community members who didn't want to "rock the boat"
- Limited community resources for Black community.
- Skepticism from community members about outsiders
- Informal translation used, community participants provided translation for dialogue

ROCHESTER

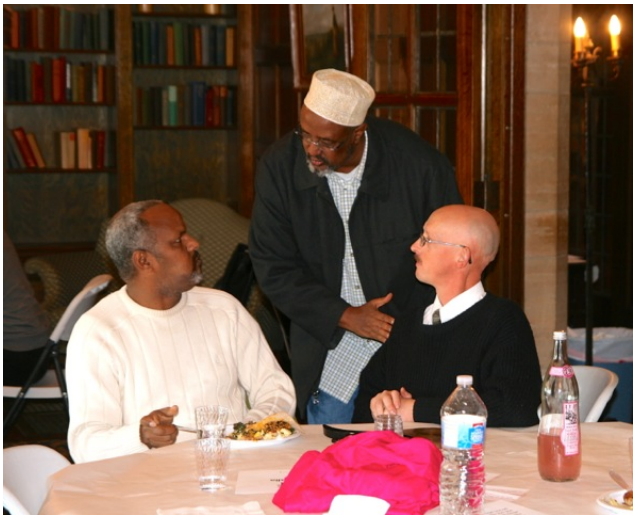
- Rural community with an intermediate community service infrastructure
- Community apparently split into two groups; one mostly rural, the other professionals such as employees of IBM Company and the Mayo Clinic
- Diversity and advocacy organizations somewhat easily identified and accessible
- Civil rights, workers' rights, and human rights identified as basic issues to address
- Some interest of engagement from government agencies
- Few informal ways to reach community
- Formal gatekeepers (church, tribal leader, mosque, civil rights organizations, a Council representative) present
- Formal translators needed
- Low level of integration between African and African-American communities
- Low collaboration between African and African American communities (neither could name three people or organizations from the other community to invite)
- Necessary to hire cultural points of contact/translators

FARIBAULT

- Rural community with emerging community service infrastructure
- High interest in advocacy
- High level of difficulty in securing participation
- Cultural and language translators required to facilitate dialogue
- Limited access to cultural foods and getting to know other cultures
- No immigrant infrastructure (restaurant's gathering places, professionals, few advocates, services, businesses
- Of all five locations, least acceptance by dominant population of immigrants and Black groups, or understanding of how Black populations came to live in the community
- High resistance by wider/White community to participate at the Table
- Limited level of information sharing with rest of the State, especially information related to the welcoming and acculturation of new immigrants

- Hostile environment facing emerging immigrant community members and leaders
- High resistance by dominant population to provide services to immigrants
- Limited points of contact among different immigrant communities and dominant population
- Strong isolation felt by immigrant community residents and leaders
- Formal translators needed
- Low level of engagement by post-secondary educators
- Low level of student population
- Low level of community referrals (only one or two points of entry into the community and those didn't know each other

The Table was also open to persons of other ethnic persuasions, local elected officials, and community leaders. This inclusive approach produced some immediate benefits in terms of new business relationships, and dialogues on civic issues between local leaders and community members who otherwise do not get the opportunity to interact. The Table also provided elected officials a rare opportunity to discuss intimate issues at the grassroots level.



A Rochester Table – October 28, 2012

4. The Changing Face of Minnesota

Students at Table in Duluth

African American leaders and African immigrants at a Rochester Table

Over the last twenty years, between 1988 and 2010, Minnesota experienced a rapid influx of African immigrants from East and West Africa. Many of these immigrants came to the State as refugees, victims of wars that often raged for decades in their native countries. These refugees and their families tend to stay in community clusters, helping them to be grounded in a new country as they begin their journey of adaptation and acculturation. Primary refugee groups include Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Somalis, and South Sudanese, all victims of civil wars. Civil war and unrest in the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among Africa's largest population and mineral rich nations, will bring thousands more refugees to the State within the next two years.

