



## About MN StoryCollective

MN StoryCollective (MNSC) is a way to share experiences, generate ideas for change, and help support the state's many communities. MNSC does this by connecting the voices of people in Minnesota with those making decisions. This connection can be made by responding to MNSC's story collection tool (independently or with the support of a community partner), or by attending public engagements to make sense of the stories and other information that have been shared with MNSC.



### Goal and Vision

MNSC's goal is to create a strong feedback loop with community and to provide a regular, flexible source of qualitative data based on diverse community stories so that State programs, policies, and practices better meet the needs of all families.

MNSC officially launched in 2023. In 2024, MNSC will increase our presence and outreach across the state and will aim to embed our work into standard processes during 2025.



### MN StoryCollective Team

MNSC is managed and implemented by staff on Minnesota Management and Budget's Results Management team, is guided by a cross-agency management team, and collaborates with multiple state teams, divisions, and agencies.

One of the main ways that MNSC collects and makes sense of stories is in collaboration with community partners across the State of Minnesota. MNSC recognizes the uniqueness of the many communities in Minnesota and understands that having a known, culturally relevant partner in the work leads to more participation from communities. To support effective, culturally sensitive outreach, MNSC provides funds to community partners to collect stories, provide feedback on MNSC work, and support Sensemaking Sessions.

Story Collection

1



2

Making Sense  
of Stories  
(Sensemaking)

3

Reflection and  
Adaption



## MNSC Cycle: Overview

MNSC engages with communities using a three-step cycle:

- 1 Story collection
- 2 Sensemaking and recommending action
- 3 Reflection and adaptation

This approach helps make sure MNSC's work stays relevant to both the community and State colleagues.

Read on to learn more about each step in the cycle.

## MNSC Cycle: Story Collection

### Story Collection Tool

People in Minnesota – or storytellers – share their lived experiences in an online tool. Storytellers respond to an open-ended story prompt (available at <https://ourtomorro.ws/MNStoryCollective>). Along with sharing a story, the tool invites folks to categorize, or “self-code,” their stories with follow-up questions.

MNSC collects stories in this way for multiple reasons. Using an open-ended prompt means the State hears what matters most to storytellers. ‘Self-coding’ also helps State staff and decisionmakers try to understand what’s been shared through the storyteller’s own lens.

### Story Collection Methods

Participants can share their story in a variety of ways. Most of the responses received to date have been collected by community partners (see pg. 4 for more information on community partners) using a variety of collection methods, including: (1) independent submissions following outreach from a partner, (2) facilitated collection taking place in the form of an interview, and (3) occasionally, as part of a larger in-person convening.

MNSC also has a collection link available online and will promote the opportunity in public communications and advertisements during the latter half of the year.





## MNSC Cycle: Making Sense of Stories with Community

As stories and other responses are collected, MNSC brings community members, community partner organizations, and staff from the state, counties, and cities together to discuss what stories and other data mean to them. This takes place in events called “Sensemaking Sessions.” The discussion ends with brainstorming next steps based on the data, stories, and discussion.

## Ways We Get the Word Out

MNSC shares news, insights, and learnings in...

- Newsletters (you can sign up to be a subscriber on the MNSC website)
- Sensemaking Sessions throughout the state
- Reports
- Meetings, conversations, and more

## MNSC Cycle: Reflection and Adaptation

During the first two stages of the cycle (story collection and sensemaking), MNSC takes in and then shares information out like stories, recommendations from Sensemaking Sessions, feedback about the story collection tool and the experience of participating, and more. These insights are shared with community, State staff and leadership, and others.

We deeply value these insights and hold time and space in our work to reflect on what has been shared and how those insights can inform our work. This may mean adjustments to the tool that we use, the way we engage and support community partners, the Sensemaking Session methods, or the way we capture, report, and loop back on what we hear. We work to have reflection and adaptation across our entire cycle. Read on to learn more about MNSC’s work in 2023, including some of our reflections and adaptations for 2024.



