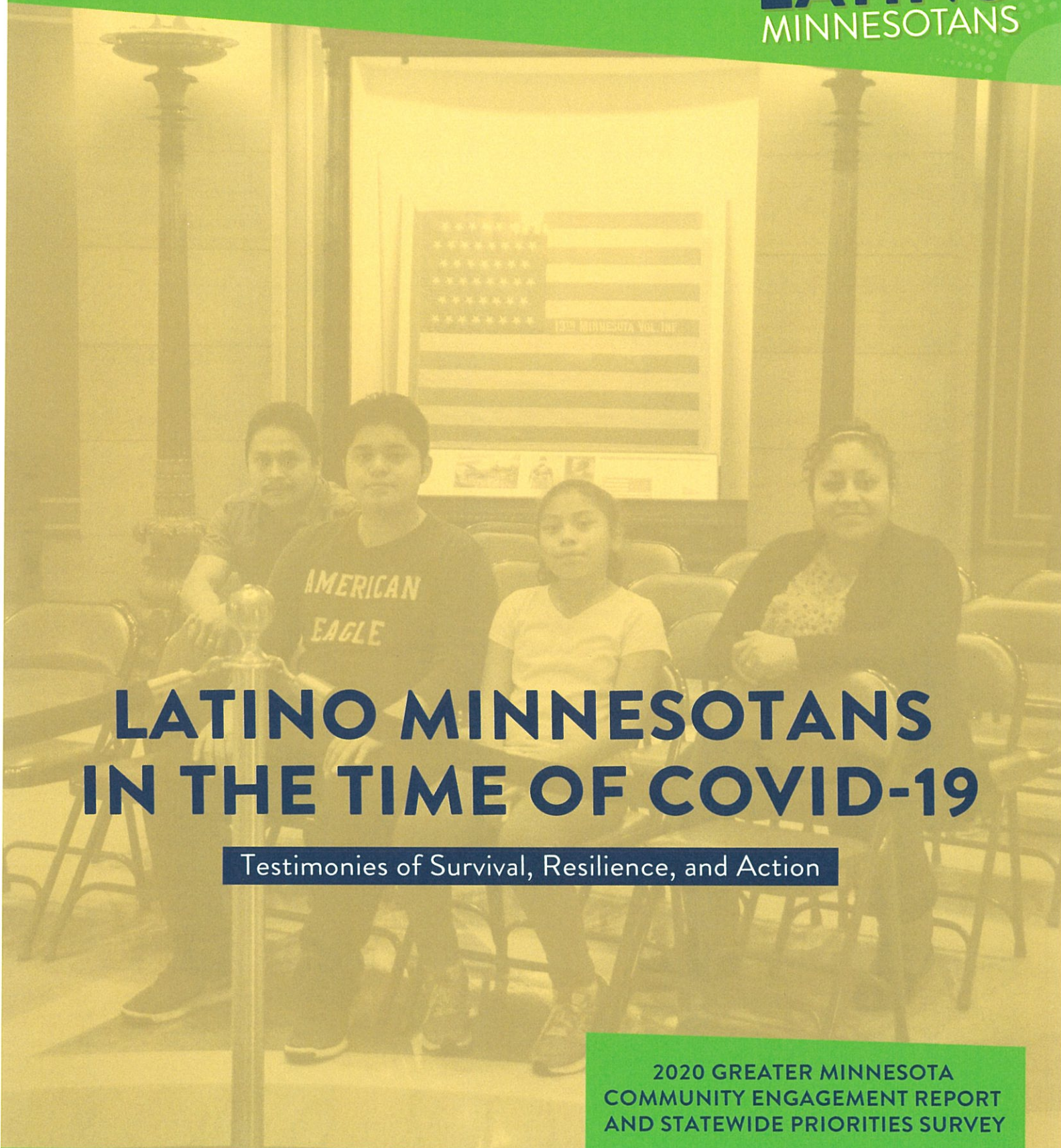




LATINO MINNESOTANS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Testimonies of Survival, Resilience, and Action

2020 GREATER MINNESOTA
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT
AND STATEWIDE PRIORITIES SURVEY

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the participation of community members who generously accepted our invitation to be part of these conversations. These individuals were willing to share with the Council their new realities during the COVID-19 pandemic but also their hopes during these challenging and unparalleled times. Our appreciation also goes to the respondents of our statewide survey.

The Council is extremely grateful to the Community Ambassadors who connected MCLA to local community members and helped arrange virtual or in-person logistics in the regions we visited. Lastly, the Council would also like to thank the elected officials who came to the community listening sessions to speak with their Latino constituents. Their presence and contribution were integral to the discussions and the overall process.

MCLA Staff

Rosa Tock

Executive Director
Coordinator, co-author and editor

Samantha N. Díaz

Legislative and Policy Director
Author

Felipe Illescas

Legislative and Policy Director
Co-author and Listening Sessions Coordinator

Cecilia Roing

Administrative Assistant
Logistical and Administrative Support

MCLA Board Members

Julio Zelaya

Chair, CD1

Ana Vergara

Vice-chair, CD2

Uriel Espinoza

Treasurer, CD3

Leticia Guadarrama

Secretary, At-Large

Marco Hernández

Member, CD4

Clara Ugarte-Perrin

Member, CD5

Mónica Segura-Schwartz

Member, CD6

Martha Castañón

Member, CD7

Susana Pelayo-Woodward

Member, CD8

Sandra Filardo

Member, At-Large

Tracy Kallassy

Member, At-Large

Senator Patricia Torres-Ray

Senate District 63

Senator Carla Nelson

Senate District 26

Representative Jon Koznick

House District 58A

Representative Tim Mahoney

House District 67A

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	8
1. Community Listening Sessions	
1.1. Overview of Locations Visited	10
1.2. Our Communities: Experiences and Reflections.....	10
1.3. Key Findings and Recommendations	12
1.4. Community Profiles	
Duluth	18
Northfield	20
Austin	22
Long Prairie	24
Albert Lea	26
Cold Spring	28
2. Statewide Priorities Survey	
2.1. Survey Approach and Demographics	30
2.2. Key Results and Recommendations	31
Conclusion	35
Appendix A: Listening Session Questions	36
Appendix B: Demographic Information Survey	37
Appendix C: Statewide Survey Questionnaire	38
References	39

Executive Summary

The Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (MCLA) is a state agency charged with advising and informing the Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor, legislators, and state agencies on issues and policies that impact Latinx¹ communities in the state of Minnesota. Additionally, MCLA serves as a liaison to the broader Latinx community throughout the state, providing updates and information that comes from the State Capitol and other government agencies. The Council also serves as a bridge between the community and state resources and referrals.

To ensure that MCLA priorities are guided by the voices of the people we serve, periodic listening sessions provide the opportunity to reassess needs and develop a policy agenda accordingly. Given the unprecedented nature of daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic, MCLA adjusted its traditional methodology of in-person visits in various locations in Greater Minnesota. Instead, we decided a hybrid approach and conducted our sessions remotely and *in situ* during the month of July. We convened two in-person sessions that adhered to CDC guidelines in Austin and at St. John's University with community members from Cold Spring, while four sessions were facilitated virtually through our Webex platform or Zoom. The MCLA team held virtual conversations in Duluth, Albert Lea, Long Prairie and Northfield. Two sessions were held in English, and four in Spanish. The majority of attendees were women, of Mexican descent, and most of them indicated they have children in the state's public-school system. In total, 72 participants attended our sessions.

In addition to facilitating the listening sessions in Greater Minnesota, MCLA conducted an online survey in September to supplement the conversations that took place across the state. Considering individuals who would have interest in the survey, but may have limited proficiency in English, there was the option to complete the survey using a separate Spanish version. During a ten-day time period, 85 individuals completed the English version of the survey and 30 respondents completed the Spanish version, for a total of 115 responses.

In appreciating and understanding the challenges of reaching out to the broader community through virtual platforms, MCLA maintains its commitment of presence in and support of these communities as we continue to move forward. We acknowledge how difficult and painful the pandemic, and then the killing of George Floyd, have been for members in our communities, and those working and assisting them on the front lines. As we write this report, Latinos were testing positive for COVID-19 at about 5 times the rate of white Minnesotans. They also had the highest age-adjusted rates of hospitalization from the virus.ⁱ Also, communities of color have applied for unemployment benefits and continue to need those benefits at higher rates than white Minnesotans.ⁱⁱ As a matter of fact, Latinos represented 6% of continued unemployment claimsⁱⁱⁱ, and their unemployment rate is at 9.7%, up from 3.1% a year ago according to the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).

Over the course of the next several months, the state will assess the likelihood of a financial recovery and learn whether a localized hybrid approach to reopening schools is effective, while maintaining the health and safety of all residents. MCLA certainly appreciates the delicate nature of decision making for state

¹ MCLA uses Latino, Latina, Latinx or Hispanic interchangeable. We are adopting the term Latinx because it is a gender neutral/inclusive term.

officials to keep the balance between safety and gradually reopening the economy. MCLA is committed to weigh in as applicable. Undoubtedly, during various phases of making decisions, it is critical to listen to and value the diverse perspectives and voices of all who are impacted as we move forward during these unprecedented times.

Therefore, this report and included recommendations will serve as a foundation to MCLA's legislative and policy priorities, in addition to supporting existing community-led efforts to addressing issues that impact the Latinx community.

This report highlights recommendations in the areas of Education, Economic Development/Taxes, and Immigration which were compiled with the participation of attendees during the remote and in-person conversations in the month of July. This report also includes the main priorities outlined by the respondents of our statewide on-line survey conducted in September.

Listening Sessions Recommendations

Education

Addressing achievement and opportunity gaps

As the fastest growing, and one of the youngest demographic groups in the state, Minnesota's economic competitiveness and socioeconomic outcomes depend in part on Latinos' educational success. While progress has been made in closing the achievement and opportunity gaps that disproportionately impact Latinos, much work remains to further narrow these gaps. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many families due to the interruption of school and the transition to distance learning. These disruptions exacerbated existing disparities in achievement, access to resources, and opportunities. Below are some recommendations to address them.