Table 1. African Refugee Concentrations in Minnesota Cities

City	Major Immigrant Populations
Minneapolis / St Paul	Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana, Togo, Senegal, Gambia, Cameron, Kenya, Mali, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda
Brooklyn Park	Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana
St Cloud	Guinea, Ethiopia, Somalia, assorted immigrant students
Faribault	South Sudan, Somalia
Mankato	South Sudan, Somalia, assorted immigrant students
Rochester	Somalia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana

Table 1 shows some Minnesota cities with relatively high numbers of refugee immigrants. These refugees, in addition to non-refugee immigrants, represent one of the fastest growing segments of the Minnesota population. According to the 2010 US Census, Asian, Latino, and African descendant populations in Minnesota each grew by over fifty percent between 2000 and 2010, fueled primarily by refugee and refugee family migration (State of Minnesota Demographer, 2012). For most of the decade, Minnesota ranked second only to California in recorded new immigrants. For every five immigrants to Minnesota, two were from Africa (State of Minnesota, Demographer, 2006). These new populations bring increased diversity in culture with their unique dresses, food, customs, and skills. According to Zafar Siddiqui of the Islamic Resource Center, 70% of Muslims in Minnesotans are from Africa (Siddiqui, 2012). Nationally, Africans make up less than ten percent of the Moslem population.

5. Key Findings

Diversity outside of the Twin Cities

Each of the attendee populations in the five-city events had some unique socio-cultural components. In Duluth, home of the University of Minnesota Duluth campus, about 75% of the attendees were college students, while in Faribault, about 80% were East African adult refugees.

Ethnic groups, especially refugees and new immigrants, tend to congregate in specific cities as family members and others follow first wave immigrants. People tended to work in same or similar populations. For example, it is estimated that 35% of recent (past 10 years) Liberian and Sierra Leonean immigrants work in medical service industries as nursing assistants or nurses. In Faribault, many of the South Sudanese and Somali immigrants worked for the same food processing company.

There was significant diversity in the attendee population at each event. In St. Cloud, there was an even mixture of immigrant and African American attendees. St. Cloud is also home to the largest, French-speaking Guinean population in Minnesota. In Duluth, about 60% of the students in attendance were African immigrants or children of African immigrants. In Faribault, 75% were East African refugees. In Rochester the respondents were a mixture of immigrants, African American professionals, and friends of the African American community. For many, this meeting was the first meeting or interaction with the Council. Every respondent group included a significant number of children.

A common refrain from the older respondents was the yearning for actions following these types of events. Feedback from various sources indicated that a number of people declined to attend the meetings because they did not feel that significant actions would result therefrom. Rochester attendees, familiar with visits from the Council, were particularly vocal about the lack of follow up following a similar visit in 2010 when the Council came in to help address an apparently racially motivated incidence of violence.

Invariably, each community was energized and delighted to have the Council engage them and ask their opinion on social and cultural matters. Immigrant groups were especially grateful for the show of concern. Many of the refugees and immigrants hailed from nations

where government services were scarce; and benevolent government agency visits to communities were even scarcer. The response by a South Sudanese in Faribault, was typical:

> *Thank you for coming and being part of us. Why did you come so late?*
> *What took you so long to come and see us?*
> (Mohammed, in Faribault)

Cultural Challenges – Traditions & Gate Keeping Rules

New immigrant groups tend to be more saturated with cultural habits than those that have been in the United States for a significant period. In addition to providing culturally familiar food selections, accommodations were made for traditional and religious rituals. Some sessions were interrupted to allow Moslems to perform their multiple daily prayers.

There was evidence that the process of acculturation can be influenced, sometimes severely retarded by the relative isolation of immigrant groups, especially groups that:

- Include a high number of under-educated adults
- Did not speak or learn English in their native country
- Are governed by traditional hierarchies such as elders or chiefs
- Adhere rigorously to prescriptions for religious worship
- Feel unwelcome by their neighbors

The South Sudanese community in Faribault was one such group, as are clusters of Somalis, especially those including young people affected by the experience of war. Cultural references are almost entirely derived from the home country, as they felt unwelcomed by the host community and lacked the language skills and resources necessary to acquire knowledge of the social infrastructure. Some respondents claimed that for some Somali and Sudanese youth feeling unwelcome and estranged from home, a return to the horrors of war and poverty often appear to be a better option, deeming familiar human relationships better than the racism of exclusion and public humiliation. According to the respondents, some of these youths actually returned to their homelands to join warring factions, some of whom allegedly have connections

to Al-Qaeda.

Within these groups, the traditional leaders, the gate keepers to the community, wielded unusual power to grant outsiders access to the community. The Tour was required to pay a Chief his gratuity in cash before access would be granted to the community. In many ethnic groups in rural Africa, this ethical norm of giving a “gift” or “greeting” is not considered a bribe. Indeed, some authors contend that this phenomenon is not unique to African societies (Bellow, 2003; Raiklin, 2009; Thompson, 2008). Lacking revenue from land use or from taxation, these rulers often derive the bulk of their sustenance from monetary or in-kind patronage from within the group as well as from outside.

