

Community Conversations: Minnesota's Changing Demographics

Connecting with Our Growing  
**Immigrant**  
Population



# Table of Contents

<b>Section 1:</b>	Introduction—Connecting with our Growing Immigrant Population . . . .	1
<b>Section 2:</b>	Discussion Planning—Putting the Power of Dialogue to Work for your Community. . . . .	5
<b>Section 3:</b>	Dialogue—Discussion Guide: Immigrant Population . . . . .	9
<b>Section 4:</b>	Follow Up—Things to Think About: Immigrant Population. . . . .	11

## Connecting with Our Growing Immigrant Population

*part of* **Community Conversations: Minnesota’s Changing Demographics**

Copyright © 2009 by League of Minnesota Cities. All rights reserved.

### **Researchers and Authors:**

Lena Gould, Policy Analyst  
Rachel Walker, Manager of Policy Analysis  
Kevin Frazell, Member Services Director

**Editor:** Claudia Hoffacker, Web Content and Publications Manager

**Designer:** Stephanie Thoe, Graphic Designer

# Connecting with Our Growing Immigrant Population

## Trends

Immigration is changing the face of Minnesota, posing many challenges and opportunities for city leaders. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Minnesota is a low-immigration state, with only 6 percent of its population foreign-born, compared to 12 percent nationwide. But our rate of immigration is growing—more immigrants (15,456) arrived in Minnesota in 2005 than in any of the previous 25 years. Minnesota's immigrants make up 1.4 percent of the total U.S. immigrant population. And among the 50 states, Minnesota has the 17th largest immigrant population.<sup>1</sup>



AMONG THE 50 STATES,  
MINNESOTA HAS THE  
17TH LARGEST  
IMMIGRANT  
POPULATION.

As of the 2000 Census, Asians represented the largest foreign-born population in the state (40 percent) and were principally Hmong, Vietnamese, Chinese, Asian Indian, and Laotians.

Latin Americans, primarily Mexicans, made up 24 percent of the state's foreign-born population. Europeans were 17 percent and Africans 13 percent. The number of immigrants from African countries continues to increase—in 2005, two in every five Minnesota immigrants came from Africa.<sup>2</sup>

In 2002, 63 percent of Minnesota immigrants came to join family members, while 16 percent came to work and 12 percent came as refugees. Minnesota has traditionally led the nation in the percentage of immigrants who are refugees or were admitted to the country through family reunification sponsorship.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, immigration to the United States has been an urban phenomenon. But since the mid-1990s, there have been rapid and dramatic proportional changes in the racial and ethnic diversity of suburban cities and rural towns. By 2000, more immigrants in metro areas nationwide lived in

suburbs than in the urban core, and large numbers had moved into states not traditionally thought of as gateway states, including Minnesota.<sup>4</sup>

Minnesota's jobs in manufacturing, hospitality, construction, food processing, and agriculture have been a strong magnet for immigrants. But while minority population growth accounted for 57 percent of Minnesota's population growth in the 1990s, immigrants are unevenly dispersed across the state. Large concentrations of immigrants live in Minneapolis and St. Paul, in particular suburbs, and in rural communities with food processing plants.

Public opinion polls show that many established residents feel that immigrants are not adapting and assimilating to American life quickly enough. But the reality is that today's immigrant families are learning English more quickly and are less likely to return to their country of origin than were the immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>5</sup> On balance, younger immigrants also have a positive impact on the financials of government programs, including Social Security.<sup>6</sup>

Percent of Minnesota Cities Experiencing Immigration-Related Changes



Minnesota's workforce is seeing and will continue to see significant changes resulting from immigration. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that 20 percent of new workers entering the U.S. labor force between 2002 and 2012 will be Latino. This may be good news for Minnesota, which has the highest Latino labor force participation rate in the nation. Our increases in immigration coincide with another unprecedented demographic change: the aging of our society. By 2020, Minnesota will have more people over the age of 65 than school-age children, and the immigrant population will become our largest source of new workers.<sup>7</sup>

### Trend Effect: City Services

The League of Minnesota Cities has already done a great deal of work in identifying the challenges and opportunities presented by immigration, and is making resources available to cities. A 2007 League survey of cities showed that due to new immigrant populations, 12 percent of Minnesota cities with populations over 1,500 were experiencing community changes "to a great degree." More than half (54 percent) said they were experiencing changes "to some degree," with 34 percent reporting no immigration-related changes.