Recommendations

1. As part of the Increase Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers legislation, address the need for districts and charter schools to be required to provide for a welcoming environment and have a curriculum that is anti-racist, respectful, and inclusive for all in their strategic plans.
2. Advocate for improved classroom experiences (virtual and in person) and more funding in English Language Learners (ELL) programming. Indexing the EL funding to increases in general revenue aid would allow for moderate increases to better support districts and charter schools.
3. Intentionally require visual aids and verbal translations when communicating with families that would benefit from school services. Communication is essential in providing support to students and parents in order to maintain engagement for districts and charter schools.
4. Advocate for programming that emphasizes Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) will be critical to student academic achievement. Providing districts with flexibility on relief funding to continue or enhance mental health services is vitally important to meeting the needs of our students.
5. Address language needs of the Latino community, such as Adult Basic Education that offers intensive English classes for adults, but also access to Spanish classes in k-12 for Latino students.

Economic Development/Taxes

Resilience, entrepreneurship, and taxes

The Latino community is vital to the strength of Minnesota's economy. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Latinos had the highest labor force participation rate in the state, although they suffered from below average median incomes and low health insurance rates due to the type of sectors that employ them. During this crisis, workers in food processing plants, janitorial services, and in the agricultural sector became "essential workers" with a fragile safety net and little labor protections. The pandemic made their path to financial stability and prosperity more challenging. Below are some recommendations to address them.

Recommendations

1. Include Individual Taxpayer Individual Number (ITIN) users into Minnesota's Working Family Tax Credit and Homestead programs. These steps will help immigrant families achieve financial stability and will align with the state's agenda on economic justice and equity.
2. Create new programs for unemployed undocumented and mixed status families, or find ways to include them in current safety net programs. Such critical and fair solutions will not only help these tax-paying Minnesotans stay afloat but will validate and ensure their continued contributions.
3. Continue to support and expand relief measures for renters experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19.

Immigration

The experience of immigrant communities in rural areas

People migrate in search of better opportunities and to offer a better future to their families. Immigrants have been displaced from their places of origin due to economic precarities, political unrest, violence, as well as the effects of global warming in fragile environmental regions. On the other hand, rural areas in Minnesota have offered many of them the possibility of working in several sectors with a high labor supply, which has re-invigorated the economic activity of many localities thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit and the many contributions of immigrants. There are also seasonal migrant workers with authorized working permits from different regions of the nation or other countries (mostly from Mexico) who have also seen barriers to access COVID-19 testing or treatments, housing stability, or information. COVID-19 has made visible immigrants' daily challenges which also impact local economies.

Recommendations

1. Support greater information and resources for migrant workers and *New Minnesotanos*, including funding for emerging non-profits that can become hubs of information for new immigrants.
2. Allocate funds for Latinx community organizations that have stepped in during these hard times and are operating at capacity with limited funding. This would help further leverage their position and relationships with community to serve *Minnesotanos* across the state.
3. Support driver's licenses for all.

Statewide Survey Main Results

Our survey found an alignment in sentiment and priorities between the community engagement sessions throughout the summer and the online responses conducted in September. Except for police reform that didn't surface during the listening sessions in Greater Minnesota, the commonalities in priorities are:

1. The top priority for Latinx Minnesotans is the health and safety related to and beyond COVID-19. With heightened exposure and disproportionate infection rates, the Latino community expects a more concise, coordinated, and intentional outreach to ensure “essential” workers have the vital information the need to protect themselves and their families.
2. Repeatedly and consistently in conversations with many stakeholders, the exclusion of undocumented individuals and mixed status families from COVID-19 relief funding has been a point of large frustration as our community continues be the backbone of several industries across Minnesota. It is paramount that the Minnesota Congressional Delegation advocate to include undocumented workers, and mixed status families in financial relief funds in order for them to regain economic stability.
3. Education has been and remains a fundamental concern of Latino parents and families throughout the state. Distance learning remains an incredibly difficult method to learning for our students, particularly those needing English Language Learning or Special Education services. Districts and charter schools need to be intentional in guaranteeing the access to quality K-12 education during and in the aftermath of the pandemic to secure the academic success of Latino students and their emotional wellbeing.



Listening Session at St. John's University

Introduction

COVID-19 Context

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve unevenly by region and demographic groups, Latinx in the state remain disproportionately affected by the virus compared to other racial and ethnic groups. As of September, Latinx Minnesotans were testing positive for the virus at nearly 5 times the rate of white Minnesotans. Although Latinx constitute only 5.6% of the total population, they represent 17% of all cases in the state.^{iv}

One of the segments of the population hit the hardest by the pandemic were “essential” workers in critical sectors of the economy, like meat processing plants, canneries and factories. Many reasons are behind this unequal situation for these workers and their families: extended exposure to the coronavirus in crews standing shoulder to shoulder in those plants; less access to health insurance and doctors; costs of testing; lack of accurate, timely and bilingual information; crowded housing conditions; shared transportation to and from the workplace; low salaries, and lack of paid sick days, among others. Some of these factors, or social determinants of health, already preceded the pandemic crisis.

Community Engagement Approach During COVID-19

By the month of July, we had already been in touch with community members in urban and rural Minnesota for at least three months. Based on the findings of two previous surveys conducted by MCLA in April and May (*The Realities and Concerns of COVID-19 Among Latino-Community Organizations in Minnesota*, and *Distance Learning and its Impact on Latino Students*), we knew that the situation for many Latinx, particularly among undocumented immigrants who were excluded from the federal stimulus aid, was already extremely fragile. With these experiences in mind, we adjusted our community engagement approach, acknowledging the situation, being empathetic, and centering the community and their needs during our conversations.

Based on the approach taken in the recent past, MCLA engaged in two types of information collection through our community engagement efforts this summer. These were 1) community listening sessions; and 2) demographic information of listening session participants. In addition, this year we introduced a broader approach by conducting a statewide survey.

As a proven practice of authenticity and intentionality in our methodology, community listening sessions were arranged by community ambassadors. Like in the recent past, these liaisons were members of the local community identified by MCLA staff, board members, or collaborating partners. They were local leaders willing to arrange event logistics and recruit local Latinx residents to attend. Community ambassadors were crucial to the success of MCLA’s listening sessions as they held a safe space to enable participants to share their personal opinions with the team. It is important to note that one limitation of the community ambassador’s approach is that these leaders first recruit from their own networks, so at times, the composition of the listening sessions may not reflect the totality of the demographics of the community.^v

The MCLA team prepared a questionnaire and facilitated the conversations (See *Appendix A: Listening Session Questions*). Community listening sessions were held primarily in Spanish, except on two occasions

where all present were fluent English speakers. MCLA staff and one intern took notes during the listening sessions. The sessions were also recorded. Identities of the listening session participants were not recorded, and all identifying information was kept confidential so that every participant could engage in the conversation freely.

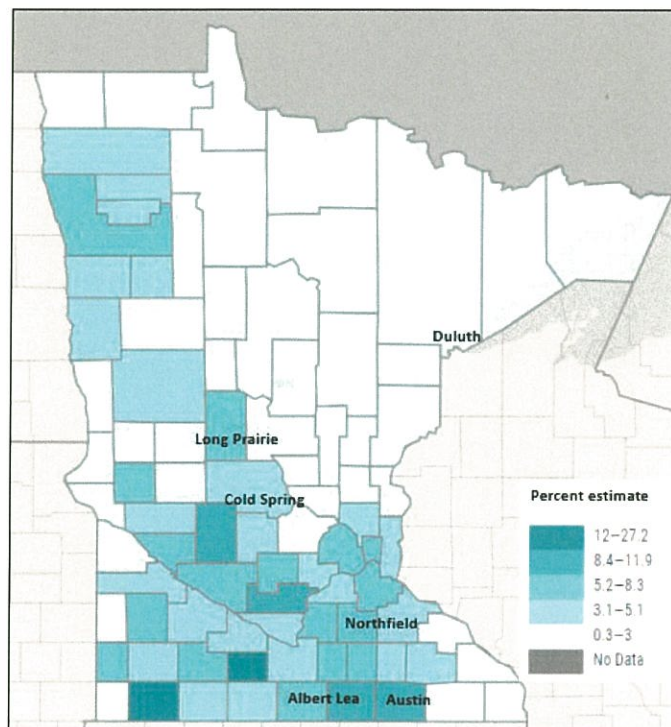
As we did in 2017 and 2018, a component of our community engagement was a demographic information survey (*see Appendix B: Demographic Information Survey*). This bilingual survey was developed for the purpose of gaining better understanding of the characteristics of individuals attending the sessions. Participation in the survey was voluntary, so the number of participants in the survey may not be representative of total attendance of each listening session. Furthermore, the survey was completed at the end of the listening sessions; therefore, participants who needed to leave early or virtual attendees were not always able to submit a completed survey.^{vi}

Interpretation of findings

Across the listening sessions and the statewide survey, the MCLA team identified common themes about the wellbeing of the communities during the pandemic, and issues in three major policy/legislative areas: Economic Development/Taxes, Education, and Immigration. As in the past, many overarching topics may be addressed at a state level, others would be more effectively addressed at the federal or local level. As such, the findings included in the “Key Findings and Recommendations” section of this report will be directed at statewide challenges and state-based solutions. The “Community Profiles” section will address some of the local concerns in greater detail to best represent the voices of the listening session participants. MCLA shared the main findings and recommendations with Community Ambassadors in each city to solicit feedback from community members. MCLA used the feedback to validate and enrich this report. The statewide survey (*See Appendix C: Statewide Priorities Survey*) will offer supplemental opinions and recommendations to encapsulate the Latinx experience as we prepare for the upcoming legislative session.

