



# Community Leader

Blandin Community Leadership Programs Newsletter

Volume 6 No. 2  
Summer 2007

**Community Leader** is a quarterly exchange for news, learning and connection published by the Blandin Foundation leadership programs for those engaged in the effort to develop and sustain healthy communities.

Please visit **Community Leader** online at [www.blandinfoundation.org/html/leader\\_comm\\_leader.cfm](http://www.blandinfoundation.org/html/leader_comm_leader.cfm)

Blandin Foundation  
100 N. Pokegama Avenue  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744  
Phone: 218.326.0523  
Toll Free: 877.882.2257

mjbahr@  
blandinfoundation.org

## Differences That Make a Difference

By: Nehrwr Abdul-Wahid, BCLP Trainer

The changing demographics of rural Minnesota are creating a number of opportunities to interact with people from a broad range of backgrounds unmatched in the state's history.

### The key word here – opportunity!

What a remarkable piece of wisdom it is that the Chinese symbol for crisis is the same symbol used for opportunity. While there are some that see these changes through the lens of “crisis,” the vast majority continue to experience this as a wonderful opportunity that most of our parents and grandparents did not have. The opportunity to create the kinds of diverse communities typically found in the largest and most urban areas of the country is one our workforce will be able to use to set us apart from many of our Midwest neighbors.

Unlike many of the “big cities” – the Midwest, particularly Minnesota – has a rich tradition of inclusion and hospitality. This has led to a rich mosaic of cultural expression

© Cartoonbank.com

### THE GENERATION GAP, 2002



continued on page 5

## In this Issue...

Differences That Make a Difference .. 1&5  
The Changing Faces of Minnesota ..... 2  
Leadership Toolbox ..... 2  
Leadership Notes and News ..... 3

Hibbing BCLP Reunion ..... 3  
Framing the Diversity Issue ..... 4  
Partners in Leadership Program ..... 6

# The Changing Faces of Minnesota

“Cultural diversity is not a statewide issue. It’s a local issue,” says Jack Geller, president of the Center for Rural Policy and Development.

Below is a chart illustrating some of the population changes using select counties. (Source: Center for Rural Policy and Development)

County	% Population of Color in 2004	% Change in Population of Color 1990-2004
Nobles	19.0	398.3
Stevens	4.8	63.9
Kandiyohi	10.2	147.1
Goodhue	4.8	206.1
Clearwater	11.7	50.9
Lake	2.0	99.1
Ottertail	3.6	211.0
Crow Wing	3.3	179.5
Kanabec	3.8	237.8
Yellow Medicine	4.8	134.2
St. Louis	5.9	72.1
Itasca	5.8	61.1

While it may be easy to think of diversity as the stuff that statistical charts and census data are made of - the reality is that the impact of cultural diversity may be felt most in your own backyard. Recognizing, embracing and celebrating cultural differences can be essential to working together effectively -whether the goal is building a new community school or gaining consensus on a new economic development project.

With that in mind, the Community Leadership team has assembled just a few quick statistics on how Minnesota communities have changed and are expected to change. While you may not recognize all of the changing demographics listed, chances are you’ll recognize some.

- While the vast majority of the state’s population remains Caucasian, the population of color jumped from 6.5% of the population in 1990 to 13% of the population in 2004, according to the Center for Rural Policy Development, which analyzed United States Census data. The increase was not uniform across the state; northern counties saw little change, while western and southern counties saw a large increase of Latinos, Laotians, Somalis, Sudanese, among other groups. Some of the greatest increases were found among the suburbs that ring the Twin Cities. (Source: Center for Rural Policy and Development)
- In 2015, projections estimate that 19% of children under the age of 15 will be nonwhite - compared to 5% of people over 65 years of age. (Source: State Demographic Center)
- Minnesota’s population will become more diverse in the future. In 2000, 9% of Minnesotans identified themselves as nonwhite. This is projected to rise to 13% by 2015 and 16% by 2030. The fraction who are Latino is projected to rise from 3% in 2000 to 6% in 2030. (Source: State Demographic Center)