## 2023 Community Partners

During the first phase of engagement, MDE awarded grants to 14 community partners to support story collection. Community partners collected most of the more than 1,000 submissions received in 2023. They also joined Sensemaking Sessions and provided feedback on MNSC's story collection tool and process.

### Partners in 2023 included:

- [Amherst H. Wilder Foundation](#)
- [Aviellah Curriculum and Consulting](#)
- Collaboration: [Chinese Community Center](#) + [Japan America Society of MN](#) + [Korean Institute of MN](#)
- [Healthy Community Initiative](#) supported by [Growing Up Healthy](#)
- [Indigenous Visioning](#)
- [Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board](#)
- [Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health](#)
- [Minnesota Head Start Association](#)
- [New Century School](#)
- [Northern Voices](#)
- [Partnership Academy Inc.](#)
- The [University of Minnesota](#), supported by [CAREI](#) and [ICI](#)
- [Three Rivers Community Action](#)
- [United Way of Central MN](#)

### Partners were geographically diverse and/or serve many populations, including communities who identify as:

- African American and Black
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- East Asian
- Families of children with/at-risk for development delays
- "Friend, Family, and Neighbor" caretakers
- Hispanic/Latino
- Hmong
- Native/Indigenous
- Rural

## 2023 Story Collection + Sensemaking Outcomes

MN StoryCollective launched in 2023 through a partnership with a cross-agency management team (MDE, MDH, DHS, MMB) and full-time staff on the Results Management team at MMB. Funding comes from the Preschool Development Grant.



## Milestones for Phase I

### 2023 Sensemaking Sessions

MNSC hosted six Sensemaking Sessions during 2023 in a variety of settings and locations, including:

- Great River Regional Library in Saint Cloud
- Rondo Community Library in Saint Paul
- Northfield Community Education Center in Northfield
- Centennial Office Building in Saint Paul
- A virtual meeting for people across the state
- Zion Baptist Church in North Minneapolis

About 40 people attended each session. Folks from a wide range of ages, races/ethnicities, and languages-spoken participated in each session, including State of Minnesota leaders and colleagues, community partners, and the individuals they serve. Participants shared positive feedback and indicated they are eager for other opportunities to participate in MNSC sessions. Following these sessions, MNSC shares recommended next steps with state staff and others.

MNSC launched in 2023 and accomplished the following key milestones.



#### Preparing for launch:

- Partnered with University of Kansas, Center for Public Partnership and Research to build story collection tool and MNSC processes
- Made grants to 14 community partners
- Established an interagency management team
- Developed and launched the story collection tool



#### Story Collection and Sensemaking:

- Collected over 1,000 stories across the state
- Held 6 Sensemaking Sessions
  - Locations included Minneapolis, Northfield, St. Paul, St Cloud, and virtually
- Nearly 800 newsletter subscriptions
- Identified multiple needs assessments, annual reports, and other opportunities to share stories, data, and recommendations with state colleagues



#### Reflection and Adaptation:

- Identified multiple potential partners for story collection across existing state efforts
- Received feedback from diverse partners, participants and colleagues to inform changes to the story collection tool and other MNSC processes (see previous page)





## Who is sharing with MNSC: In storyteller's own words

In the snippets below, the storyteller shares a bit about themselves as part of their story. These details, often provided as context for a longer story, are what the people who submitted their lived experiences through MNSC thought we needed to know to understand their story.

## Who is sharing with MNSC?

The more than **1,000 submissions received** reflect the diversity of communities and experiences in Minnesota. This section explores who has shared with MNSC so far.

This is explored in three ways: first with a short collection of first-person statements from the tool, then 'by the numbers' in a series of charts, and, finally, in a single story.