Children using computers at Faribault Public Library – Oct 27, 2012

6. Results

The data from this innovative, *developmental evaluation* approach to community engagement provided some qualitative themes and some quantifiable data. Figure1 shows some culturally relevant characteristics of the total attendees from the five-city tour. A significant percentage of the attendees were immigrants. About half of the respondents had heard about the Council indirectly or had interacted with the Council and other people in the room. Many languages were represented, as were young adults and children.

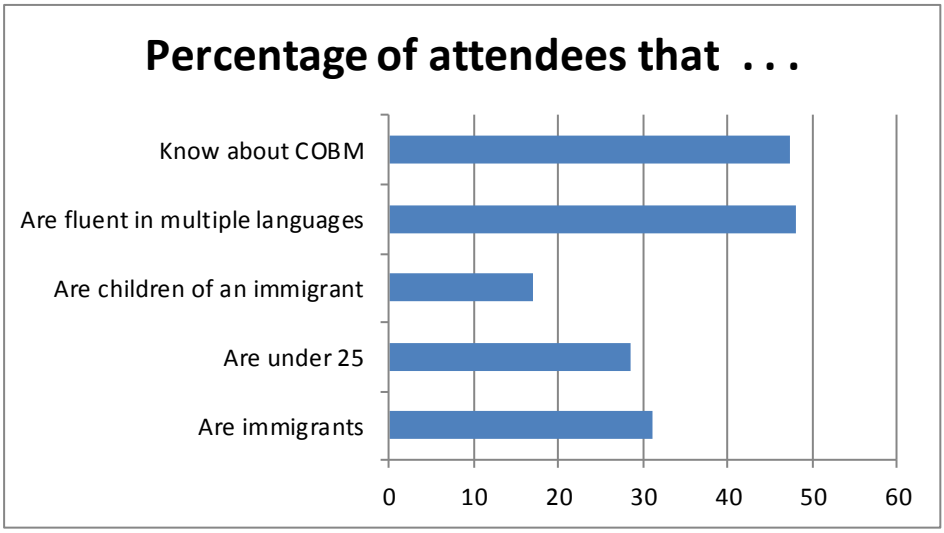


Figure 1. Cultural Characteristics of Respondents. *Total respondents = 356*

Figure 2 describes responses to issues and concerns in two different ways. The lower part of each bar represents the responses when people were asked about the *most pressing concerns* within their communities. The upper part of each bar represents the responses when people were asked what *issues they would like to solve*. The data showed that the frequency of the binary responses to each issue or concern were not always equal or similar. Some issues such as child care, housing, and empowering youth had high levels of disparity between the binary responses,

probably reflecting a difference between that which is a problem, and the perceived probability of solving that problem satisfactorily.

Access to voting scored relatively high, and was perceived as a problem probably in part due to the close advent of the 2012 election, and the perception that the proposed Constitutional Amendment to require government- issued identification for each voter will abridge voter rights and restrict access to voting for many in the community.

