

## Meeting Minutes: Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council

Date: November 21, 2025

Minutes prepared by: DHS Community Relations Staff

Location: WebEx and NorthPoint Conference Center (Hybrid)

### Attendance

- **CECLC Members:** Shawn Sorrell, Philip Gaye-Bai, Josefina Geronimo, Micaela Schuneman, Farhia Said, Alex Abraha, Paul Slack, Tonia Lofton, Wayne Somes, PaChua Vang, Nelly Torori, Craté Darden, Kimetha Johnson, Julie Churcher, Chris Guy, Kiora Matthews, Raphael Omoto, Angela Fields, Joanna Rosa
- **State Agency Staff:** Helen Ghebre, Lola Muhammad, Deputy Commissioner Nikki Farago, De Anna Conover, Hli Vang, Kelly Barnebey, Sophia Mai, Steven Wilson, Yung Jens Vang, Leigh Grauman
- **Public Attendees:** JoDee Christianson, Abebe Dashew, Ahmed Mussa

### Agenda

12:00	Lunch and Community Networking / WebEx Opens
1:00	Open Public Meeting and Land Acknowledgement
1:05	Introductions and Welcome
1:20	Review and Approve Meeting Agenda and Minutes
1:25	Community Celebrations and Shoutouts
1:45	Connection Building Activity
2:25	Break
2:30	Workgroup Updates & Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Equitable Outcomes Workgroup</li><li>• Topics &amp; Issues Workgroup</li><li>• Legislative Workgroup</li></ul>
	Administrative Updates
4:00	Adjourn

## Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, and Introductions

Shawn Sorrell called the meeting to order. He led the council through a land acknowledgement and introductions.

Shawn reminded council members about the Tribal-State Relations Training (TSRT) opportunity to more effectively engage the DHS Office of Tribal and Urban Indian Relations and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) around Tribal Relations and addressing the needs of Urban Indian communities. Please contact Community Relations to register.

TSRT posted the following sessions:

- **January 28-29, 2026, Black Bear Casino Resort in Carlton, MN**
  - Hosted by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
  - Registration is open.
- **February 25-26, 2026, Grand Casino Hinckley in Hinckley, MN**
  - Hosted by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
  - Registration opens on January 6, 2026
- **March 25-26, 2026, Treasure Island Resort & Casino in Welch, MN**
  - Hosted by the Prairie Island Indian Community
  - Registration opens on January 6, 2026

## Decisions Made

Review and approve October minutes and meeting agenda:

- Motion to approve meeting agenda and October minutes: Shawn Sorrell
- Second: Christopher Guy
- The motion passed

A motion was made to approve the recommendations as written for the HEARD Team Phase III project. The motion passed unanimously.

## Community Celebrations and Shoutouts

Shawn Sorrell opened the floor for members to share.

- Kimetha Johnson is excited to announce she moved her home based non-profit to an office location. She will send details about an open house in the coming weeks. In addition, the Residents of Color Collective (ROCC) is hosting a [Resource Fair](#) on Friday, December 12 from 5:00-7:30 PM.
- Hli Vang shared [MN Hmong New Year](#) will be held on November 30-December 1 at the St. Paul Rivercentre. Tickets are on sale now.
- Julie Churcher shared Simpson Housing is holding its annual [Homeless Memorial and March](#) on Thursday, December 18 from 4:45-8:00 PM at Plymouth Congressional Church in Minneapolis.

- Helen Ghebre mentioned the [2025 Fall Mental Wellness Conference](#) on Saturday, November 22 at Wilder. Registration required.
- There is [Dyani White Hawk: Love Language](#) at the Walker Art Center, which runs through February 15, 2026.
- There is a [Queering Indigeneity](#) exhibit at Minnesota Museum of American Art from September 18, 2025–August 16, 2026.
- Wayne Somes gave a shoutout to the Detroit Lakes Public Schools which had [record attendance at its powwow last week](#) to celebrate Native American Heritage Month.
- Shawn Sorrell is excited to announce the birth of his grandson.