1. Community Listening Sessions

1.1. Overview of Locations Visited



Source: MCLA based on 2018 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

Minnesota's population is 5,639,632, according to estimates by the American Community Survey from 2019. Approximately 308,013 Minnesotans are Latino or Hispanic, which is about 5.6% of the total state population. Although many Latino Minnesotans reside in the Twin Cities Metro Area, roughly one-third of Minnesota Latinos live outside the Metro Area.

The cities visited during this summer have particularly high percentages of Latino residents. MCLA has visited and established relationships in the last decade with them, most recently in 2017 and 2018. Long Prairie in Todd County, Northfield in Rice County, Austin in Mower, and Albert Lea in Freeborn County have Latino populations ranging from 7% to 15% of the total city population.

For the first time in many years, MCLA met with Latino community members in Duluth, in St. Louis County. This city does not have a high percentage of Latino population (only 2.3%), but it is one locality where the population is growing, is dispersed, and had not been frequently engaged in the past. The map above demonstrates the percent of Latinos in counties across Minnesota, with the cities that MCLA visited marked in their respective counties.

1.2. Our Communities: Experiences and Reflections

To develop a general understanding of the context of each respective local Latinx community, participants of the listening sessions were asked to compare their lives now and prior to the pandemic. Additionally, community members were asked to identify where they have seen the most support given the various challenges inflicted by COVID-19. This support could have been through local government, friends, family, work, church, etc. Finally, they were asked more specific questions regarding education and economic development issues, with an emphasis on taxes and immigration.

The Pandemic: Testimonies of Continued Survival

The initial grounding questions helped paint a clear picture of the reality of the deep impact COVID-19 has had on Latinx communities in Greater Minnesota. Community members shared their experiences ranging from job loss and financial hardship, personal stories of contracting COVID-19 and fear of seeking medical help, and significant challenges with distance learning. The situation was acute: some told us that they

still have bills to pay to the hospital after contracting COVID-19 and going to the Emergency Room. Others had to pay bills to the clinic they were tested. Others were reluctant to do the test because they didn't have good insurance or were afraid that they wouldn't have the means to pay, and others didn't have enough information about cost and implications in their workplace. Safety and privacy are top of mind for many Latino residing in both urban and remote rural communities; more specifically, assurance that their personal information will not be shared with enforcement authorities. That lack of clarity from state government had a chilling effect, with fewer people getting tested as a result, and the state having less control over the spread of the virus.

On the other hand, in demonstrating the resilience of the Latinx community in rural areas, there was a palpable sentiment of having been able to lean on each other to push forward. For example, the Austin community heavily relies on each other, even pooling money together when necessary. Their connectedness stems from knowing each other their entire lives and their upbringing in Oaxaca, Mexico. Participants in that town shared their success in organizing and partnering with local Latino and non-Latino leaders to obtain funding from the municipality to build a basketball court in town. The second phase of their collective efforts is to ask for additional funds to build a shaded pavilion. The previous community organizing to address a local issue allowed them to build a relief network during the pandemic crisis.

One of the most sobering themes throughout these conversations was the consistent expression of isolation and absence of government entities. There were varying degrees to which this feeling was expressed that ranged from sheer abandonment to clear desire for reciprocity of engagement. It is important to note that their frustration was mostly connected to lack of information for identified needs, but there was a desire expressed in wanting to engage in local issues more. However, there was a void in effort from local government to facilitate a conducive environment for said engagement. One resident in Austin stated they are not looking for anything special, simply as they continue to contribute to their communities, they want similar access and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

In the Cold Spring and Albert Lea areas, participants expressed that there was virtually no support from local governments, leaving communities void of any information on resources or services they may need. Members of the Albert Lea community could not point to one organization in the area that provides support to them. However, the Cold Spring community did share they felt as though they could count on St. John's University clergy for help. In Long Prairie and Duluth, there appears to be a slow effort to provide information and utilizing the existing assets of community to improve outreach, but these efforts appeared to lack intentionality or urgency.

It seems that the most established efforts to engage Latinx communities in Greater Minnesota comes from Northfield, which saw cross-sector relationships between faith-based and community-based organizations that stepped in to fill voids of relief and information. Community expressed great appreciation for the care and support they received for urgent needs. Many participants shared that they contracted the COVID-19 virus from work. Although challenging and distressful, they knew of resources available to them, which prevented them from feeling totally isolated and on their own.

Resilience and Social Capital

One of the most palpable and profound characteristics of the Latinx community on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic has been resilience. Widely acknowledged and reported in data throughout the country, in addition to the anecdotal experiences shared with MCLA, is that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Latinx in health and economic indicators. Nevertheless, despite a lack of clear institutional and coordinated system to respond to its needs, the Latinx community across the state of Minnesota has pulled together information and resources to support each other through this unprecedented time.

Community members organized based on affinity (whether by national origin, culture, and previous organizing efforts); mutual interests (support costs of COVID-19 testing and treatment; renting and childcare needs, and access to food); and networks (family, neighborhood, and faith-based connections).

It is important to balance an asset-based lens that highlights how community is persevering through systemic and intentional barriers that contribute to our state's chronic gaps for communities of color and indigenous communities. Latinx show a strong level of social capital through their families, neighborhood organizations, and communities of faith which have allowed them to create mutual aid models to cope with this emergency and the lack of financial aid from the federal government.

The Latinx community is a large contributor to local economies and the state, and workers are aware of it. There is a growing sense that greater respect and reciprocity from those contributions is much needed, by way of driver's licenses for all Minnesotans regardless of immigration status, and COVID-19 relief funding that includes undocumented and mixed status families.

There is a strong desire for more structured and consistent presence of Latinx organizations that could provide a space for these families to express their concerns, needs, and ideas around several topics including public safety, health, and education.

Finally, experiences with local police and feelings of mistreatment or profiling indicate that Latinx communities in Greater Minnesota are aligned with comprehensive efforts to reform policing throughout the state.

1.3. Key Findings and Recommendations

Education

Education needs and opportunities: lessons of distance learning

When given the information of the status of public education in Minnesota for Latinx children, parents understood and shared what they envisioned as a quality education for their child, mostly academic supports, school's guidance, counseling, and scholarships. Moreover, these parents know what they want for their children. Parents requested to be engaged in a way that works to benefit students' learning, but also genuine engagement and conversations to assist them in the educational programming delivered by the schools and districts.

Access to technology and internet was consistently one of the top issues identified by community members during their experience with distance learning. An overwhelming majority of these families were provided laptops or Chromebooks, as they did not have this technology in their home prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, as outlined in the guidance that MCLA provided to policy makers regarding how to communicate with Latinx families during the distance learning period, navigating through e-learning systems for the first time was challenging for most of the participants. Despite insufficient orientation during the initial phases of the distance learning period, families persevered and did the best they could, given the barriers presented by learning online. In Northfield, although the district provided laptops and Chromebooks, there was incredible stress on our students and families to work through systems and assignments to stay on-task.

Additionally, distance learning also presented frustrating and unique challenges to our rural families as English only programming made it difficult for parents to support their children. Parents were frank and consistent in their frustration with a lack of information and effective communication from their respective school district. The use of interpreters and translation was widely disparate throughout each community. Some parents could not identify an individual throughout the child's school district who they could consistently rely upon to provide translations, which certainly prevents legitimate and helpful conversation with their child's teacher. However, efforts to reach families in Northfield and Austin were important in helping families feel less isolated on top of the inherent challenges of distance learning.

Across each engagement session, parents expressed concern around the deep impact on the physical and mental health of their children, as a result of COVID-19. In multiple conversations across these rural communities, parents shared that their children, being unable to be in the classroom and amongst their friends, resulted in lack of motivation in learning. There was a general sense that even with a scenario of returning back to seat-based programming, it is going to be critical for schools to help their children unpack the trauma of the last several months in order to set a foundation of an environment that is conducive for learning.

Considering all the significant challenges surrounding distance learning, most parents expressed that it would be best for their child's learning to return to a seat-based model making sure that the school explains and implements safety protocols. One of the reasons is that parents needed to return to work in person to their workplace, while childcare options were few or virtually nonexistent in certain communities.

It is important to note that in several of these rural areas, the Latinx population make up a significant percentage of the student demographics. Nevertheless, the licensed teacher workforce remains chronically low compared to the diversity of the students in the classroom. In a district where Latinx makes up nearly 50% of the elementary students, former students of said school district could not identify a single instance or grade where they had a person of color at the head of the classroom. Parents expressed the importance of and continued need for a staff that represents their children, in addition to understanding their experience prior to entering the classroom.

While there is this feeling of limiting options for what educational programming looks like for their child at the beginning of their school year, there were clear needs from community that reopening must be done with the utmost precaution to ensure the health and safety of their children. In the Cold Spring

area, parents set expectations of distancing, disinfectants, hand sanitizers, etc. They also wanted to receive the district's plan for September in a clear and understandable manner, in order to mitigate frustrations around lack of information.

More intentional and coordinated communication strategies by local and state government to rural Latinx Minnesotans would serve as an opportunity to better connect respective entities to these vibrant communities that want to be more engaged and informed.

Access to technology and internet continue to be a significant challenge for all communities across rural areas throughout the state. This issue was particularly present in Latinx communities, coupled with the furthering of limiting of access to public resources such as libraries during stay at home orders. Supporting greater access to technology for these areas is paramount to ensure communities are receiving vital information pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and understanding much needed resources that could be available.