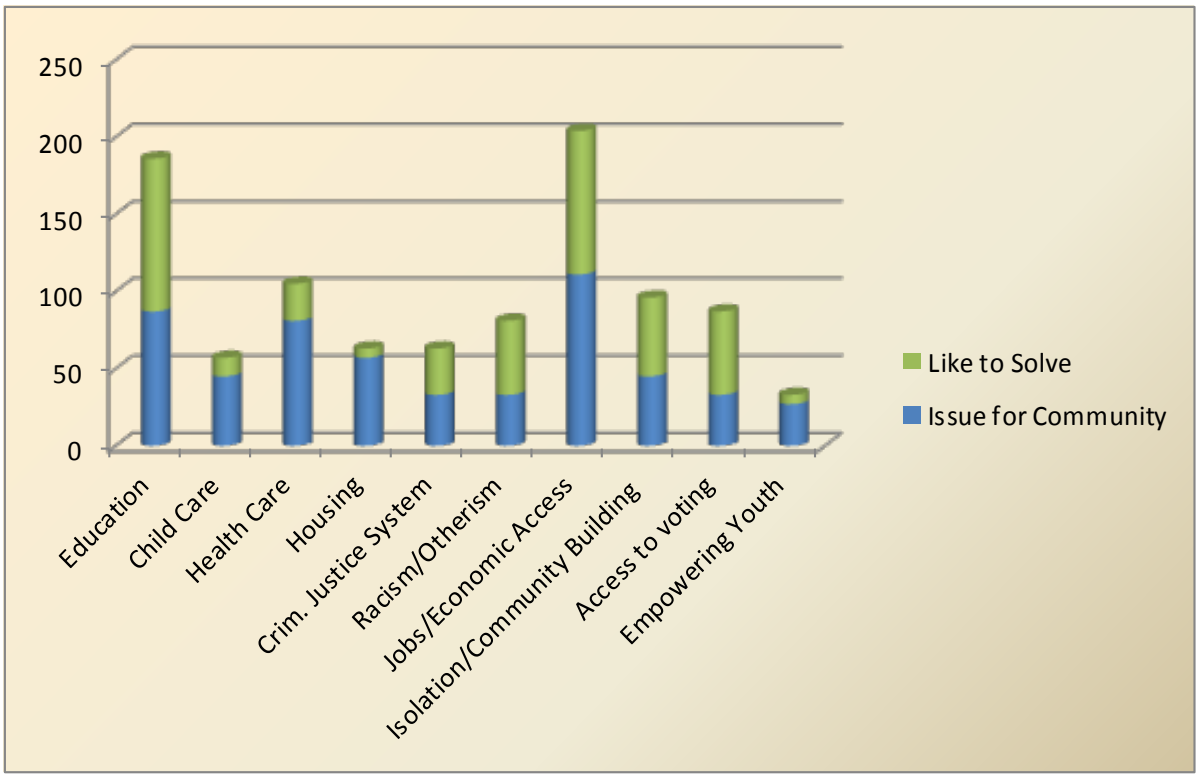


Figure 2*: Binary responses to question on issues*: High Concern vs. Like to Solve

Interpreting the data

Further evaluation of the categories of responses through additional conversations indicated that some categories could be consolidated. For example, when respondents spoke about the need for jobs, and also spoke about economic access, or economic independence, they were generally speaking about the same concern. This thread of concern was consolidated under ‘Economic Independence” because economic independence was the ultimate goal. Having access to businesses, loans, and good jobs were means of achieving economic independence. Issues related to racism were more complex. Racism was identified as a factor in the inequitable administration of justice, the high rate of incarceration of Black people, poor economic access, education, and access to health care. Racism was also cited as a prime cause of civil rights and human rights violations, such as the spitting incidents in Faribault.

Youth showing his priority concern in St. Cloud

"From a personal standpoint this is the first time, for me, that I felt like young (20-35) Black males left empowered.
Issues that I have been championing for five years now seem to be in the discussion, particularly reducing recidivism, preventing a negative relationship with law enforcement and the devastating effect on families and community when we do neither." (St. Cloud Student)

Emerged Themes

i. Celebratory Themes

The Council's presence in the communities visited was well received, even among the few that expressed reservation about whether the relationships and dialogue developed would be sustainable. Many expressed delight at being invited and at being asked to join the Council and others at the dialogue tables. In addition to the mutual discovery of commonness and diversity within the Black Diaspora, the sessions established some immediate social and business relationships. Elected officials also expressed their appreciation for the invitation, and the Table conversations provided some tangible results in relationship building. In St. Cloud, the mayor sat next to young students and discussed real opportunities for employment and career development. In Duluth, the school superintendent offered college students an opportunity to help the school district mentor younger students. In Rochester, Senator Carla Nelson offered her office in partnership to help with the Council's agenda.

"That's was a most wonderful day".
"Thank you so much for the words of encouragement you presented during the moment we were here. I will look forward to help this society of mine and you as well in your culture tour, I knew it my people are very excites a lot more will join in the coming months of tour."
Chief Brown Bol. St. Cloud, June 2012

ii Issues and Opportunities

There were some common threads of concerns among all groups in all geographic areas. When asked what the most pressing concerns were, most responded by citing Education, Criminal Justice, Community Relationships, Housing, Connectedness, and Economic Independence.

The following themes were consistently high on the list of issues that people felt were most important to the Black community. Most people were torn when requested to choose just one issue. On closer inquiry, most felt that the issues are connected, often with one issue enabling or disabling other issues.

