Towards Action

A synthesis report on the notes from the 2013 FAIRE Multicultural Community Fall Mini-Conference

On Thursday, October 24, 2013, 75 people spent three hours in the Faribault High School gym, discussing "how to make Faribault a more unified and welcoming community." Working at five tables, people shared many hopes for Faribault as they came up with dozens of answers to the question. One hope was emphasized by all: the need to move beyond discussion and towards action.

Below you will find a list of action items that emerged with some clarity. We state each, then list (i) the purpose it serves, (ii) who leads, (iii) what resources they need, and (iv) what decisions remain.

The ideas reported here come from those who attended the conference: people who live and work in Faribault. St. Olaf political science students prepared a briefing paper ahead of time, facilitated discussions, and wrote this report.

The 2013 St. Olaf College Political Science 350 Course,

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1. **Create an organizational hub to address immigration and diversity related issues.** While several groups[1] try to coordinate conversations about diversity, none have emerged as a clear leader. This reality frustrates efforts towards institutional collaboration. A central organization would benefit community leaders by communicating their goals and plans. Additionally, a central organization may benefit individual Faribault residents seeking information, assistance, or the chance to cooperate with others on diversity related issues. Creating an online database, which describes existing organizations, resources, and contact information, could start this project.

   1.1. Purpose: Promote information sharing and access to resources. Increase good will and trust. Connect existing organizations, individuals to organizations, and individuals to each other.

   1.2. Who Leads: FAIRE members (together or as individual leaders of organizations) could establish a planning process for creating an organizational hub.

   1.3. Resources:
      1.3.1. Existing organizations and their leaders.
      1.3.2. Models in other Minnesota cities.[2]
      1.3.3. FAIRE's network of leaders from the school district and other public and non-profit organizations.

   1.4. Decisions:
      1.4.1. Funding - Identify funding needs and sources.
      1.4.2. Physical Space - Decide if a physical space is a priority.
      1.4.3. Leadership - Appoint one person or a small team to direct the new project.

2. **Formalize the structure, leadership, and membership of FAIRE.** Many conference attendees discussed the need for FAIRE to implement a clearly defined organizational structure, with focused action plans that move discussion. FAIRE's role in Faribault needs to be determined and advertised.

   2.1. Purpose: Strengthen and clarify FAIRE's purpose to become more effective, transparent, and visible.

   2.2. Who Leads: Active FAIRE members draft a charter and appoint a leader and spokesperson.

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[1] Examples include FAIRE, the Mayor's Task Force on Cultural Diversity, and the recently revived Faribault Diversity Coalition.

[2] Models in other Minnesota cities discussed at this conference include: Northfield's LINK Center, Austin's Welcome Center, and Rochester's Heritage Center.

2.3. Resources:

    2.3.1. Previously drafted statement of purpose.

    2.3.2. Past meeting minutes - Attendance list and discussion topics offer a first step towards creating a directory of organizations, contact list, and specific agenda.

    2.3.3. Email list of interested people.

    2.3.4. Existing web page.

2.4. Decisions:

    2.4.1. Who will serve as director and central contact person of FAIRE? For how long? Should there be subcommittees?

    2.4.2. What decision-making process works best?

    2.4.3. Who should participate in meetings?

    2.4.4. What specific tasks should be addressed?[3]

3. **Assess the needs of newcomers to Faribault directly.** Graduate students can gather relevant information for service providers and decision makers in Faribault by collecting comprehensive demographic data and information on the needs of Somali and Latino populations.

    3.1. Purpose: Survey Somali and Latino population to collect accurate demographic data and better identify needs.

    3.2. Who Leads: FAIRE should identify a specific organization that is best capable of guiding this project with academic partners.[4]

    3.3. Resources: Apply for a grant and contact graduate-level students to design the study and conduct research.[5]

    3.4. Decisions:

        3.4.1. Identify a project leader.

        3.4.2. Choose an educational partner.

        3.4.3. Seek grant funding for the project.

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[3] Suggestions during conference discussions included: rotating reports from each organization represented in FAIRE and coordinating guest speakers from other Minnesota cities.

[4] Specific organizations that were mentioned include: Growing up Healthy, So How Are the Children?, Three Rivers Community Action Center, Faribault Mayor's Task Force on Cultural Diversity, the public schools, South Central College, and the United Way.

[5] Graduate programs at the following institutions may make good partners: The University of Minnesota, Minnesota State University, Mankato, St. Mary's University and Winona State University.