Minnesota city officials identified their main diversity issues as communication, cultural differences, housing, and a lack of community integration. When asked about barriers to addressing those issues, cities reported a lack of money; a lack of will or commitment by the mayor, city council, or staff to prioritize diversity issues; a lack of time to do the work; communication and cultural differences; not knowing how to proceed; and limited staff capacity.

In a 2006 meeting of more than a dozen Minnesota cities, most reported particular challenges related to undocumented immigrants. Not surprisingly, the major challenge was identity documentation. Residents who are not legal immigrants frequently use false identification, and several individuals may share the same identity documents to verify status

for employment or access medical services at hospitals. Other challenges included overcrowding in housing, illegal parking of too many vehicles, and general code compliance issues. Language barriers were an ongoing issue as well, with cities bearing substantial costs for building a multilingual staff or for interpretive services.

## Civic Responsibility

City officials are elected and appointed to ensure that residents receive quality city services, to engage them in the city governance process, and to lead the community in setting and achieving a shared vision of the future.

***The League's cultural diversity work over the past seven years found four main reasons for cities to build ethnic and cultural inclusivity:***

## Economic Development

Ethnic populations contribute significantly to the economic base of Minnesota communities through an estimated \$6 billion in buying power and by providing a stable workforce, as well as entrepreneurship and job creation.

## Community Harmony

Your community's residents likely have various expectations about the assimilation of newcomers, both in the level and speed of adopting community norms and English as their primary language. "Bilateral assimilation"—where both long-term residents and newcomers modify behaviors and expectations to accommodate each other—may be the approach that best prevents conflict and results in community harmony. This approach is unlikely to develop without leadership from city hall.

## Loss Control

While there are many positive factors that motivate city officials to build inclusive communities, it is also a reality that serious liability issues can arise if cities do not comply with civil rights laws. From public safety to employment practices, city officials need to be aware of the liability risks they face and work to reduce those risks.

## Trend Effect: City Employment

Unlike the white population, which is aging overall, ethnically diverse immigrant populations fit the more traditional profile of each new generation being larger than the one before it. Simply put, retiring baby boomer city staff are increasingly likely to be replaced by younger immigrants.

Yet officials from communities with already significant immigrant populations report a strong hesitancy on the part of those residents to apply for city positions; they don't yet seem to believe that city hall is a welcoming place for them to work. Cities need

to take very proactive and deliberate steps to recruit and retain newcomer and non-white employees.

They will need to affirmatively reach out in culturally sensitive and nontraditional ways to persuade members of ethnic populations to apply for city positions. Some cities report a perceived barrier, department by department, that must be broken by the first newcomer or non-white employee.

Cities will also need to provide training in cultural competence to city employees so those employees can both serve ethnic populations and work successfully in an increasingly diverse workforce.

Officials from communities with already significant **immigrant** populations report a strong **hesitancy** on the part of those residents to apply for **city positions**; they don't yet seem to believe that **city hall** is a welcoming place for them to work.

# Putting the Power of Dialogue to Work for your Community

**Increasingly, public officials are learning that** one of the most effective ways to address challenging community issues is through citizen and stakeholder dialogue. Conducting such dialogues is part of the growing citizen engagement—or “democratic governance”—movement that seeks to tap the insights, energy, understanding, and experiences of “everyday citizens” to address public issues.