- Economic Independence
- Education
- Criminal Justice System
- Housing (mostly Minneapolis)
- Connectedness
- Nutrition and Healthy Living
- Civil Rights / Human Rights
- Youth Empowerment (mostly Duluth)

Some issues were high in communities where the concerns were especially acute. Housing was at the top of the list of concerns in Minneapolis. According to Housing Link (2012), Hennepin County had twenty four percent of all foreclosures in the State of Minnesota in the first half of 2012. This number is consistent with past periods, and is also consistent with other data on the availability and affordability of housing units in the county. Youth Empowerment was a

priority in Duluth where a majority of the Table attendees were college students. The East African immigrant population of Faribault placed civil and human rights violations, and a community center (a place to call their own) as equally high priorities with education and economic independence.

Economic Independence

Economic independence was one of the two top themes emerging from the tour. Economic issues and Education generated the highest number of concerns and suggestions. Many felt that having economic independence would alleviate or eliminate other social ills peculiar to communities of color. Economic independence was not just about getting a job; it was defined in various conversations as being in a position of not needing public assistance, being able to provide for the family, providing health care, and having a sense of dignity in the community. As one respondent said,

> "*Working just one job will allow me to spend more time with my children, and teach them more about my culture.*"

Other related discussions addressed wealth creation, starting small businesses, access to financing, lack of trust from financial lenders, and internships for students to improve their chances of getting a job after graduation.

Discussion threads/statements on Economic Independence

- How to start a credit union in the Black community (how to create/build access to legacy)
- How to pass on wealth in the African American community
- Access to economic information
- Economically correct vs. politically correct
- Trust issues with establishment (e.g. credit, banks, employers)
- Investing in Black business—how do we invest in these models in a way that makes sense
- Think about what's working
- Get involved, help somebody succeed

Education

Participants at table chats felt that having a good formal education was required to help achieve economic independence. The community agreed that children should have the opportunity to receive as much education as their ambition demanded. Said one African immigrant student in Duluth:

> *"It is really depressing in UMD that I am the only Black person in one of my chemical engineering classes. I need people to encourage more young Blacks to get into engineering. Basically, we need to empower Black youth to believe, achieve."*

Discussion threads/statements on Education - 1

- Education runs through our whole lives
- Education is a way to come out of poverty
- Poverty creates a different label
- Students not ready when they get to school—Push them along, into a hole
- Having immigrant parents: Can't help students, their children with homework, etc.
- Warren Buffet and his concept that rich should send children to public and not private schools
- Lack of reading in the home
- Teachers teach the way they are taught—doesn't work
- Kids want to be connected in the worst way
- Charter schools don't work
- In the inner city schools there is so much chaos and disconnect—students not learning
- Connection to school and community
- Parents had to volunteer 5 hours a week—changes schools, neighborhood and environment
- The poor address different issues, For those in poverty, addressing education alone isn't enough

Discussion threads/statements on Education - 2

- How to go back to school after a period of time? Where are resources?
- As a minority member you often come to the US because there are better educational opportunities
- Not all minority students grow up with the same opportunities (ex. North Minneapolis)
- There seems to be a large gap between what kids are now learning and what they used to learn
- A lack of education stifles a belief that one can live their dreams and enrich their lives
- Child of an immigrant: Mother only went through 7th grade. Parents didn't know how to help. Teachers did not understand and fully appreciate the cultural difference factor in education

- For immigrants, "different" can be interpreted as "stupid" and placement in special classes holds them back
- The problem with education is not the kids but the way they're being instructed
- One man started college in 1975 and was not able to finish until this year because he was taking care of 7 kids

- As a community those who become educated need to return to the minority groups they came from
- "What can we do for each other?"

- For one young woman, parents didn't finish high school which inspired her to reach for her Ph.D. and provide for her parents
- Looking at MN statistic on minority education "people should be rioting in the streets"
- The standards of a school depend on the neighborhood—this is a broken system
- One parents of a 6 year old: Can't advocate for the current public school system and put her child in private school
- Eden Prairie teacher: Left EP to start an education outlet for minority students. Students who immigrate need a foundation before entering the public school system.
- Ex-Normandale Instructor: The biggest issue at Normandale was that public and private school students didn't graduate with the tools to succeed in college
- Students don't learn how to learn, only how to pass tests while in high school
- Metro State instructor: teaches future teachers and feels they are often underprepared to be students. She is not comfortable with many of them teaching future youth in the condition they arrive. They need to be interested in learning. Having also worked at St. Paul Academy and an alternative school, she feels private school kids are encouraged to use resources that are available to everyone.