## Leadership Toolbox:

### Recognizing Diversity Opportunities

In this issue of Community Leader, our leadership team has tackled the issue of recognizing the opportunities that come with diversity. The following are 5 tips to help you communicate more effectively with and invite a diverse spectrum of views to your community leadership table:

#### Tip No. 1: Learn and understand your own cultural norms as a way of better understanding others.

It’s not enough to just say, “I just respect everyone.” Be specific...what are the behaviors related to your definition of respect? Is it waiting for someone to pause for a second or two before responding or adding your own comments to something they said? Or, is it “jumping right in” mid-sentence as they’re speaking because you’re trying to show them that you’re actively engaged in the conversation (i.e., a typical Woody Allen movie!)? Both of these are examples of “respectful” communication - depending on the perspective you’re taking.

#### Tip No. 2: Be empathetic.

Everyone has a different life experience and you demonstrate effective leadership when you validate others’ experiences – even though you may not fully understand.

#### Tip No. 3: Be curious.

Express genuine interest in learning about others.

#### Tip No. 4: Be reciprocal.

Just as you express interest in learning about others, try beginning some of that conversation with information about yourself. This helps remove the idea that the one who is different from the norm is the one who is supposed to educate everyone about their difference.

#### Tip No. 5: Be flexible and adaptable.

The more you learn about others, the more you realize that everyone is different and unique – each needing some different things from you. Be wary of “one size fits all” approaches to learning about cultural differences. You have to get to know individuals as well as within the context of the many groups to which they belong.

*We’ll all make a few mistakes– but remember – authenticity trumps perfection!*

# Leadership Notes and News:



**Diana Anderson (2002 BCLP, Hutchinson)** was promoted to chief operating officer for the Southwest Initiative Foundation. This newly created position is designed to provide leadership and oversight to the SWIF's internal operations and functions. Anderson previously worked as the SWIF development director and took on her new position on April 9, 2007. Sherry Ristau, SWIF president/CEO said of Anderson's promotion: "Diana has done an outstanding job as our development director for the past six years. That experience, combined with her background in hospital administration, has prepared her well to assume her new role as COO. Diana embodies all of the (SWI) Foundation's core values and demonstrates the highest degree of professionalism and integrity in all she does." (Source: Southwest Initiative Foundation, [www.swmnfoundation.org](http://www.swmnfoundation.org))

**Gary Geiger (1991 BCLP, Willmar)** was recently welcomed to the Southwest Initiative Foundation Board of Trustees. He is the chairman of the board and president of Heritage Bancshares Group, Inc. and chairman/chief executive officer of Heritage Bank N.A. - Willmar, Spicer, Raymond and Pennock. Geiger is active in his community in numerous ways including serving as director of the Willmar Design Center, chairman of the Gateway Transportation and Parking Committee, chairman of the Bethel Lutheran Church Downtown Ministry Committee, chairman of the Airport Taskforce of the Economic Development Commission, member of the Economic Development Commission's Business Retention Committee and serving on several committees of the Minnesota Bankers Association. (Source: Southwest Initiative Foundation, [www.swmnfoundation.org](http://www.swmnfoundation.org))



**Michele Gordon, Duluth/Superior**, was recently named co-chairwoman of the American Indian Commission, a city of Duluth advisory committee. Gordon is a member of the Bad River Band of Chippewa in Odanah, Wis. and a leadership consultant on staff with the Blandin Foundation.

"Leadership Notes and News" is a regular feature of Community Leader celebrating the accomplishments and endeavors of Blandin Foundation Leadership Program alumni as well as the communities which have been served by its programs. Those who have a notes and news item to share can e-mail it to: [mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org) or send it via USPS mail to Blandin Foundation, 100 North Pokegama Avenue, Grand Rapids, MN 55744. Attn: Community Leader editor.

## Hibbing BCLP Reunion

One of the first groups in Hibbing, MN to receive BCLP training reunited this Spring at the March 2007 "Blizzard" rendezvous. The group gathered to evaluate professional and personal involvements and set goals for the future. The alumni reunion included a group who received their BCLP training in 1990. Pictured are, seated: Pat Ives, Kay Krtinich, John Michaels and Cathy Baudeck. Standing are: Patty Miller, Steve Rauker, Nancy Larson, Terry Moore, Helen Thran, Jack Ross, Bill Lah, Joanne Lipovitz and Lance Sundquist.