Recommendations

1. Given the challenges presented to parents and students in greater Minnesota as a result of language barriers, while translating written documents is helpful, *visual aids and verbal translation and communication are essential in providing support to maintain engagement for districts and charter schools.* There is also an *innovative opportunity to invest in producing material directly in Spanish with plain language that is understood by families with all levels of education.*
2. Funding for English Language Learning (ELL) programs has remained stagnant in the state of Minnesota, limiting the quality of services districts and charter schools provide to meet the needs of students needing this support. *Indexing the ELL funding to increases in general revenue aid would allow for moderate increase to better support districts and charter schools ELL programming, provide professional development for teachers to meet our students where they are at in their own language, and provide for the greater accountability needed for improvement across the state.*
3. The challenges surrounding distance learning offer perfect examples as to the need for districts and charter schools to be required to provide for a welcoming environment and have a curriculum that is respectful and inclusive for all in their strategic plans. Much of the disconnect and isolation could have been mitigated if all districts and charter schools had a deeper understanding and relationship with the students they serve. Additionally, having licensed staff that reflects the students in the classroom would also serve to cultivate a more conducive environment for student learning. *Thus, the passing and adoption of the Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian teachers during the next legislative session will be demonstrable action towards addressing existing gaps.*
4. Considering the frequency of our parents and educators have consistently highlighted the impact on the mental health of children, as a result of the pandemic, programming that emphasizes social and emotional learning will be critical to student academic achievement. Additionally, providing districts with flexibility on relief funding to continue or enhance mental health services is vitally important to meeting the needs of our students.

Economic Development and Taxes

COVID-19 and Economic Impacts in Latino workers

Economic impacts from the pandemic resulted in significant hardship, particularly for our immigrant communities all while these communities remain vital economic engines for local economies and the state. In support data collected by MCLA through a distance learning survey in May, it was shared that the loss of employment or reduced work hours posed significant challenges. These testimonies also mirror reports of the disproportionate impact that the novel coronavirus inflicted in Latino communities across the country.^{vii}

Several community members contacted in southwestern Minnesota shared that they were very concerned for the lack of resources available to them. They expressed frustration over the exclusion of undocumented workers from the unemployment insurance program and for their exclusion from federal stimulus programs that could offer some financial relief. This exclusion caused many Latinx families to experience tremendous hardship as the breadwinners got laid off due to COVID-19 business closures. Some expressed that certain plants were posting vacancies, but these new positions are stricter in verifying documents, banning access to undocumented workers that might have been laid off during the virus outbreak.

This pandemic and its economic effects have shown that many of our families are only one emergency away from chaos, meaning that most families are not financially prepared for unexpected events like lay-offs. What this shows is a lack of financial literacy among Latinx families that must be addressed. By finding ways to offer financial literacy to Latinx families and including ITIN users into the Working Family Tax Credit, we can enhance the lives of these families and help them achieve financial stability, which will end up benefitting the state.

Participants employed in meat-packing facilities expressed their awareness of COVID-19 and the lack of safety measures experienced in their workplace. Some mentioned that they contracted the virus and infected their families and then had to return to work after getting better only to risk getting infected again. As noted by community members themselves, Latinx workers are significant contributors to local and state economies. Their exposure to the COVID-19 remains high as a result of their work in agriculture, meat-packing plants, and the service industry. It is their belief that these communities have earned reciprocity in relief, based on the risks that they and their families take every day at work.

As mentioned previously, there was a candid sense of abandonment in certain communities, with one participant sharing that it seems as though their local government does not want Latinx people there. Thus, nonprofit, faith-based, and community-based organizations have served as a lifeline for a large portion of the Latinx community throughout the state. The presence of these organizations served to fill a void in information, resources, and support that were not immediately activated by government institutions.

Employers, large and small, must prioritize the health and safety of their workers by providing critical information with respect to the COVID-19 virus, in addition to supplying Protective Personal Equipment (PPE). Latinx workers throughout the state have been essential to mitigating disastrous impacts to our economy, they deserve proper protection to continue to do so.

Lastly, there was a general lack of knowledge of tax credits and the state's Homestead Credit Program, which is not necessarily uncommon, but it would be very beneficial for families if they had more information about. This lack of knowledge is also due to the fact that undocumented taxpayers are not currently included in critical programs such as the Working Family Tax Credit and the Homestead Credit program.

Recommendations

1. Because undocumented Minnesotans are currently excluded from federal relief and the state's unemployment insurance and medical assistance programs, our recommendation is that, as a state, *Minnesota needs to create new programs for unemployed undocumented and mixed status families or find ways to include them in current relief efforts*. Such critical and fair solutions will not only help these tax-paying Minnesotans stay afloat but will validate and ensure their continued contributions.
2. *Allocating fair resources to Latino non-profits and organizations that have stepped in during the pandemic and economic crisis. Forming true partnerships will help further leverage their position and relationships with community to better serve Minnesotanos across the state.*
3. Taxpayers that use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to file their taxes make significant contributions to our state's economy and they need to be included in all state tax programs. *It is our recommendation that ITIN users are included into the Working Family Tax Credit and can file for Homestead when they buy and occupy their home*. These steps will help immigrant families achieve financial stability and will align with the state's agenda on economic justice and equity.

Immigration

About two thirds of the participants in our listening sessions were immigrants. Although we did not include a specific question regarding immigration issues, the plea for immigrants' rights and policy changes are always present in conversations with the community. Participants who were not immigrants but provide direct services to the community, often talked about trying to find ways to better serve and reach out to immigrant workers and families in the community. They mentioned that this segment of the community is extremely afraid to approach public agencies or request services, ignoring that they or other members in the family might benefit from health and human services (e.g. regular check-ins, vaccinations, etc.).

The most relevant themes had to do with the fact that for some, their mixed immigration status was a barrier to access a stimulus check. Other challenges had to do with fear to take a COVID-19 test and provide their contact information to different state agencies as they were skeptical about how that information would be used. Also, there was confusion regarding whether seeking for COVID-19 related services would have a negative effect and considered as "public charge" for those who were in the middle of obtaining a permanent resident status. As a result, their frustration with government was present in almost every session. Many participants were aware of their role in the economy as essential workers and how much they contribute through their labor and taxes but couldn't understand why they were not included like everyone else in the stimulus packages. One participant expressed: "the politicians may have education and titles, but they are heartless."

As MCLA has been hearing repeatedly, the number one issue that community wants the agency to continue supporting is reinstating the privilege for everyone to have a drivers' license. Other requests involved increasing the coordinated flow of information and resources for New Minnesotans, including funding for emerging non-profits that can be hubs of information for immigrants. We also heard about the importance to allocate resources through grants to organizations who have stepped in and are at capacity with limited funding to help further leverage their position and relationships with community to better serve *Minnesotanos* across the state. Finally, there were significant policing and criminal justice reform proposals that were introduced by the Legislature and signed into law during a special session in July. They are also relevant for immigrants who, as was shared with us, many times face racial profiling or intimidation. There must be a continued push to adopt as many of the policy proposals introduced by the POCI caucus in order to truly restore faith in the law enforcement agencies whose purpose is to protect and serve community members, regardless of immigration status.



Community Listening Session in Austin

1.4. Community Profiles

Duluth (St. Louis County)

Fast Facts

Duluth is a city located in St. Louis County in northern Minnesota, situated on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Based on Census data, the estimated population of Duluth in 2019 was 85,618, making it one of the largest municipalities in the state outside of the Twin Cities Metro Area. Approximately 2.3% of Duluth's population identify themselves as Latino and/or Hispanic. In terms of graduation rates, in 2019, in the Duluth Public School District, 67% of Latinx students graduated from high school on time (MDE Report Card). As for the main economic activities, the Elliot Meat Packing Plant operates in the area, but the main activities are centered on the hospitality and food service (Duluth is a resort town).

Participants

The attendees of the community engagement session were predominately professional women, working in higher education, local government, or at the school district. There were a handful of attendees who worked in multiple, low to medium wage jobs, in addition to a male local business owner. Moreover, in comparison to the communities also visited during these sessions, the Duluth participants were perhaps the group with most years of education, with most attendees having received bachelor's degrees or higher. Participants shared that members of the community are very much dispersed in the city and the county, which makes it difficult to gather, organize, or support each other. They shared that during the pandemic, they relied on the NAACP for support and guidance.

Most of the attendees of this conversation facilitated through Webex were parents with children in school. Additionally, this was one of two sessions that was facilitated in English as all attendees were proficient in the language and/or bilingual. All participants had heard of the 2020 Census and had completed it.

Local Issues or Concerns

Interpreters at community clinics or health facilities

The need for culturally competent medical professionals and translators was identified by the Duluth Latinx community. One community member was identified as someone who people may go to for translations. This individual is relied upon as they not only provide translation but is also able to relay pertinent information in a manner that is unthreatening and understandable. This disconnect and lack of trust with medical professionals poses great risk to the Latinx community as it was shared that people will wait until they are extremely sick before they will go to the doctor. The pandemic has made the need for quality medical interpretation even more important.