## Here's a glimpse of who shared with MNSC, in storytellers' own words:

- I became a first-time mom during Covid.
- We are both Black, and my boyfriend is an immigrant, and we feel pressure to create generational wealth within our families since our parents and grandparents weren't able to do the same for us.
- I got a job working at a hotel. Before working there I lived in a tent in the woods. I rode my bike 30 mins to and from work every day. I wasn't able to move in to the hotel till about 4 months of working there.
- 5 1/2 years ago, I moved to the small town where I am currently living. I moved here from overseas because of a family crisis, and when I arrived my 3 children and I only had one suitcase each and a limited amount of money.
- My boyfriend and I have been living together for 4 years and are hoping to start a family soon, buy a house, etc. [...] the cost-of-living increase, on top of the high student loan repayments, have made it impossible.
- As a father of three, I work hard to provide for my family. My job in construction pays the bills but often requires long, physically demanding hours. A few weeks ago, I injured my back badly [...] between missing work and medical bills, money became very scarce.
- I was a teen and single mom with 2 daughters. I was low income and lived in poverty. I remember not having enough money to buy groceries or pay for gas to go to work. etc... It was hard living in survival mode.

In addition to providing these sample statements, the following section uses aggregate data to describe who shared their stories with MNSC.



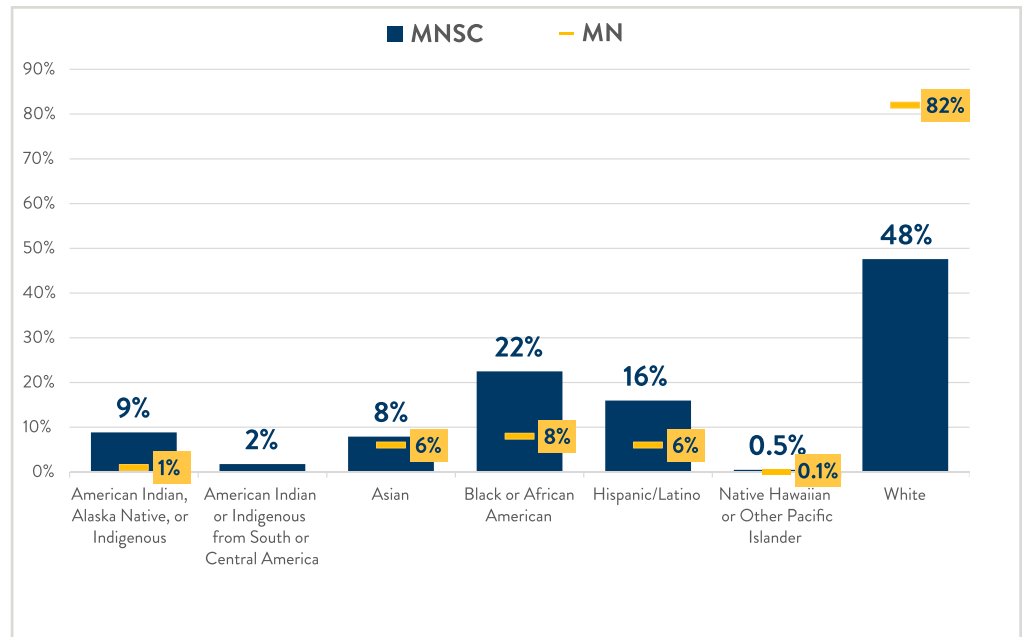
## Who is sharing with MNSC: By the numbers

While first-person statements provide a rich and unique view of storytellers' identities and experiences, it is important to look at the bigger picture as well.

This section provides summaries of responses to key demographic questions.