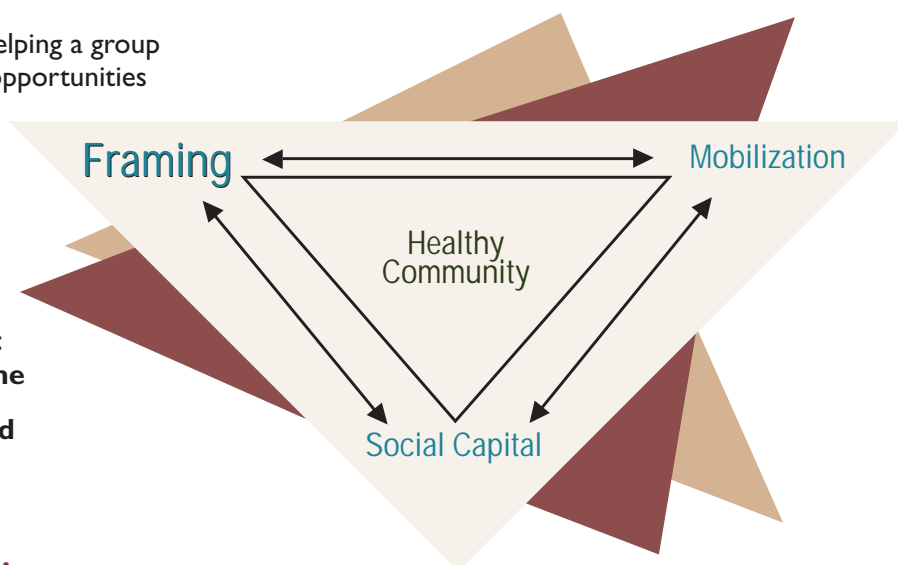


# Framing the Diversity Issue:

Framing - a definition: Framing means helping a group or community recognize and define its opportunities and issues in ways that result in effective action.

## Framing helps:

- the group or community decide what needs to be done
- define why it is important that it be done and how it has to be done
- to communicate that in clear and compelling ways



## Community Example of Framing: A Welcoming Community

When you drive into this town your first reaction is, this must be that mythical, quiet, small-town America community I read about somewhere. It looks like a Norman Rockwell painting. Within five minutes, however, you realize it can't be that place. Everyone may be "handsome" and "good-looking" (borrowing Garrison Keillor's description of people in the small town of Lake Wobegon, MN.). At the same time, you see faces of every hue and color. You hear children speaking in English and to their grandparents in Spanish, Cambodian or Somali. You sense a vibrancy in the community as a local radio station runs ads for the upcoming multicultural festival.

The transformation of this community started 15 years ago. That's when the labor needs of its major industries, which focus on food production, outgrew the local workforce. Soon jobs were being filled by waves of newcomers from Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa.

As this trend accelerated, the mayor convened a diverse group - people from communities of color, members of the city staff, representatives from the school, and spokespersons from the area's major employers. She asked these people to become a task force to document the population changes that had already taken place. She also wanted them to anticipate what changes were coming next and predict their implications.

The task force's report was rich in detail. Yet, it could be summarized in two key points:

- The population trends are likely to continue, with the community becoming more diverse in the foreseeable future.

- The way that current residents, units of government, local groups, and local organizations respond to this change will significantly affect how unified or fragmented the community becomes in the future.

The report was shared with and discussed by the various community groups represented on the task force. Next, the members of the task force challenged themselves with a question, What values should guide our community's responses to newcomers?

That conversation was not easy. But the group was able, with the help of the mayor, to agree that:

- Every resident is a potential asset to the community.
- No matter where they come from, new residents are more apt to see themselves as an asset - and to be seen by others as an asset - if their transition into the community is a positive one.

As the discussion drew to a close, one of the task force members captured the essence of the group's agreement: "I was taught that community is the gift or legacy we give the next generation. Tonight we've decided that the legacy we want to leave is to be a welcoming community for everyone."