4. **Organize community-building activities inclusive of all groups.** The existing yearly International Festival does this to an extent, but conference participants felt that it could be made more inviting to the broader community. Ideas proposed during the conference include cultural festivals and immigrant grocery store tours.

    4.1. Purpose: Promote inclusive, cross-cultural understanding and awareness.
    4.2. Who Leads: The School district and FAIRE in collaboration with other organizations.
    4.3. Resources:
        4.3.1. Existing community organizations, including places of worship.
        4.3.2. School district's contact information for regular meetings with local families. Student conferences may provide a good setting for festive cultural exchanges.
    4.4. Decisions:
        4.4.1. Specify type of activity/event.
        4.4.2. Choose locations that are inviting and accessible to everyone.
        4.4.3. Identify funding for events.

5. **Improve language-learning opportunities for youth and adults.** While English as a Second Language (ESL) programs currently serve youth and adults, immigrants and refugees still face significant language barriers. Perceived lack of flexibility in course offerings frustrates some adults who want to learn practical language skills. Children are often more proficient than adults. ESL teachers should work more closely with entire families.

    5.1. Purpose: Provide flexible times and locations for ESL courses, coordinate private and public programs, and improve training for volunteer instructors.
    5.2. Who leads: Public ESL/ABE programs and volunteer organizations.
    5.3. Resources:
        5.3.1. Existing public and private curriculum.
        5.3.2. Existing ties to students.
        5.3.3. Need additional training for volunteer instructors.
    5.4. Decisions:
        5.4.1. Who will coordinate public and private program curriculum?
        5.4.2. Plan to work with employers willing to cooperate with ESL providers to host on-site English classes.[6]

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[6] Austin Jennie-O hosts ESL courses at the workplace after work hours.

5.4.3. How to gather feedback from current participants on possible improvements to program curriculum?

6. **Increase positive media** through targeted outreach to newspapers when immigrant related events take place. This also includes addressing negativity on the online newspaper site. Doing so could begin changing the media culture of Faribault and native citizens' attitudes more generally.

   6.1. Purpose: Create a more positive image of immigrants through media.

   6.2. Who Leads: Existing leaders of community organizations hosting events or leading positive programs.

   6.3. Resources:

   6.3.1. Faribault Daily News managing editor, Jaci Smith (jsmith@faribault.com).

   6.3.2. The Radio station manager of La Mera Buena, Mike Castillo (info@lamerabuena107fm.com; 952 898-1122). [7]

   6.4. Decisions:

   6.4.1. When and which media outlet to contact?

   6.4.2. How best to encourage all organizations to contact the media?

   6.4.3. How to address the negativity in the newspaper website comments section and discourage commenter anonymity to increase respect and accountability? [8]

7. **Develop better ways of treating mental health issues within the immigrant and refugee population.** Conference participants pointed to insufficient mental health treatment to meet the needs of youth and adults in Faribault. The participants proposed training public school teachers on identifying at-risk students in their classes. Participants also discussed using the resources Canvas Health provides. Broader education about immigrants' past experiences will be useful in addressing the mental health issues immigrants are facing.

   7.1. Purpose: Improve awareness of and treatment for mental health issues facing immigrants, particularly refugees.

   7.2. Who Leads: Rice County and the school district

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[7] Latino conference attendees explained that this radio station, from Burnsville, is widely listened to by Latinos living in Faribault.

[8] Providing positive media exposure could be discussed with local newspaper editors, but community outreach may also be necessary, as people were careful not to advocate censorship of online forums. Some participants suggested asking for a regular column featuring immigrant stories and highlighting local events and programs.

7.3. Resources:
    7.3.1.Canvas Health
    7.3.2.Rice County Mental Health Collaborative
    7.3.3.Mental health related professional development training for teachers
7.4. Decisions:
    7.4.1. Determine effective citywide strategy.
    7.4.2. Decide who needs training.
    7.4.3. Identify funding alternatives.

Afterword

As conference participants and other concerned people consider how to build on these action items, we remind you that Rice County's institutions of higher education can offer support from undergraduate students once you have clear plans in place. Civic engagement and volunteer programs at St. Olaf College and Carleton College already strive to support many initiatives in Faribault. South Central College offers additional resources. Examples of how college students can help include event planning, policy research, grant research, web page design, focus groups and small scale surveys, and by volunteering as tutors and mentors.