Those involved in the democratic governance movement have found that by talking in groups people are more easily able to balance individual needs with the common good. They relearn the civic skills many have lost—the ability to talk, debate, persuade, negotiate, be creative, and find compromise. When

citizens with different viewpoints talk to each other to develop policy recommendations that are rooted in the common ground among them, the participants:

- Learn more about the issues.
- Connect their personal experiences to the policy debate.
- Develop detailed plans and policy recommendations.
- Devote their own time and energy to implementing those action ideas.
- Forge effective working relationships with others, including city elected officials and staff.

This type of dialogue may be very effective when dealing with demographic issues, including meeting the needs of immigrants.



# 6 Steps to Conducting a Stakeholder Dialogue

Taking a democratic dialogue approach to addressing issues can be made as simple, or as sophisticated, as you like and as makes sense for the issue and the relevant individuals and groups with which you are working. While democratic engagement can take place in a number of different forums, the type of dialogues we are suggesting here work best with a small group—ideally 10 to 12 individuals. They gather to discuss a topic, identify resources, and develop an action plan, and perhaps take responsibility for implementing that plan. If a larger number of stakeholders needs or wants to be involved in the dialogues, the group can be broken down into subgroups. The collective insights of the various groups are then compiled into a common report.

*The basic steps to conducting a dialogue include:*

1

## Identify the stakeholders.

Who is or will be affected by the outcome of this discussion? Who has an interest in it? Who can impact the outcome and the success of any implementation effort? Assess what other local governments have done in this area, including counties and school districts. For most of the issues, almost anyone in your community might have a stake in the outcome, so think broadly.

2

## Recruit the stakeholders.

Invite participation by the individuals (or representatives of groups) identified in Step 1. Be careful not to invite just the usual group of community activists. Encourage all groups, including those that may not have participated in city issues in the past, to become involved. Be sure as well that there is good participation and balance by age, gender, economic status, family status, geography, ethnicity, occupation, and so forth. For most issues, you may also want to publish a general announcement inviting anyone who is interested to participate. Consider different ways of contacting individuals in your community, especially younger generations, who may rely upon different technologies for social interaction.

## Additional resources on dialogues:

- The Democratic Governance page on the National League of Cities. To view this page, visit [www.nlc.org/resources\\_for\\_cities](http://www.nlc.org/resources_for_cities), click on “Programs & Services,” and then click on “Democratic Governance.”
- *Smart Democracy: How to Engage Citizens*—a publication available for purchase from the International City/County Management Association at bookstore.[icma.org/Smart\\_Democracy\\_How\\_to\\_Engage\\_P1241C23.cfm](http://icma.org/Smart_Democracy_How_to_Engage_P1241C23.cfm).
- Everyday Democracy is a nonprofit organization that works to help communities engage in successful dialogue. For information, visit [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org).
- For more information about community dialogues, contact **Kevin Frazell**, League of Minnesota Cities director of member services, at (651) 281-1215 or [kfrazell@lmc.org](mailto:kfrazell@lmc.org).

### 3

#### Retain a facilitator.

Conducting successful small group dialogues usually necessitates the services of a trained facilitator. The facilitator takes responsibility for helping the group get through the dialogue, makes sure all participants have a balanced opportunity to speak, leads the discussions toward conclusions, and if appropriate, an action plan. The facilitator does not directly participate in the content of the discussion, offer his or her own personal opinions, or lead the discussion in a particular direction or toward predetermined conclusions. Many organizations today have staff who are trained in group facilitation skills.

If your city doesn't have a trained facilitator on staff, check with your county, school district, institutions of higher education, larger local/regional businesses, or the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Any of these organizations might be willing to contribute a few hours of their facilitator's time to a community dialogue on an important issue. And, of course, you will need to be clear about expectations for the facilitator. Beyond facilitation, will he or she be expected, for example, to type notes, prepare a report, or make public presentations?