Census completion rates

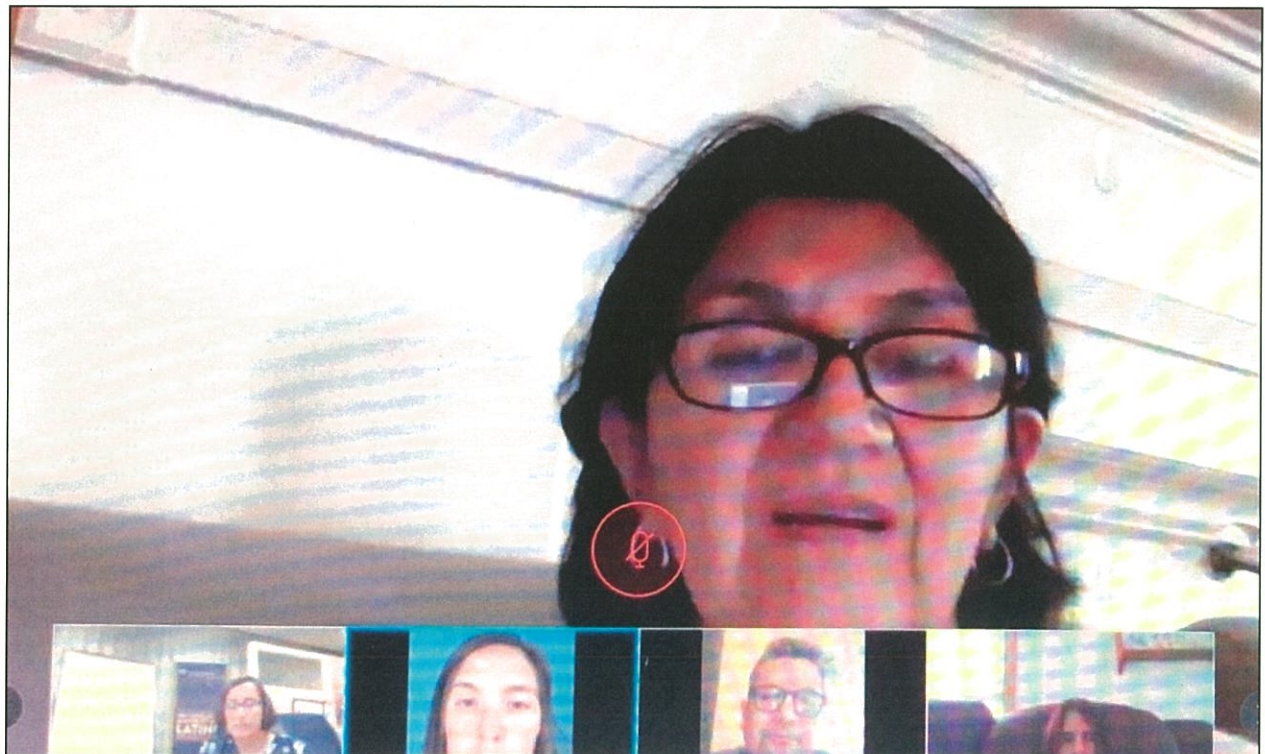
Throughout the city of Duluth, it was shared that although the overall census response rate was high, residents living in the poorer areas of the city and who are largely communities of color or indigenous, including Latinos, had a disproportionately low response.

Promotion of and sharing information with Latinx owned small businesses

While there is a growing sector of Latinx entrepreneurs in Duluth, it was shared repeatedly that support for growth and technical assistance is much needed. Moreover, as a result of the lack of connection to local government and larger business community, there is a concerted effort of local Latinx business owners to organize a formal association to help each other. Some suggested that there should be concerted efforts to find funding to invest in a welcoming center which would serve as a centralized point to provide a safe space, offer legal supports and human services, and share information.

Impact of COVID-19 in the county

Compared to the high concentration of COVID-19 infections in areas with Latinx residents in other Greater Minnesota localities, at the time of the engagement session, participants did not report a significant number of cases. However, as of September 9, 2020, there had been 867 total confirmed COVID-19 cases with 9 Latino cases, and zero deaths in the community for this county. At the time of our visit in July, there were only 238 confirmed cases with 0 Latino cases.^{viii}



Northfield (Rice County)

Fast Facts

Northfield is a municipality located in Rice County in southeastern Minnesota. The estimated population of Northfield in 2019 was 20,742. Approximately 9% of Northfield's total population identify themselves as Latino and/or Hispanic. According to the MDE Report Card, the Northfield Public School District reported that 89% of Latinx students graduated from high school on time. In this town, one of the main employers is the Malt-O-Meal company.

Participants

The participants of the Northfield community engagement session were largely working-class women. In partnership with a local Latina leader, this session was integrated into the programming of an effort to train and share resources and information or improve the local community on the utilization of virtual platforms through a weekly class. This was a well-attended Spanish-only conversation that took place via the Zoom platform online. Most of the roughly 25 attendees had children who attended the local district and were highly invested in their children's educational success. Most participants had heard about the 2020 Census and its importance, indicating that they had submitted their form.

Local Concerns or Issues

General Information and Education on COVID-19

Most of the participants of this session shared that either they or someone in their family had contracted the COVID-19 virus; and all participants indicated that they knew someone who contracted the coronavirus at some point. Some participants expressed anguish because those who contracted the virus were isolated and marginalized even within the community post-recovery as a result of a lack of general information, such as length of infection or time when one is contagious. However, attendees indicated that local churches and neighbors organized to offer support to each other or lend money to those who had bills to pay for COVID-19 related costs (tests, treatment, hospital care, etc.).

Ability to Finance and Purchase Homes

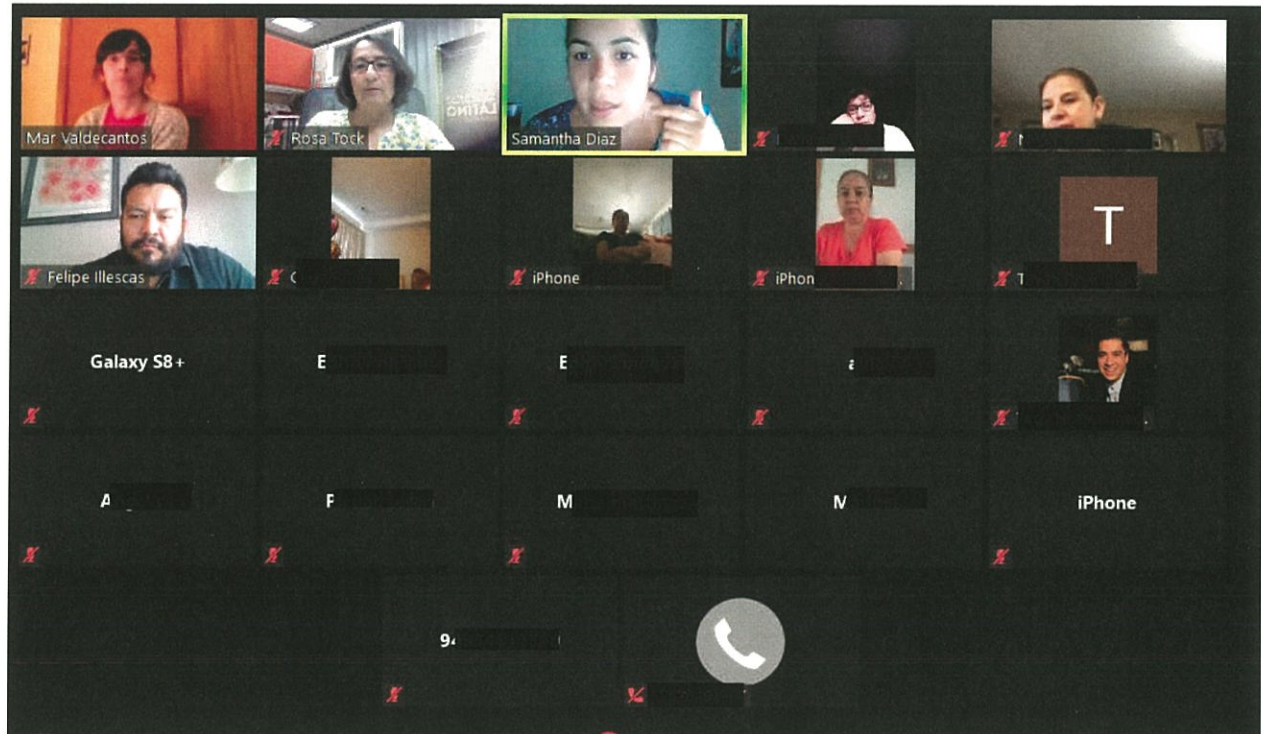
Access to financing and purchasing a home was an issue that participants found as an additional need in the community. There was a palpable understanding of the value in owning a home and participants expressed great interest in making this type of significant investment in their community, but are precluded from financing opportunities, often because of their immigration status.

Workplace Safety and Precautions Amid COVID-19

While specific locations were not identified, workers shared deep concerns with the lack of safety and precautions their employers have implemented since the beginning of the pandemic. Additionally, when attempting to alert officials of the county where their employment is located regarding the issues within those facilities, one community member received a response that the only reason infection rates were so high was as a result of the increased testing capacity.

Impact of COVID-19 in the county

As a rural area that is home of or neighbor's food factories and other agricultural facilities, there has been a relatively high COVID-19 infection rate in Rice County. As of September 9, 2020, there were 1,165 COVID-19 cases (up from 697 confirmed cases in July) of which 387 were Latinos. At the beginning of September, there were 8 deaths, 3 of them Latinos (almost half of fatalities).^{ix}



Austin (Mower County)

Fast Facts

Austin is a community located in Mower County in southeastern Minnesota and serves as the county seat. The estimated population of Austin in 2019 was 25,233, with approximately 16% of its total population identifying as Latino and/or Hispanic. Regarding high school graduation rates, Austin Public School District reports that in 2019, 68% Latinx students graduated on time (MDE Report Card). The Hormel Processing Plant is the main employer in town, with most workers being Latino.

Participants

This engagement session was the first in-person discussion that was facilitated during the summer. It was held at a local church with approximately 10 working-class participants, split between men and women. Representative Jeanne Poppe (DFL-27B) attended the meeting and welcomed community members. The Latinx community in this town is relatively close knit as many have lifelong relationships with each other stemming from Oaxaca, Mexico, where most emigrated from. Additionally, most of the participants worked together at a local meat-packing plant. Although most of the attendees had heard about the 2020 Census, not all of them had responded, and a couple of them were still confused about how to do it and whether it was mandatory to participate in the Census.

Local Issues or Concerns

Access to Information Technology

While access to technology was highlighted as a priority during each conversation, the Austin community found it particularly difficult to access any pertinent information from government at any level. The local library closures added an additional layer of barriers to stay up to date and complete any documents that required technology as this community was reliant on this asset prior to the public buildings' closures. Efforts to continue to address and mitigate these gaps as a result of the digital divide are necessary as we continue to endure the impacts of the pandemic. In the meantime, more intentional communication and non-digital outreach is critical to ensuring that government executes a basic function by providing all residents vital information.

