Community Assistantship Program

Report of the Findings from the Diversity Leadership Workshop: Focus on Immigration in Rural Communities
Report of the Findings from the Diversity Leadership Workshop: Focus on Immigration in Rural Communities

Prepared in partnership with
Faribault School District #656

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November, 2004

CAP Report 073a
CAP is a cross-college, cross-campus University of Minnesota initiative coordinated by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

Funds for this project were generously provided by the Otto Bremer Foundation and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

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November 4, 2004

To: CAP Program

From: Katherine Fennelly, Professor of Public Affairs, Humphrey Institute

Re: Diversity Training Evaluation

I am very pleased to send you a report of our project "Development and Dissemination of a Regional Model for Diversity Training in Rural Communities." When the project began I never would have believed that it would be as successful as it has proven to be. We had several starts, stops and twists in the planning - perhaps an inevitability for this kind of community-based work. We were especially pleased with findings from the 3-month follow-up summarized at the end of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report presents the results of an evaluation of a diversity training workshop that was piloted in Faribault, MN on August 18-20, 2003. This workshop, entitled "Focus on Immigration in Rural Minnesota," was the culmination of a pilot project funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation, the Faribault School District, the Rice County Family Service Collaborative and CURA at the University of Minnesota. It was the result of an extensive planning process that sought inclusive ways to change community attitudes toward immigrants and other diverse individuals in greater Minnesota. Twenty-five individuals participated in the three-day workshop, and 16 of these completed both a pre- and a post-survey. Comprehensive data collection, including pre- and post-surveys, participant observation, and document analysis, sought both to capture formative information for improving the workshop and to use a survey that would meaningfully demonstrate the session's outcomes.

We contracted with two evaluators to do assessments of the summer workshop. Yi Du, an evaluator with the Edina Public School District, analyzed the pre- and post-workshop survey forms, and Jean King, professor of educational policy and administration, advised us on the overall project evaluation and helped to summarize project results.

In addition to participant knowledge gains and very high levels of satisfaction with the workshop, there are numerous indications that the project has seeded important community change. A few examples include an on-going strategic planning group committed to continuing the work begun at the August workshop; new commitments of funding for diversity work (shared staffing at the Welcome Center by a local community organization and from the Hormel-Jennie-O Turkey Store, commitment from the Faribault School Superintendent to fund further diversity training); the creation of a "public response team" - a network of workshop participants interested in preventing, monitoring and responding to public attacks on immigrants; and requests to adapt and replicate some of the training activities from the August workshop with other groups.
As the project evolved we began to view it less as a regional model that might lead to exact replication of a packaged program, and more as a process for engaging diverse community members in a strategic planning effort and providing them with multiple resources. To this end we have produced and disseminated multiple copies of the publication "Guidelines for the Development of Diversity Education and Anti-Racism Projects in Rural Communities." The notebook includes educational materials and resources that can be applied or adapted to other communities undergoing rapid demographic change. Copies of the workbook can be obtained for the duplication cost of $15 by sending a check to my attention made out to the University of Minnesota.

We would like to express our appreciation for CURA’s support of the project evaluation.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Survey results document a high level of satisfaction with the workshop. Participants reported that, because of the workshop, they have a better understanding of diversity, have more information and know more resources, and can use these to enhance their work. Ninety-four percent of survey participants wrote they would recommend the workshop to colleagues, and a sizeable majority of those who took part (88%) said the workshop met their personal goals. In addition, importantly, they reported a personal motivation to lead changes in their community.

Evidence from the survey shows that this workshop increased participants' knowledge of immigrant issues. In particular, participants significantly gained knowledge about the following three topics: the Rights of the Child, the percentage of immigrants in Minnesota, and the years needed for even an educated non-native speaker of English to become English proficient. Also, people's positive attitude toward immigrants and their cultural competence reportedly increased slightly because of this workshop. In particular, more people perceived that immigrants to the US "generally contribute more than they take" and that immigrant students need to be taught in both English and in their native language. Not surprisingly, given the nature and length of the intervention, more evidence supported participants' knowledge gain than changes in their attitudes, i.e., their attitude towards immigrants, their perception of racism, and their self-ratings of cultural competence.