**Editor's Note:** The above text was excerpted from *The Community Leadership Handbook* by James Krile, Gordy Curphy and Duane R. Lund. The above passage provides one example of framing the diversity issue. Diversity, however, is not only an issue of color or ethnicity, but can also be an issue of gender, economics, religion, sexual orientation, age or culture. And, with that in mind, every community has opportunities to turn its diversity into an asset.

# Differences That Make a Difference *Continued*

through the arts, food and various clothing trends. This aspect of culture will be a driving force all over the state for new business opportunities and renewed economic growth.

But this is but one aspect of culture...and a very small one at that. Culture is about the way we interact, the way we see the world and the way we understand and define our communities. It influences so much of what we think and feel. And to further complicate things, we all belong to and actively participate in more than one culture at any given time!

Take for example John and Fatimah, working together on a class science project. John brings the cultural experiences and influence of his family – being an only child, his church – Midwestern Lutheran, his white-skinned U.S. American identity...and of course – being a 16-year-old male in high school! A true culture within itself! Fatimah brings her cultural experience of being the oldest of four children, Somali, Muslim, female and

once again...being a 16-year-old female in high school! While they may have many things in common – they also have many differences that may merit attention if they are to work together effectively.

Some of these individual perspective differences include their concepts of modesty as it relates to interactions across genders, their concepts of time, their approach to building relationships and even their definitions of “personal space” (the comfortable distance between two people as they communicate with one another).

None of these aspects that make each individual unique is readily visible to the eye.

The iceberg that sank the Titanic could neither be averted nor plowed through. The structure underneath was simply too massive. Just as that iceberg’s mass was not readily apparent, so are the “invisible” aspects of culture. These hidden but underlying structures of culture are the very places which need our attention.



Image from the Center for Rural Policy and Development

## Further Reading...

### **The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down**, Anne Fadimon

Lia Lee was born in 1981 to a family of recent Hmong immigrants, and soon developed symptoms of epilepsy. By 1988 she was living at home but was brain dead after a tragic cycle of misunderstanding, overmedication, and culture clash: “What the doctors viewed as clinical efficiency the Hmong viewed as frosty arrogance.” *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* is a tragedy of Shakespearean dimensions, written with the deepest of human feeling. Sherwin Nuland said of the account, “There are no villains in Fadiman’s tale, just as there are no heroes. People are presented as she saw them, in their humility and their frailty--and their nobility.”

For more information on understanding diversity issues for effective leadership the Community Leader Team recommends [www.oneummahconsulting.com](http://www.oneummahconsulting.com). One Ummah is a team of trainers and consultants from a broad range of fields who assist organizations in building their multicultural competence. With over 50 years of combined experience, they offer innovative solutions, comprehensive strategies, and a wide range of services to help organizations move from awareness to action in creating more inclusive and productive work and learning environments.

### **Other helpful Web sites include:**

[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org); [www.splcenter.org/index.jsp](http://www.splcenter.org/index.jsp) and [www.edchange.org](http://www.edchange.org)

# Community Leader

Blandin Community Leadership Programs Newsletter



BLANDIN FOUNDATION™

Blandin Foundation  
100 N. Pokegama Avenue  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Address Service Requested

NonProfit ORG  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Duluth, MN  
PERMIT No. 1003

## Partners in Leadership Program

This edition of Community Leader highlighted some of the cultural differences that exist throughout rural Minnesota, as well as opening the conversation about the complexity that rural leaders work with everyday. The Foundation is often asked to develop training that helps communities begin to identify and work through issues of cultural difference. The Partners in Leadership Program (PIL) is a leadership program that helps alumni begin to work effectively across those differences.

The Foundation piloted a newly designed PIL on May 30, 2007 in partnership with the community of Willmar. The new program is designed to work with issues facing your community in real time and help the participants begin to work more effectively in multicultural groups. Willmar has just begun their journey with PIL, but we have had great feedback on the practical uses of the training.

- “I have learned there is more to culture than race & ethnicity” - Willmar participant, 2007
- “Now that I am aware of some of the stumbling blocks, I can recognize situations and how I interact.” - Willmar participant, 2007



**If you and/or your community is interested in learning more about PIL please contact:  
Malissa Bahr at 877-882-2257 or [mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org) .**