Childcare Options

Limited childcare options in the area was raised as an issue before the pandemic. However, like most daily processes, the impact of the pandemic further exacerbated the challenges in finding quality childcare in this community.

Recreational Opportunities

The Latinx community repeatedly shared their commitment and desired investment in their Austin community. They shared their vision for what they believed would improve their quality of life and wellbeing. Access to recreational opportunities and facilities was part of said vision. Moreover, participants shared their pride in securing initial funding for a sports field after an organized effort by the community itself. Nevertheless, frustration was expressed with the existing lack of services or perceived

willingness to be encouraged to participate in recreational activities. Social activities, arts and sports could serve as a unique opportunity to provide a welcoming environment to better connect Latinx residents with the larger local community.

Impact of COVID-19 in the community

Of the counties visited, Mower ranked third in the number of COVID-19 cases. As of September 9, 2020, there were 1,163 cases (up from 661 confirmed in July), of which 498 were among Latino residents. 3 deaths were reported in that county, none of them Hispanic/Latino.*



Long Prairie (Todd County)

Fast Facts

Long Prairie is a community located in Todd County in central Minnesota and serves as the county seat. The estimated population of Long Prairie in 2018 was 3,315 and approximately 32% of Long Prairie's population identify themselves as Latino and/or Hispanic. In the Long Prairie Public School District, 89% Latino students graduated from high school on time, per MDE's Report Card. In this community, Long Prairie Packing Co. Animal Processing is the main employer.

Participants

This community engagement session was facilitated online via Webex and was coordinated through the help of allies with a commitment to equity and serving our Latinx Minnesotans in the area. The meeting was held in English. Representative Ron Kresha (R-9B) welcomed participants and stayed for most of the meeting. There were approximately ten participants, and gender was split relatively evenly. A handful of participants had kids in the school district, in addition to a few young college students. This was perhaps the most diverse group throughout the engagement sessions with participants identifying as Mexican, Ecuadorian, and Puerto Rican. All of them had heard of the 2020 Census and indicated that they had completed it.

Local Issues or Concerns

Need for Increase in Teachers of Color and Bilingual Support Staff

It was shared repeatedly that a large portion of the student population in the local school district identifies as Latinx. Many of these students speak predominately Spanish at home with parents and family members. There is frustration that the lack of intentional outreach or efforts to communicate with parents impedes their children's ability to be successful, particularly during the distance learning period and the COVID-19 outbreak.

Legal Services and Information on Rights

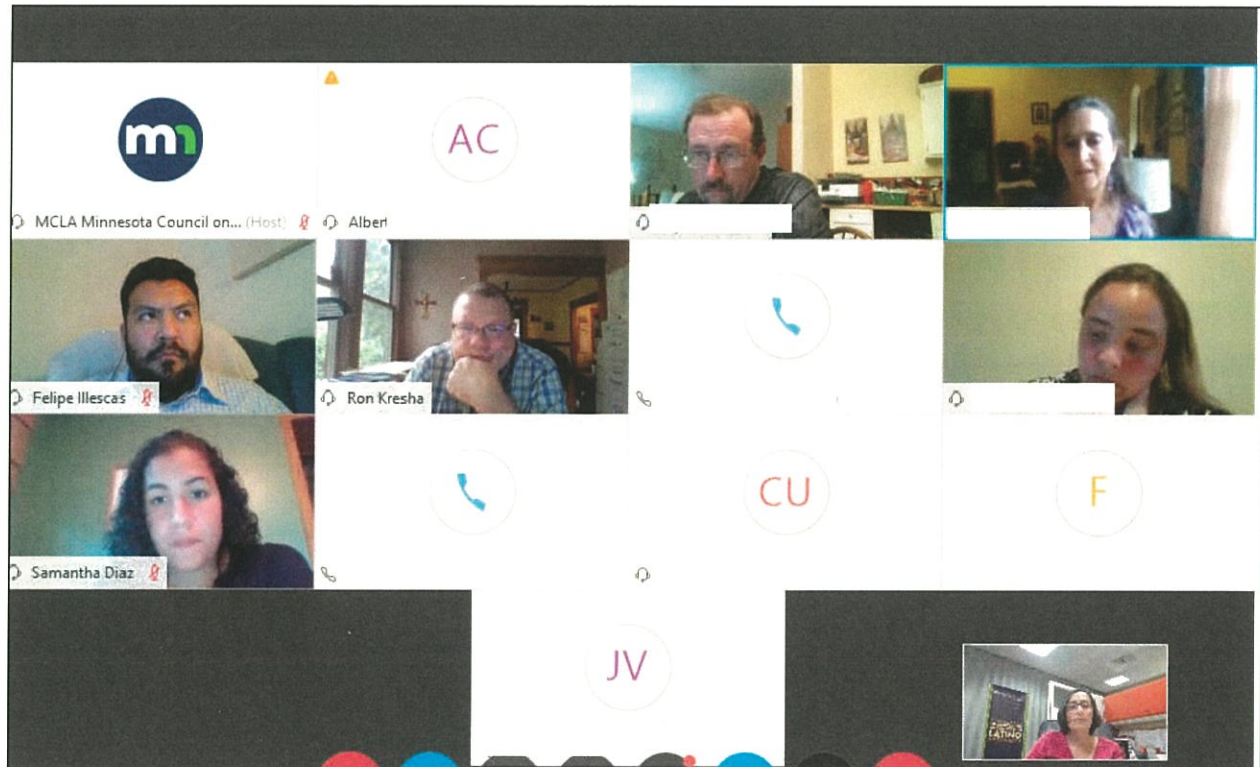
Poor experiences with law enforcement and general fears regarding immigration status were expressed during the conversation. One participant shared that improvement in respect and diversity training was urgent in the community based on firsthand anecdotes, and individual experiences. Additionally, considering the community's existing dynamics with law enforcement, it was believed that people within the Latinx community in the area should be provided with more information on their individual rights, regardless of immigration status.

Housing

With the deep economic impacts of the COVID-19 lingering for the foreseeable future, participants expressed concern about the dwindling availability of affordable housing options. As the local Latinx population continues to grow, this community will be seeking the response and efforts to adjust to the changing population.

Impact of COVID-19

Todd county has a high prevalence of COVID-19 cases in the Latinx community. From July to September there was not a significant increase. As of September 9, there were 399 cases (up from 375 confirmed cases), of which 278 (or 70%) were associated to Latino residents. There were only 2 deaths, and 1 of them was Latino/Hispanic.^{xi}



Albert Lea (Freeborn County)

Fast Facts

Albert Lea is a community located in Freeborn County in southern Minnesota. The estimated population of Albert Lea in 2019 was 17,656 with approximately 14% of Albert Lea's residents identifying themselves as Latino and/or Hispanic. According to MDE's Report Card, 71% of Latino students in Albert Lea Public School District, graduated from high school on time. In terms of economic activity, Wilson's Meat Packing Plant is the principal employer in this town.

Participants

Given the uneven access to technology and challenges with connecting through virtual platforms, this engagement session was held through an innovated approach. A MCLA policy fellow and an intern, both Albert Lea residents, hosted Latinx community members in their backyard to ensure that attendees were adhering to CDC social distancing protocols. A laptop and audio system were then set up so that participants would be able to communicate with MCLA staff via Webex. Each of the roughly 15 participants had students in local school district. This community demonstrated great interest, resilience, and general strength to show up to an event held by MCLA, despite the lack of trust in state agencies and institutions that has been salient during the pandemic. Participants were hopeful and enthusiastic about our visit and our intention to learn more about their realities in this region. All of them had heard of the 2020 Census campaign and were aware of the importance to complete it.

Local Issues or Concerns

Access to Health Care and Other Services

Participants could not point to a single local institution or organization that they would comfortably go to if one was in need of a social service or assistance. As shared in multiple engagement sessions, there was a palpable fear in going into any medical facility regardless of the acuity in illness as a result of their immigration status. The lack of trust is so apparent that most participants shared to have made a practice of seeking medical care in Mankato, which is over an hour away.

Disconnect and Isolation from Government

The sentiment of abandonment from government at all levels was expressed throughout the entire conversation with this Latinx community. Receiving information from the local government was a point of high contention as it was believed they are simply ignored despite contributions by Latinx resident to the community. Nevertheless, a great opportunity to organize the community to engage local government exists as demonstrated by the urgency in improving the quality of life for the entire community, not just the individuals themselves.

Impact of COVID-19:

Freeborn county has not been hardly affected by the pandemic in comparison with other locations in Greater Minnesota. As of September 9, 2020, there were a total of 410 confirmed cases (up from 314 cases in July), of which 130 cases (or a third of cases) were Latino. No deaths were reported in the Latino community.^{xii}



Cold Spring (Stearns County)

Fast Facts

Cold Spring is a community located in Stearns County in central Minnesota as is considered part of the St. Cloud Metropolitan area. The estimated population of Cold Spring in 2017 was 4,067 with approximately 7% of the residents identifying themselves as Latino and/or Hispanic. In the Rocori School District, 82 % of Latino students graduated from high school on time, per MDE's report card. Pilgrim's Pride Poultry Processing Plant and Jennie-O-Turkey in the St. Cloud area are the main employers.

Participants

This was the second in-person conversation facilitated by MCLA during the community engagement tour. The location of the conversation took place in the St. John's University campus through its parish, which is a trusted source of information and resources for the community. There were 12 participants with more women being in attendance. All of them were aware and had completed the 2020 Census, except for one young mother.

Local Issues or Concerns

COVID-19 and Safety in Schools

Like in conversations with other Latinx communities, the parents in this community expressed great exasperation with distance learning and the impact on their children's educational success. It was believed that seat-based instruction seemed to be the best option for their children. However, there was anxiety as to how the local school district would be able to have children in school and ensure their health and safety with respect to the virus.