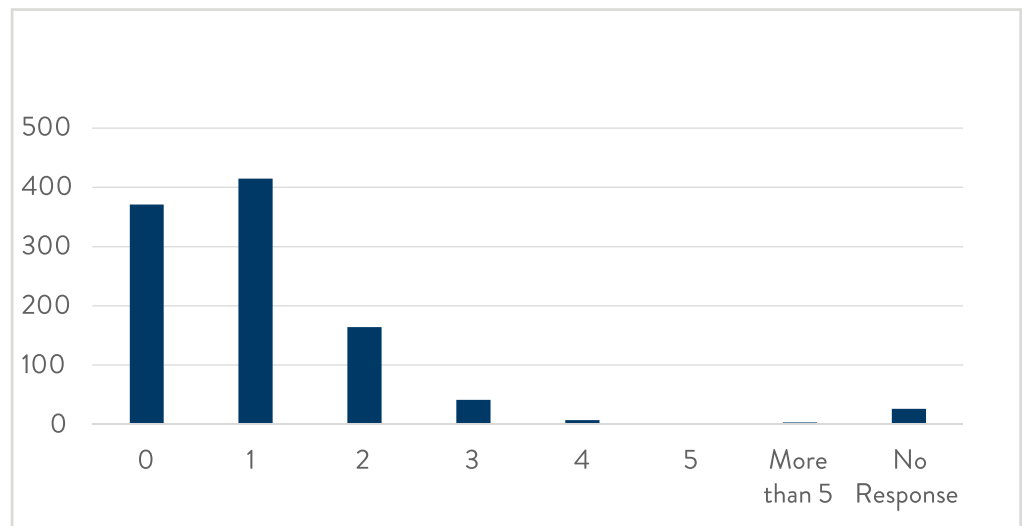
## Racial/Ethnic Identities:

MNSC data are compared to [U.S. Census Data \(2022\)](#).



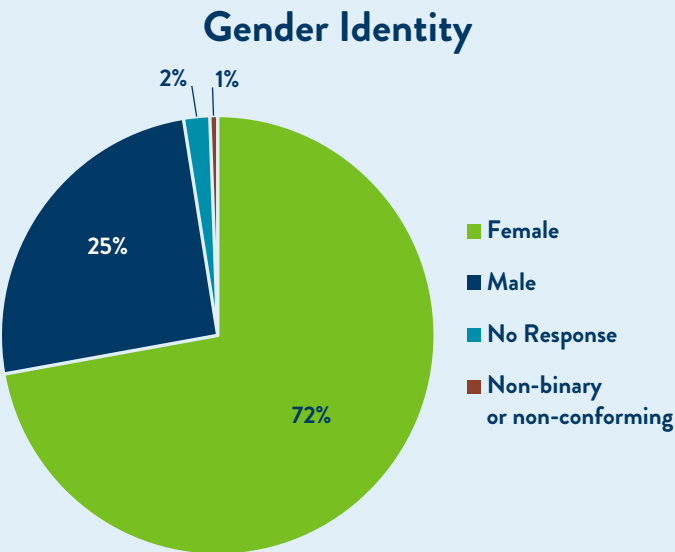
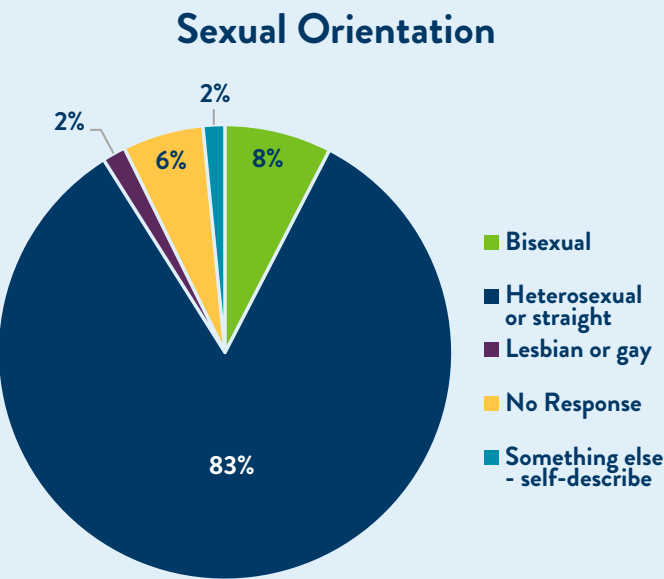
## Number of Children in Household:

Most responses came from parents, often parents of young children.