### 4

#### Establish your meeting times and locations.

City hall can work, but consider an optional location where everyday citizens are more used to congregating—e.g., library, coffee shop, park building, or community center. Be sure the setting is comfortable and can provide enough seating. The setting should also accommodate a group discussion (i.e., seats can be arranged in a circle or some other way that is conducive to a group conversation). Arrange for refreshments. Depending on who is in the group, you may also need to provide for child care.

## 5

**Use this Discussion Guide to conduct the dialogues.**

Using the Discussion Guide in Section 3, feel free to modify the questions in a way that seems more relevant to your community or to the group. It is best, however, to keep the questions very broad so as not to lead the discussion into predetermined directions. The idea is to connect a current community issue to the values and life experiences of the members of the group, and to their commitment to becoming involved in addressing the issue.

The Discussion Guide in Section 3 is designed to take the group through several discussions, including:

- Background and personal connection to the issue;
- Consensus-building on what the issue is about;
- Future vision about what can and should be done; and
- Development of an action plan, including agreement on assignment of responsibilities for follow-through.

The introduction on the growing immigrant population (Section 1) is designed to serve as a resource for the discussion process.

It's important that someone take notes to document the dialogues, including an outline of the group discussion, agreement points, action plan, and follow-up responsibilities.

## 6

**Follow through on next steps.**

Determine whether completion of the dialogues is sufficient in itself, with the work of implementation to be turned over to others, such as staff, or whether further follow-up discussions and action steps require additional meetings. Also be sure to get evaluations from the participants on the dialogue itself. What worked? What didn't? What could be improved?

**With productive community conversations, you can explore the possibilities—and celebrate your successes!**

# Discussion Guide:

## Immigrant Population

**This guide deals with the topic of immigration.** This topic has two components: general community issues and city employment. A dialogue on city employment may have a narrower group of stakeholders that includes current city staff and representatives of ethnic groups. The guide provides two alternative Topic 2 sessions—one related to community issues and the other to city employment issues. You can select whichever seems more relevant to the purposes of your group, or use both if appropriate.

Dealing with the issue of immigration can create special challenges in terms of civic involvement. New immigrant groups, and perhaps even those who have been in the community for a while, may not believe they are truly welcome at the dialogue meetings. Many come from cultures with no history of such authentic involvement, and where, in fact, relations with government were very difficult. For ideas on how to specifically reach such groups, consult the League of Minnesota Cities publication *Building Inclusive Communities: An Action Guide for City Leaders*, available at [www.lmc.org/page/1/cultural-diversity.jsp](http://www.lmc.org/page/1/cultural-diversity.jsp).

### Begin each session with a reminder of the ground rules for having an effective dialogue:

- Everyone deserves respect.
- Everyone gets the same opportunity to speak and be heard—only one person talks at a time.
- Participants can disagree, but they must do so amicably and without personal attacks.

# Discussion Guide: Immigrant Population

## Topic 1

### Personal Experience and Perceptions

This topic allows the group members to begin exploring their respective experiences and perceptions with regard to immigration.

- What ethnic groups originally founded this community? When was that? Why did they come here?
- When did you (or your ancestors) come to the United States? Where from? Why?
- Describe a situation where you personally felt like an “outsider” within the surrounding culture. Did anyone reach out to make you feel more welcome and comfortable? How did they do that? If not, what could someone have done for you?
- What new ethnic groups have come to this community over the past 10+ years?
- How have existing residents reacted to these new ethnic groups?
- What strengths does our community have to help us integrate newcomers into community life?
- What obstacles to the integration of newcomers do we face?

## Topic 2

### Our Current Reality

Building on the groundwork laid in the first discussion, this topic is intended to lead the group into discussion about the realities of ethnicity and immigration in this community, and to begin coming together to strengthen the community through awareness and mutual understanding.