## Connection Building Activity

Craté Darden led the council through a connection building activity.

## Workgroup Updates

### Legislative and Policy Workgroup

The workgroup continues work on its legislative tracking worksheet and aims to build more structure around legislative updates to the CECLC when session begins.

The CECLC Legislative Meet & Greet has been confirmed for Thursday, April 9, 2026. More details to come.

### Topics and Issues Workgroup

The CECLC Desired Outcome 3 was assigned to this workgroup, which is:

*DHS must expand targeted, linguistically appropriate, and culturally relevant community outreach and education efforts to improve program awareness, eligibility understanding, and responsiveness to policy changes*

The workgroup has deliberated on how to proceed, and its goal is to organize one listening session per quarter. The Legislative Workgroup would like to work with them to make that happen.

## Equitable Outcomes Workgroup

The Equitable Outcomes Workgroup developed a feedback and recommendations memo for the HEARD Phase III project, which was sent in advance of today's meeting. A vote is required to move this forward.

Below is a high-level summary of the recommendations provided by the workgroup.

### Highlights of Feedback and Recommendations

Our feedback focused on strengthening community engagement, local partnerships, and cultural accessibility in Phase III. We acknowledged the project's strong foundation in equity and responsiveness to community voice, while emphasizing the need to deepen local connection and shared accountability, particularly given the research vendor's out-of-state location.

### Key Recommendations

- Strengthen and localize recruitment through trusted community messengers, cultural brokers, and Tribal partners to ensure authentic, diverse participation.
- Make materials culturally and linguistically accessible, using plain language, multiple languages (English, Somali, Spanish, Hmong, and Tribal languages), and visuals that reflect community identity.
- Deepen partnerships with community-based and Tribal organizations by engaging them as co-researchers and designating community liaisons for ongoing two-way communication and data sovereignty.
- Develop a Phase III Community Engagement Plan to outline lead partners, co-design timelines for materials and translations, and set evaluation checkpoints for continuous feedback.
- Ensure equitable compensation and flexible participation options to recognize lived experience and remove barriers to engagement.

Together, these recommendations aim to make Phase III more community-centered, transparent, and action-oriented, ensuring that findings reflect and benefit the diverse Minnesotans receiving Home and Community-Based Services.

A motion was made to approve the recommendations as written for the HEARD Team Phase III project. The motion passed unanimously.

## Administrative Update

Deputy Commissioner Nikki Farago gave an overview of DHS program integrity and pre-payment review.

- [Pre-payment review FAQ / Minnesota Department of Human Services](#)
  - The Minnesota Department of Human Services has created a frequently asked questions webpage about the new pre-payment review process that [Governor Walz announced on October 29, 2025](#).
  - The FAQ page is the best source of the most up-to-date answers to common questions about pre-payment review and will be updated on a weekly basis.
  - Questions can be submitted on the webpage, and DHS will post answers on the page as needed.

- [Program integrity / Program Integrity - Department of Human Services](#)
  - As a part of Governor Walz's recent Executive Order 25-10 to prevent fraud, waste and abuse in state programs, DHS has launched a new webpage that will serve as a central resource to keep the public informed of our progress. It includes:
    - Clear definitions for fraud, waste, and abuse.
    - A timeline of actions that have been taken.
    - Key decisions that support transparency, prevention, detection, and enforcement.
    - Information on preliminary investigations, cases opened, law enforcement referrals, administrative actions, and money identified for recovery.

DHS's goal is to safeguard the programs that serve Minnesota's most vulnerable communities. It encourages everyone to visit the webpage; there is a lot of information available. The public can also sign up there to receive email updates.

Helen Ghebre provided the following updates:

- As shared earlier, the CECLC Legislative Meet & Greet is scheduled for Thursday, April 9, 2026 at the State Capitol. More details to come.
- There is an opportunity to serve as council co-chair. Nominations will be open soon. There will be more information in the post-meeting email update. The current co-chairs are happy to field council members' questions about the role.

**Meeting adjourned at 3:40 PM**