Financial Literacy and Access to Tax Incentives

The Cold Spring Latinx resident expressed urgency around the need for assistance in financial literacy and long-term planning, particularly around obtaining and maintaining healthy credit. Additionally, these community members recognized and understood their contributions to the economy, while expressing frustration with being intentionally left out of COVID-19 relief funds and general tax incentives based on immigration status. It was deemed critical for these participants to advocate around state and federal programs to allow ITIN users access to vital relief options.

Impact of COVID-19

As of September 9, 2020, there were 2,301 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the county, of which 295 were Latino Cases. There were 22 deaths, 2 of them in the Latino Community.^{xiii}



2. Statewide Priorities Survey

2.1. Survey Approach

Questionnaire

MCLA prepared and distributed a bilingual survey through our newsletter and social media from September 1 to September 11. Respondents were asked to identify their personal top priorities from prepopulated options that included economic recovery as a result of the pandemic, health and safety related to and beyond COVID-19, access to quality K-12 education (effective distance learning), tax incentives and fairness, police reform and racial justice, access to technology, housing, and business development. Additionally, respondents were asked to explain why they selected each respective priority and provide recommendations as to how policy makers can address said issues. Respondents were offered the option to mark all issues listed.

Considering the consistency in the opinions and recommendations obtained during the listening sessions, MCLA did not anticipate significant differences upon creating and conducting the survey. The data and analysis below shed further light on the state of Minnesota's Latino community months into an ongoing global pandemic. As will be noted throughout this section, much of the findings from this survey align with the findings compiled from the community listening sessions. Except for one question about the use of the term "Latinx", the questionnaire reflected the questions posed during the listening sessions.

Demographics

Compared to the listening sessions, the survey showed more nuance and responses reflecting a diverse Latino community. In the English survey, 55% of respondents identified as Mexican, 9% of respondents identified as Colombian, 7% of respondents identified as Puerto Rican. The remaining Latino communities were less than 5% in the English survey; nevertheless, there was diverse representation as respondents identified as Cuban, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Honduran, Panamanian, Salvadorian, Chilean, Argentinian, or Peruvian.

In the Spanish version of the survey, 53% of respondents identified as Mexican, 13% of respondents identified as Colombian, and 7% of respondents identified as either Ecuadorian or Honduran. Respondents who identified as Cuban, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, Venezuelan, Peruvian or Spanish individually totaled 3%.

Minnesota is becoming increasingly diverse, with Latinos being one the youngest and fastest growing populations. Mirroring the young Latino population in the state which median age is 25 years old (in contrast with 38 years for the state), 83% of the respondents were under the age of 55. While there remain challenges and disparities in the higher-level educational attainment, the population of respondents who completed the survey were well educated. Overall, 83% of respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher. Regarding household income, 40.3% of English-speaking respondents indicated that their income was between \$31,000 and \$75,999, whereas in the Spanish version, 48% indicated their income fell in the same range. On the other hand, 30% of Latinos who responded in Spanish earned \$30,000 or less vs. 6.5% of Latinos who responded in English.

Economic Impact and Recovery

We wanted to acknowledge and report about the economic impact of COVID-19 in the lives of our community. In the Spanish survey, out of the 20 respondents that answered the question determining the economic hardship created by COVID-19, roughly a third indicated that they were laid off or someone in their household was laid off. Even more striking, 85% of the Spanish survey respondents indicated that either they or someone in their household saw a decrease in work hours. In the English version, given the low response to the question, we were not able to determine a clear picture of the economic impact of these respondents.

Like all Minnesotans, Latinos are eager and determined to bounce back from the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic. Overall, 54% of respondents indicated that a top priority for them is economic recovery. Moreover, 46% of respondents who completed the English survey and 63% of individuals who completed the Spanish version identified economic recovery related to COVID-19 as a priority. These opinions also mirror trends for Latino voters at the national level. For instance, Pew Research Center indicates that “strong majorities of Hispanic registered voters say the economy, health care and the COVID-19 outbreak are very important to their vote in the 2020 presidential election.”^{xiv} Although Latino Minnesotans only represent 3% of the total eligible voting population, Latinos are now the second voting bloc in the country, with an estimated 32 million eligible voters.

2.2. Key Results and Recommendations

Identifying Priorities

Health and Safety related to and Beyond COVID-19

As COVID-19 continues to deeply impact Latinos in Minnesota, the health and safety of our community is at the forefront of priorities. Anecdotal reports and news stories demonstrate that Minnesota, collectively, has not done enough to ensure that low-wage essential workers are safe across the state. Overall, 75% of respondents identified ensuring health and safety as it relates to the pandemic as their top priority in terms of public policy. Moreover, 71% of respondents who completed the English survey identified health and safety related to COVID-19 as a priority, while 80% of the individuals who completed the Spanish survey found this to be a top priority.

One respondent noted “we want to ensure we are all able to stay healthy at work so that we can continue working, not risk infecting others and keep the economy from further disruption.” An additional respondent stated, “make sure that companies are taking precautionary measures in the workplace, and that employees feel safe to avoid going into work if they are sick.”

Access to Quality K-12 Education (effective distance learning)

Given the challenges presented by distance learning and the clear exacerbating of chronic opportunity gaps for Latino children, access to quality K-12 education and effective distance learning was deemed as another priority by survey respondents. Overall, a total of 53% of all respondents indicated that access to quality education was a priority.

Mirroring conversations from the summer listening engagement sessions, distance learning was difficult for families as they navigated through completely different systems. One respondent stated of the experience in serving Latinx families and needs, particularly around increasing access to technology, “while we are trying our best to meet those needs it is not enough. I fear we are further creating an opportunity gap for our students and setting up a future for more educational inequities.”

Tax Incentives and Fairness

As undocumented immigrants and mixed status families continue to be drivers of local and state economies, fairness in taxes and incentives have become an increasingly important issue for the Latinx community. Overall, 41% of all respondents indicated tax incentives and fairness were a priority, with 53% of the respondents who completed the Spanish version of the survey responded accordingly.

One respondent noted of immigrants, “they pay taxes and often don't get anything back.” Another respondent shared “we immigrants who pay taxes also have the right to receive help as those who are born here, there are many people who received help and did not need it and those who needed it did not receive anything.”

Police Reform and Racial Justice

The Latino community has largely stepped up to serve as an ally in the fight for comprehensive police reform and racial justice. After African Americans, Latinos are disproportionately affected by arbitrary arrests or stops, and police brutality. The survey complements countless conversations MCLA have engaged in since the murder of George Floyd. Overall, 64% of all respondents indicated that police reform and racial justice are their top priorities, while 75% of the respondents who completed the English survey identified this issue as such. This human rights issue will continue to be at the center of conversations until more significant and substantial reforms are adopted and implemented.

As one respondent noted, “We need officers who are not afraid of people of color and they need to be better trained to avoid fatal decisions when dealing with citizens.” In highlighting a need for greater accountability from law enforcement, another responded stated as a recommendation to “hold the police accountable as well as public officials.”

Access to Higher Education

Disparate higher educational attainment levels in Minnesota have been an issue for decades. This issue was also identified as a priority for 40% of the respondents who completed the Spanish version of the survey and 34% of respondents who completed the English survey. In reference to needing more opportunities for Latinx students to enter higher level education, one respondent noted in urgency, “We need more opportunities for higher education for the thousands of students of Latino origin who feel hopeless achieving a better future for themselves and their families.”

Access to Technology

It should be noted that access to technology consistently is raised as a challenge in the numerous conversations that have taken place since the beginning of the pandemic. Additionally, the online survey limited the reach to other community members who may have participated. Nevertheless, 47% of the

respondents who completed the Spanish survey identified this issue as a priority, as did 29% of the individuals who completed the English version. With so much information being disseminated online, one respondent described the need for information to be shared in collaborative and uniform messages from different state agencies and provide it in multiple languages. Some mentioned the need for a 1-800 or free number in different languages to answer questions about education, employment, health, housing, general community resources.

Housing

Given that affordable housing has been an issue in the Twin Cities and metro area even before the pandemic, there has been heightened urgency and discussions around the significant challenges of affordable housing in the Latinx community. Moreover, 47% of the respondents who completed the Spanish survey identified housing as a priority and 37% of the respondents that completed the English survey responded similarly. A respondent, who indicated housing as their top priority shared that policy makers should “focus more on affordable housing and removing policies that intentionally exclude people of color.”

Food Security

As the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take its toll on Latinx communities, food security was identified as a priority to 34% of the respondents who completed the English survey and 23% of the respondents who completed the Spanish survey.

Business Development

As small, local Latinx business and entrepreneurs look to recover from the pandemic, 37% of the respondents who completed the Spanish survey found business development as a priority. An additional 23% of respondents who completed the English survey found this issue as a priority.

Other topics

At the end of the summer, there had been concerns among leaders that Latinos would be undercounted once again^{xv} given the circumstances of the pandemic and inconsistent measures adopted by the Department of Commerce at the federal level shortening the timeframe to respond to the Census which initially was extended until October 31. On the other hand, a recent study by the Pew Research found that less than 25% of Latino/Hispanics knew about the term “Latinx” and that only 3% use the term so far, with young women most likely to use it.^{xvi} Thus, in addition to asking whether participants had responded to the 2020 Census, we introduced another question that had to do with identity and the preferred term that members in the community use to identify themselves.

2020 Census Responses

Latinx leaders across Minnesota have expressed deep concern about the response rate to the 2020 Census for our community. The pandemic, distrust of government, and a void in comprehensive and coordinated outreach to Latinx throughout the entire state and in areas with a high Latino population might contribute to a disparate response rate. Nevertheless, community leaders amplified their outreach efforts to compensate for the void left by the federal government and led a final push for Latinos throughout

Minnesota to complete the Census. The survey showed that not all respondents had completed the Census yet, even though 92% of them shared that they completed it.