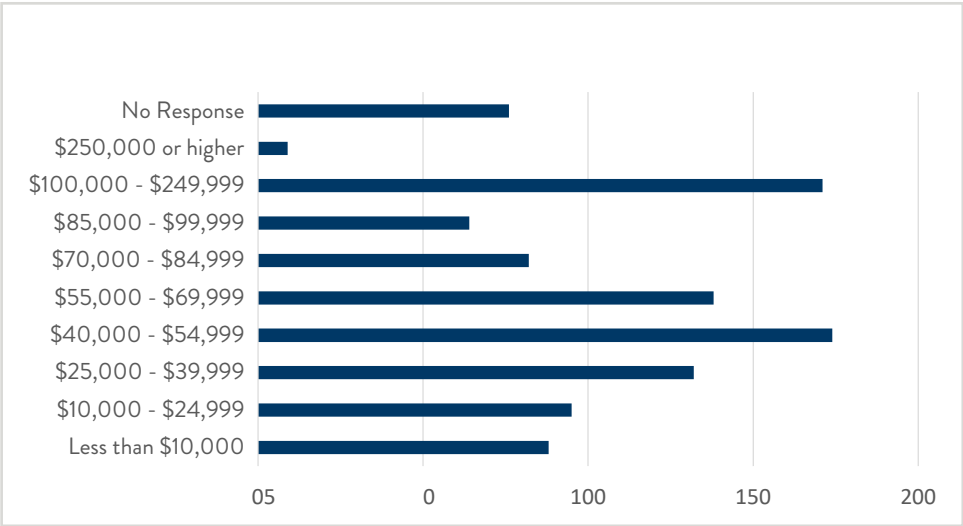




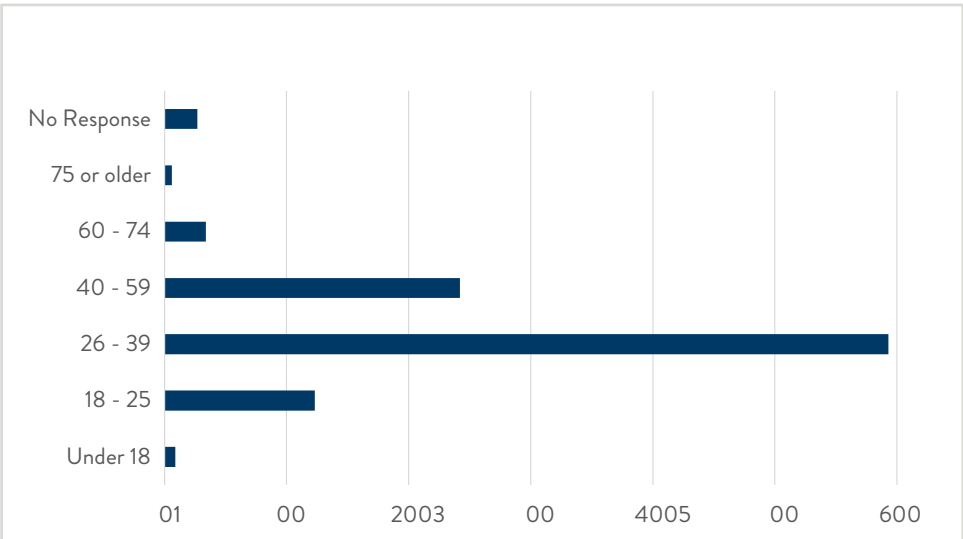
Stories were most-often shared by heterosexual women, though people with other gender identities and sexual orientations are also represented in the sample:



MNSC also collected data on annual household income:



Last, MNSC asked participants about their age:



## What MNSC is Hearing

Due to the scope of collection, the number of open-ended and write-in questions, and MNSC's commitment to analyzing information in conversation with community, this report does not include a set of simple, stylized facts and quick take-aways. Instead, the reader is invited to consider one of the most-detailed stories.