- Junior in private college: really struggled after attending a public high school because college is so application based. In high school he could cheat the system.
- The current exam-based high school system is driven by how schools are funded.
- When minority students get special resources they're sometimes ashamed
- Putting children in special education causes a self-fulfilling prophecy—teachers need to learn how to teach struggling kids so they can catch up

For adults, the critical education factors included *retraining*, *affording the time to go to school*, and *making connections* that would lead to job opportunities. In all demographic age groups, it was apparent that virtually everyone considered education as an important vehicle for personal improvement and for lifting up communities.

Criminal Justice System (Equity, Overrepresentation of Blacks in prison population)

This was an area where there were some clear emotions and mindsets. Concerns about the criminal justice system, specifically about the high rate of incarceration of young Black men, racial profiling, and inequities in sentencing were high on the list of priorities. However, there was a sense that not much can be done about it. When participants were asked about what can be done to help Black communities, the criminal justice system did not rate in the top six.

It was notable that the issue of "*Crime*" was differentiated from the "*Criminal Justice System*". Except for crimes related to violation of civil or human rights, crime as a category was not perceived as being a major concern for any of the communities visited.

Health Care, Nutrition and Healthy Living

While respondents were generally concerned with access to health care, specific mention was often made about poor eating habits such as serving pop and chips as steady diets to children. There was concern for the high rate of obesity in communities, and lack of access to affordable, nutritional foods. For some, working multiple jobs did not allow enough time to prepare regular nutritious meals for the family.

Discussion threads for Health Care

- Policy change—changing the environment in order to help people
- Voting—getting the right people in office
- Lack of access to healthy foods
- Programming in school systems (lack of gym, recess, health education)
- Ability to get health insurance (affordable)
- Access to health coverage

Civil Rights and Human Rights

Many stories abounded that were related to violations of civil and human rights. In Faribault, the immigrant South Sudanese spoke of being told by the Mayor that they were not wanted there. There were stories of women being harassed and spit upon as they walked by. For nonimmigrant populations, the violations or acts of discrimination were more subtle or indirect, such as the school official who shared that he was told not to include so many people of color in his special programs for youth.

Discussion threads/comments on Civil Rights & Human Rights

- We do not feel welcome or feel like we are part of the community
- If we had our own place to go, such as a community center, it would help
- South Sudanese & Somali: The Mayor told us that "we do not want you here. You should leave."
- Our women were spit upon as they walked down the street
- Equal access to opportunity is a civil right
- Our young men are systematically taken away from us, put in prison, destroying families, destroying hope. It creates a sense of helplessness

7. Recommendations

The consistency of the themes that emerged from the discussions provides an opportunity for the Council to continue building cultural bridges, and addressing cultural, social, and economic concerns.

Nurturing Culture and Connectedness

The dialogue between the Council and its constituents needs to be substantial and sustained. Current resource levels would not permit the Council to continue this city to city tour, but it was clear that these communities desired a sustainable relationship with the Council. A regional representative or satellite office would help bridge the relationship and communications divide currently imposed by geographic distance, and help the Council to collaborate more effectively with local organizations.

Link to Services and Resources

The Council needs to maintain a vibrant and informative website that would provide information on the Council, its services, and other State and social service organizations. This would help reduce the dependency upon human resources for daily information.

Researched Information & Data Driven Strategic Planning

With the passing of Mr. Roger Banks and his unique store of experiences and expertise, the Council is in need of competent research resources within, and/or access to such resources outside of the Council. Frequent cultural appraisal is required as technology, migration, and time nuance the fabrics of cultures and communities. Research competency is also required for the Council to provide updated information and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature.

Addressing the OVOS Themes

The prevailing themes, *Education, Economic Independence, Equity in Criminal Justice, Nutrition and Healthy Living, Housing, and Civil Rights / Human Rights* that emerged from the tour were not new to the Council or to the communities. The consistency of these concerns requires that substantial review be performed, to result in recommendations to the Legislature and the Executive branch for correction and intervention.

It is further recommended that the Council appoint committees or leaders to develop data driven and culturally appropriate strategies to address these themes to the benefit of the communities and the State. Population demographics consistently show that the fastest growing populations in the State are communities of color and immigrant communities. Left unaddressed, the concerns will dim the brightness of the cultural celebration, and will sustain the persistent inequities in economic opportunities, academic achievement, and comprehensive social capital between Black communities and mainstream Minnesota.

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