- What is the current ethnic makeup of our community? (*Use sound statistics.*)
- Where do the various groups live?
- What do we know about the cultures these people come from? What information do we want everyone in our community to know? What do we want to understand better?
- How much do differing ethnic groups here interact with the historic population and with each other? Are they comfortable with one another? Does the comfort level seem to be increasing or decreasing over time?
- Let’s talk about the experience our community is having as new immigrants interact with the following groups (*this list provides examples; tailor to your city’s needs*):

- employers
- retailers
- law enforcement
- schools
- medical services
- other city government services
- social service agencies

- Have staff of these organizations been provided with training in intercultural relations and cultural sensitivity?
- Are a sufficient number of staff in these organizations able to speak the new languages being spoken in our community?

## Topic 2—Additional (*optional*)

### City Employment

Building on the groundwork laid in the first discussion, this topic is intended to guide the group into a more in-depth dialogue about the realities of ethnicity in the city workforce.

- What is the current ethnic makeup of the city workforce? How does it compare to the makeup of the community?
- When we advertise city positions, do members of ethnic groups newer to the community apply? Why or why not?
- How comfortable are employees of differing ethnic backgrounds working together?
- Are our employees adequately trained in cultural sensitivity in the workplace?

## Topic 3

### Action Plan

At this stage the group starts to move from vision and ideals to action!

- How would we like the various ethnic groups to interact in our community?
- What obstacles do we face to make that happen?
- What specific steps need to be taken to move toward our ideal future?
- What will each of us here commit to doing?
- Who else needs to be engaged at this point to move our plan forward?

This session should end with agreement about who will write the action plan, including assignments of responsibilities for implementation and how the group wishes to review, modify, and commit to that plan.

You may copy pages of this booklet for use in your organization, or you may download them for further customization from the League web site at [www.lmc.org/page/1/changing-demographics.jsp](http://www.lmc.org/page/1/changing-demographics.jsp).

Copyright © 2009 League of Minnesota Cities

# Things to Think About: Immigrant Population

**As your community discusses and plans to meet the needs of its immigrant population, keep the following considerations in mind:**

- What is the projected future ethnic makeup of our community? Are we or might we become a magnet for ethnic populations? How do we work best with the state in understanding what refugee populations might be arriving in Minnesota?
- How much do we really know about who lives in our community? Do we know how many of any particular ethnic group reside here? Do we know what brought them here? Do we know where they are living?
- Do we have strategies for reaching these communities? What is our outreach plan? Do we know how immigrant populations are structured and who their accepted or designated leaders or liaisons are?
- How do these new immigrant groups feel about our city and about our community? How do perceptions vary by ethnicity or country of origin? Do they feel welcome? Do they wish to become a part of community life, or are they maintaining a separate existence?
- How much do we know about the culture from which they came, and in particular, how that affects their view of city government and government officials, especially law enforcement?
- Are members of newcomer groups willing and inclined to cooperate with law enforcement and other public safety personnel? If not, why?
- Is our city staff trained to respond successfully to new residents? Are there provisions for communicating in their native languages (e.g., interpretation services)?
- Are our housing and other city codes creating unique issues with these populations?
- Are we finding ways to encourage ethnically diverse immigrants to become engaged with our community? What type of message do city officials send about how welcoming our community should be? What else could we be doing?
- What is the human rights violation process available to members of ethnic populations within our community?
- Are ethnic populations represented in our current city workforce? Do they apply when there are openings for city positions? If not, why?
- What specific steps, if any, have we taken to affirmatively recruit and retain ethnic employees?
- Is our city staff sufficiently trained in intercultural competency, so as to reduce workplace conflict?

## Endnotes

1. U.S. Census Bureau.
2. Professor Katherine Fennelly, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Professor Richard Alba, SUNY-Albany, and Professor Victor Nee, Cornell University.
6. National Research Council and the Social Security Administration.
7. Minnesota State Economist Tom Stinson and Minnesota State Demographer Tom Gillaspay.



**League of Minnesota Cities**  
145 University Avenue West  
St. Paul, MN 55103-2044  
(651) 281-1200 (800) 925-1122  
TDD (651) 281-1290 Fax (651) 281-1299  
[www.lmc.org](http://www.lmc.org)