Identity and use of the term “Latinx”

The utilization of the gender affirming and inclusive term “Latinx” has been an ongoing evolution in conversations throughout the community. The survey results indicate that respondents more often identify with the binary term Latino or Latina. In the English version of the survey, 70% of respondents identified as Latino/Latina, 38% of respondents identified as Hispanic, and 19% as Latinx. Additionally, even at a low percentage (1% each), it is important to note that “Chicana”, “Latine”, and “Xicana” were also added by respondents as additional identities that reflected who they are. In the Spanish version of the survey, respondents identified as Latino/Latina at 69% and Hispanic at 62%. Only 3% of respondents who completed the Spanish indicated that they identified as Latinx. While there is much dialogue to have on the term and to ensure that our language is inclusive within our diverse heritage and culture, MCLA has included Latinx in our communications.

Key Recommendations

As we continue responding to the ongoing pandemic, the dissemination and delivery of key information must be translated into languages reflected by the residents being served. Utilizing the expertise of community leaders, diverse news outlets and ethnic specific publications are essential tools to reaching individuals and families who do not speak English as a primary language. Additionally, while appreciating more localized community engagement approaches as we move forward, particularly with safe learning plans, the need to ensure all residents have vital information they can understand remains the same.

There is no question that police departments across our state and nationwide are in need for substantial and profound reform. The elimination of qualified immunity, in addition to comprehensive anti-racist training and recruitment of potential candidates through an equity lens are essential to begin restoring the faith in law enforcement agencies whose mission is to protect and serve the public.

Requiring businesses to ensure the health and safety of their workforce is paramount. Enforcement of safety measures, in addition to providing key information regarding COVID-19 and distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as outlined in gubernatorial executive orders is a critical layer of protection for workers who are at constant risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

Undocumented immigrants and mixed status families play an essential role in our global economy and this role has only proven more important during the pandemic. These key communities can no longer be excluded from pandemic relief funds that served as lifelines for millions of Americans. Additionally, allowing for tax fairness by making programs and incentives available to ITIN users is not only the right thing to do, but this further stimulates local and state economies.

Continuing to increase access to technology and affordable broadband internet would help eliminate the gaps that contribute to the challenges seen through the distance learning period. Written and verbal communication with parents and students must continue to improve in districts that serve Latinx students. Increasing funding for ELL programming will strengthen the capacity of services that are critical to help students needing these specific supports to secure academic success.

Conclusion

Overall, the Latinx community has and will continue to endure through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. It is important to balance an asset-based lens that highlights how community is persevering through systemic barriers that contribute to our state's chronic gaps for communities of color and indigenous communities.

As was shared repeatedly and consistently in conversations through these respective communities in greater Minnesota, Latinx communities do their fair share to benefit the entire state. Additionally, since the onset of the pandemic, the incredible resilience of our constituents has stepped up for each other, demonstrating the commitment to persevere as one united community. Participants in our listening sessions shared messages of hope as well, specifically, how helpful it was to gather, discuss these issues, and be seen and heard. However, the most vulnerable segments of the community can't continue dealing with accumulated stress and challenges by themselves.

Now is the time to act as we need to take responsibility as a state and pass legislation necessary to improve the quality of life for all Minnesota families regardless of origin and immigration status. The Latino community has clearly identified their current challenges and is more than willing to offer recommendations to build *One Equitable Minnesota*. Continuing to actively and legitimately engage the Latinx community is critical to realizing outcomes. To sum it up, as one respondent surmised in one recommendation, decision makers have "to govern with us not at us."

Finally, MCLA encourages members in the community to explore further public conversations about all types of identities, including Latinx, Afro-Latinos, or Latinos with indigenous roots in Latin America and the Caribbean. As the Census starts shedding more light on its products next year regarding the diverse makeup of the population and electoral redistricting, these conversations and educating policy makers will be essential.

APPENDIX A: Listening Session Questions

MCLA developed a series of bilingual questions that were consistent across all six community listening sessions. Before delving deeply in the conversation, we started with a warm welcome, offered general information about our agency and kicked-off the discussion with an ice breaker.

1. How was your life different this year compared to last year? What's different for your family and your community?
2. Where have you seen support in the last couple of months?
3. Education: How was your child's experience prior to the pandemic and how distance learning has worked for you?
4. Economic Development and Taxes: What are some things that would help you gain more financial stability and be prepared for an emergency?
5. How can we be helpful, what needs are anticipated in your community?
6. Beyond legislation/policy, what do you want to see from the government (local, state, federal)?
7. 2020 Census: Have you heard about it, have others in the community heard about it, have you responded? What do you need?
8. Tell us about one thing that makes you hopeful.

APPENDIX B: Listening Sessions Bilingual Demographic Information Survey

1. Seleccione la ubicación de la sesión de participación comunitaria a la que asistió:

Albert Lea _____
Austin _____
Duluth _____
Long Prairie _____
Northfield _____
Cold Spring _____

2. ¿Nació usted en los Estados Unidos?

Sí _____
No _____

3. ¿Cuánto tiempo ha vivido en Minnesota?

Menos de 1 año _____
1-5 años _____
5-10 años _____
10-15 años _____
15-20 años _____
Más 20 años _____
Residente de toda la vida _____

4. ¿Cuál es su herencia u origen nacional? * Marque todas las casillas que se aplican a su familia. Si no ve su herencia / origen nacional, escriba aquellos que identifique en el cuadro "Otro".

Cubana/o _____	Hondureña/o _____
Colombiana/o _____	Mejicana/o _____
Costarricense _____	Panameña/o _____
Dominicana/o _____	Peruana/o _____
Ecuatoriana/o _____	Puertorriqueña/o _____
Guatemalteca/o _____	Otro _____

5. Rango de edad:

20 o menos _____
21-29 _____
30-39 _____
40-49 _____

50-59 _____
Más de 60 _____

6. ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de escuela que terminó (en su país de origen o en los Estados Unidos)?

Sin escuela formal _____
Primaria _____
Título de secundaria, GED o el equivalente _____
Título de Asociado o Licenciatura _____
Posgrado y doctorado _____

7 ¿Cuál es el número total de personas en su hogar, incluyéndose usted? _____

8. ¿Cuántos niños hay en su casa? * Por favor, solo cuente a los niños menores de 18 años. _____

9. ¿Está trabajando o empleado en este momento?

Sí, trabajo desde casa _____
Sí, yo voy a mi trabajo _____
No, yo no trabajo _____
No, yo estoy desempleado a causa del COVID-19 _____
Jubilado _____

10. Ingresos del hogar: ¿Cuál es el ingreso bruto anual de su hogar?

\$30,000 o menos _____	
\$31,000-\$45,999 _____	\$91,000-\$105,999 _____
\$46,000-\$60,999 _____	\$106,000-\$120,999 _____
\$61,000-\$75,999 _____	\$121,000-\$134,999 _____
\$76,000-\$90,999 _____	Más de \$135,000 _____

APPENDIX C: Bilingual on-line Survey

Section I. Background and Demographics

1. What is your ethnicity? Please mark all boxes that apply to your family. If you do not see your ethnicity, please write-in any ethnicities you identify as in the "Other" box.
2. What is the highest level of school you finished (in your home country or the United States)?
3. What is your age range? Please select the range that identifies your age.
4. How many people live in your household?
6. Are you employed or working right now?
7. Have you at any point during the pandemic experienced economic hardship? Check all that apply. If you select other, please describe the economic hardship that you endured.
8. What is your household income?
9. Have you or do you know someone who contracted COVID-19?

Section II. Ranking Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Please rate the response from various levels of government. 1 indicates not very helpful, while 4 indicates very helpful.

10. How helpful would you rank information and resources you have received from the federal government in response to COVID-19?
11. How helpful would you rank information and resources you have received from state government in response to COVID-19?
12. How helpful would you rank information and resources you have received from your local government in response to COVID-19?
13. If you have children in the K-12 school system, how helpful would you rank information and resources you have received from your child's school district or charter school?

Section III. Identifying and Prioritizing Public Policy Issues. Help us identify and prioritize MCLA's areas of work

14. What are the most important issues to your household RIGHT NOW? Check all that apply
15. Please briefly describe WHY these issues you selected are important for you and your family?
16. Do you have any recommendations to state agencies or legislators as to how the issues you mentioned above can be addressed or resolved?
17. Did you respond to the Census?
18. If you have not responded to the Census, explain why.
19. Identity: Which term or terms do you use to identify yourself: Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, Other? Select all that apply.

References

-
- ⁱ COVID-19 Data by Race and Ethnicity. <https://mn.gov/covid19/data/data-by-race-ethnicity/index.jsp>
- ⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v MCLA. (2017). *From Stories to Actions. A Rural Latino Vision to Strengthen Communities for a Thriving Minnesota*. https://mn.gov/mcla/assets/English%20Revised%20Report%20PDF%2012.20.17_tcm1099-321641.pdf
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Miriam Jordan and Richard A. Oppel Jr. (June 26, 2020). *For Latinos and Covid-19, Doctors are Seeing an “Alarming” Disparity*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/us/coronavirus-latino-disparity.html>
- ^{viii} Data provided by Kristen Ehresmann, Director of the Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division at the Minnesota Department of Health (September 9, 2020).
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Ibid.
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Pew Research Center. (September 11, 2020). *Hispanic voters say economy, health care and COVID-19 are top issues in 2020 presidential election*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/11/hispanic-voters-say-economy-health-care-and-covid-19-are-top-issues-in-2020-presidential-election/>
- ^{xv} According to the Census Bureau, in 2010, 1.5% of the Latino population was undercounted. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-95.html#:
- ^{xvi} Pew Research Center-Hispanic Trends. (August 11, 2020). *About one-in-four U.S. Hispanics have heard of Latinx, but just 3% use it*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it/>