The survey results point to the topic of community interaction as one that may deserve attention. Perhaps not surprisingly, the results for community interaction show that (1) most adults (71% or more) have close relationships with European Americans and (2) that the amount of interaction with European Americans is nearly two or three times greater than that with any minority groups. Furthermore, with the exception of the Latino group, children reportedly follow similar patterns of community interaction. Because the survey purposely did not include an item asking people's race/ethnicity, it is not clear how different racial or ethnic groups reported their interaction levels, suggesting the likely value of adding such a question to future versions of the survey. In addition, future
offerings of the workshop may wish to more closely examine the concept and practice of community interaction in order to effect long-term change.

POST-WORKSHOP UPDATE ON COMMUNITY ACTION, NOVEMBER, 2003

The following provides examples of the impact and sustainability of community connections forged at the August, 2003 Diversity Leadership Workshop in Faribault

1. Joint Funding Offer for Welcome Center Staff

Before the workshop the Welcome Center (an organization for new immigrants in Faribault) was struggling to find volunteer and paid staff to keep their doors open. As a result of contacts made during the Diversity Leadership Workshop, the director of the Riverbend Nature Center has offered to partner with them to fund a staff person to work at the Welcome Center.

In addition, the Turkey Store in Faribault has committed to paying employees to volunteer at the Welcome Center each week.

2. Creation of a Public Response Team for Public Action and Systems Change

On one evening of the Diversity Leadership Workshop, community members were invited to an open forum on diversity. Approximately 20 members of an Owatonna-based group attended the forum in order to loudly voice their anti-immigrant views. As a result of this members of the workshop decided to form a “public response team” to write letters to local newspaper editors, speak openly with community members, observe the activities of local hate groups and take other actions to promote multi-cultural integration.

3. Letters to the Editor

In the two months following the Aug. 18-20 Diversity Leadership Workshop, there have been two op-ed page editorials by workshop participants and one article about diversity in the Faribault public schools printed in the Faribault Daily News. Additional articles have quoted workshop participants in their role as activists/advocates for diversity in schools and in the community.

4. School District Response to the Workshop

As he left the August Diversity Leadership Workshop, the Faribault public schools superintendent turned to the group to say, "This was wonderful. I'd like this group to reconvene in six months, and I'll foot the bill.” The Superintendent of schools is heading a strategic coordinating committee to plan this follow-up. Other committee members include representatives from the local Latino community, Northfield School District, the League of Women Voters and the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Since the workshop, a Faribault high school teacher has written to us to say that some of her colleagues would like to host a youth panel discussion similar to the panel of immigrant youth presented at the workshop.
5. Requests for Workshop Materials

Several people have requested and received the resource guide and other materials/research as the result of this workshop. They include individuals from Faribault who heard about the materials after the workshop, and people from other parts of the Midwest.

6. Informal Feedback

One participant wrote to say that she'd heard from another that the trip to the migrant work camp was “a life-changing event.” Some of the educators at the workshop have asked how they might replicate this experience or share their observations with students so that they too could better understand the life realities of contemporary immigrants.

7. Information/Dissemination

The League of Women Voters of Minnesota featured a story about the diversity workshop in their September 2003 publication. The Humphrey Institute's September newsletter also included a brief mention.

8. Requests for Replication

The West Metro School Education Program in Minneapolis (a voluntary desegregation program) has asked to use some of the diversity training and evaluation materials used in Faribault.

The warden of the Faribault Correctional Facility has asked Dr. Fennelly if she would develop a diversity education program for the 600 staff of the prison.

9. Chamber of Commerce Endorsement

A thank you letter to Kathy Fennelly from Kymn Anderson, President of the Faribault Chamber of Commerce complements Professor Fennelly's dedication to the issue of racism in rural communities, and stated that the Faribault business community will benefit as a result of her work.

10. Continued Communication Among Workshop Participants

Communications among workshop participants - some participants have maintained the connections they established at the Diversity Leadership Workshop with people and organizations with whom they'd not interacted before.

11. Academic Interest

A Faribault Public Schools teacher is writing her Master's Degree thesis on bilingual education, and requested information about the summer workshop and about the collaborative actions and research that members of this group have done in Faribault.