

## **Executive Summary**

### **AFTER THE WELCOME CENTER:**

### **RENEWING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT IMMIGRATION & DIVERSITY IN FARIBAUT**

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## **Abstract**

This report presents ideas from Faribault, Minnesota about how increased immigration and diversity challenge public services and community relations. Immigration has changed Faribault, Minnesota's population dramatically in recent years. In 2010, nearly one-fifth of local residents identified as non-white, up from only two percent twenty years earlier. Various sources indicate that most of those persons are recent immigrants and their family members. For ten of the last twenty years, the Welcome Center offered advice and support to immigrant and refugee newcomers about how to access local services and build a productive life in Faribault. With the Welcome Center's closing in December 2010, Faribault finds itself at a turning point in responding to the arrival of so many new residents. Featuring insights gathered through interviews St. Olaf College students conducted with Faribault community leaders in March and April 2011, this report seeks to open new conversations and paths of action "after the Welcome Center," about how Faribault can best incorporate its newest residents.

## **Contents summarized**

### **1. Introduction**

Introduces the intent and scope of the report.

### **2. Immigration and diversity in Minnesota**

Presents statistics on recent demographic change due to immigration; historical discussion of immigration trends; and a brief explanation of why immigrants move to Minnesota.

### **3. Immigration and diversity in Faribault**

Describes the trends in immigration to Faribault in the last two decades and how the city has responded to the resulting changes in its population. Includes a discussion of the Welcome Center's mission and reactions to its closing.

### **4. Critical Needs and Key Issues: Original Research Findings**

Reports community leaders' understanding of what issues confront Faribault, based on the interviews conducted during the spring of 2011. Identifies three major categories of issues, detailing the scope and content of each, and interviewees' ideas about what actions should be taken to address them.

- (1)** Lack of consensus on how the process of incorporating immigrants should proceed, replicating the national debate about how much immigrants should assimilate and how much native communities should strive to accommodate them.
- (2)** Community-wide issues, regarding cultural differences, communication practices, and organizational patterns, compromise the ability of service providers, public officials, concerned citizens, and immigrant residents to respond to the challenges created by recent immigration.

- (3) Immigrant-specific issues, regarding the immediate problems newcomers face in daily life (in the areas of education, employment, housing, transportation and economic opportunity), require creative thinking in a time of scarce resources.

## 5. Recommendations

Offers seven specific recommendations for further discussion and action:

- (1) We recommend concerted effort and sustained attention to improving communication and networks among the various public agencies, non-profit organizations, religious institutions and informal groups that are directly concerned with immigration and diversity issues.
- (2) We recommend that public and private responses to immigration and diversity issues be data-driven and grounded in research. We find that community leaders need to know more about the following five issues at this time:
  1. What immigrants themselves believe to be their greatest needs;
  2. What the general population of citizens in Faribault thinks about immigration and diversity issues;
  3. What services are provided where, how often, with what conditions and by whom;
  4. Who accesses which services and who participates in public meetings, events and discussions; and
  5. What best practices have been achieved in other small Minnesota cities.
- (3) We recommend that Faribault organizations collaborate to develop effective solutions to the language barriers that complicate relations between newcomers and native English speakers. Accessible, dependable English as a Second Language (ESL) classes should be at the heart of this effort, but translation and interpretation services will also be required.
- (4) We recommend developing and enacting plans for broader community outreach and cross-cultural education that invite participation by all Faribault residents. Such efforts are part of an overall commitment to sustained public education aimed at reducing misunderstandings among all Faribault residents, whether immigrants or not.
- (5) We recommend more attention to assessing current programs provided by the non-profit sector and other private organizations. Assessment results should be used to improve program quality as well as administration and management of organizations overall.
- (6) We recommend more public discussion about the positive contributions under way in the Faribault schools and dedicated efforts to spread them more consistently throughout the School District.
- (7) We recommend that concerned citizens and community leaders attend directly to the ways in which government policies shape what happens in Faribault, and that they seek to influence those policies through the political process.

## 6. Appendices

Presents notes, recommended reading, reference materials, research methodology and list of persons interviewed.