The story to the right on this page was chosen because it touches upon many points that are consistent with what has been shared elsewhere, as well as rich detail and complexity that is distinct to the storyteller. Stories are not copy edited.

### Example: A Longer Story on Overcoming a Challenging Set of Circumstances

Hello, I am born and raised in NE Minnesota and have called the Twin Cities my home since 1983. My story is about generational alcoholism, untreated mental illness, and perseverance to overcome the odds stacked against me.

I was raised in a generational home of alcoholism and after I moved out of my family home after graduation I started my own journey into my own addictions and continued until I was 54 years old. My journey started when I was young, I knew I had to graduate from school and move out to find a better way of life. But what I was facing was my own addiction due to untreated and undiagnosed mental illness. I was functional addict, I held a job, not the same job, but I always worked. I moved from apartment to apartment, didn't pay my bills, disconnected from my family, I associated myself with one bad group after another.

Eventually, I was drinking, using drugs, doing anything to get money, even though I had a job, but I always needed more because I had to look good because I thought people would think I was just like them. I started a criminal lifestyle in the late 1990's until 2018, when everything stopped. I was out of energy, out of time, and I knew I had to either give up my addictions, get help for my mental illnesses, or die. I had two choices on November 26, 2019, so I choose to fight for myself.

I have not used drugs or alcohol since November 26, 2019, I begged for help at Hennepin County Mental Health, and the team there not only diagnosed my mental illness, referred me to DBT therapy and I continued one on one therapy along with my medications. Because I was facing my final criminal charge of my long journey of poor choices, my next chapter of my life was going to be the scariest but the most rewarding. I entered a Residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment facility via the Federal Prison System. I was in a year program that was CBT based, I worked hard and when I left 11 months later, I was free of bondage of self. I was ready to live and create a life for myself. There was no more secrets, shame, guilt, obsession, self hate, poor self esteem, I was excited for my future.

I am living a life that I always dreamed about as a child but never knew how to do myself. I am grateful for everyone that have supported my journey but I also keep in mind all the people and my community I hurt while I was in addiction and making one poor choice after another.

### What Do You Think?

A key component of MN StoryCollective is collaboration to build shared understanding. Take some time to reflect and think about this story and everything else you've read in the report.

What do you notice? How are narratives like this relevant to you and your work?

The questions are intended for reflection, but we're happy to hear from you, too:

[mnstorycollective@state.mn.us](mailto:mnstorycollective@state.mn.us).

## What's next for MNSC?

After a successful first year of engagement, MNSC is looking forward to everything that's to come:

### 2024: Scale and Grow

- Scale statewide, applying lessons learned during 2023 engagement
- Build story collecting into existing state efforts
- Develop new agency partners
- Document policy/practice changes

### 2025: Sustain and Embed

- Secure long-term funding
- Build MNSC into standard ways of working
- Adapt and adjust based on feedback from 2024 community partners, participants, and other stakeholders

To stay connected with MNSC's work and receive invites to public sensemaking sessions, [sign up for our newsletter](#), or in the bottom-right corner of [MNSC's website](#).



## Thank You!

On behalf of the MN StoryCollective Management team, thank you for your interest in Minnesota StoryCollective, our work, and the stories of people in Minnesota.

We hope you have enjoyed this overview of MNSC, our goal and vision, our unique cycle of engagement, and an exploration of who has shared with us – with first person quotes, demographic summaries, and a long-form story.

This effort is supported by the Preschool Development Grant and the following agencies Education, Health, Human Services, and Management and Budget ([Children's Cabinet](#) and [Results Management](#)).

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