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# About

MN StoryCollective (MNSC) is a way to share experiences, generate ideas for change, and support the state's many communities. We do this by collecting stories and other data from people in Minnesota, engaging with policymakers and community to make sense of the collected stories, and connecting decisionmakers with ideas for change.

MNSC was launched in 2023, inspired by the 'Our Tomorrows' project from the Center for Public Partnerships and Research from the University of Kansas. MNSC brings community and state agencies together to make meaning of, and learn from, qualitative and quantitative data and then, based on those learnings, lift up ideas for supporting community well-being. This is a meaningful and effective feedback loop, with lived experience at the center. The State of Minnesota wanted to reduce the number of times that community members were being asked to share information and establish a way of looping back with community members to share updates about what was heard in stories and sensemaking sessions.





## Goals and Vision

MNSC's goals are to create a strong feedback loop with communities across Minnesota 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's vision is to embed the work of centering lived experiences through story collection and sensemaking into the work of state programs and services.

## MNSC Team

MNSC is managed and implemented by Minnesota Management and Budget's Results Management team and guided by a cross-agency management team. This team is comprised of directors from the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Management and Budget, the Minnesota Department of Health, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Community partners play a vital role in MNSC's work. Current and former partners include organizations serving people across Minnesota. MNSC funds community partners to collect stories, take a leading role in making sense of the stories they collect, and provide feedback on the initiative. Having familiar partners with established, trusting, local relationships in this work supports deeper, more authentic engagement. See page [xx] for more on community partners' contributions to MNSC.



# Milestones



## MNSC met major milestones in 2024, including:



1 new story  
collection platform



Over 600 total  
submissions



16 sensemaking  
sessions



4 state agencies  
investing in MN  
StoryCollective



MN StoryCollective tool  
available in 5 additional  
languages (English,  
Hmong, Karen, Somali,  
and Spanish)



Annual report translated  
into multiple languages



1 MNSC Fellowship  
position launched



7 community partners  
(Good Trouble, HueMan  
Partnership, Humanize MN,  
Indigenous Visioning, Avieallah  
Curriculum and Consulting, United  
Way of Central MN, Chinese  
Community Center)

# MNSC Cycle: Overview

## MNSC follows a four-step cycle:

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

This approach helps ensure that MNSC's work is relevant both to community and state colleagues. The following sections provide more information about each step in the cycle.



# MNSC Cycle: Story Collection

## Story Collection Tool

MNSC invites people to share whatever is most important to them about their story as well as their current circumstances and experiences in an online tool (available at <https://ourtomorro.ws/MNStoryCollective>). Storytellers respond to an open-ended story prompt and answer a series of follow-up questions.

**In 2024, the story prompt read:** *Think about what it's like to live in your community.*

*In the space below, tell us about a recent personal experience that feels important to you. Your story could be about you, your family, or your community. You can tell us about a good experience or one that was difficult. Tell us about what happened.*

The tool invites people to categorize, or “self-code,” their stories with follow-up questions.

The self-coding process includes both multiple-choice questions such as “How often do experiences like the one you shared happen?” as well as more reflective questions such as “What do you hope others will take away or learn from the story you shared?” Storytellers have an option to provide additional information if the pre-populated options do not reflect their experience. There are also questions about what might improve the wellbeing of others in similar circumstances.

MNSC collects stories in this way for multiple reasons. Using an open-ended prompt means State officials learn about what matters most to storytellers rather than constraining input by program or policy area. ‘Self-coding’ also helps State staff and decisionmakers understand what has been shared through the storyteller’s own perspective and reduces the potential for misinterpretation.



## Story Collection Methods

People can share their story in the online tool in a variety of ways. Most of the responses received to date have been collected by community partners (see page 12 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, dedicated time to share stories as part of a larger in-person convening. In addition, MNSC has a collection link available online that can be shared in public communications such as newsletters, in social media ads, and when attending community events.



# Who Shared with Us?

MNSC received over 600 submissions in 2024 from across 30 counties and Tribal communities, and from people of all different backgrounds and experiences.

Below is an example of a story submission.



## Storyteller-submitted title: ECFE is a chance to connect

*In a polarized society, I have been thankful lately for opportunities to have meaningful connections with people different from me. One place this has occurred lately is Early Childhood and Family Education. During parent breakout time I get to sit down with other moms and dads who have totally different socioeconomic, religious, and political backgrounds than I do. We share the experience of parenting and come together in a respectful environment where we are able to learn from one another. Participating in these classes makes me a better parent and community member and I'm thankful that Minnesota prioritizes learning and support for families in this way.*

## More about this storyteller:

Lives in Anoka County, is the parent of adopted children, and notes child care as their top budget expense. They have also had to recently cut or sacrifice Mental/Physical health care costs from their budget.

## What were the important issues in your story?



Education  
funding



Learning from  
peers



Respect amidst  
difference

## What do you hope others will take away from the story you shared with us?

If you are a parent of young kids try ECFE!

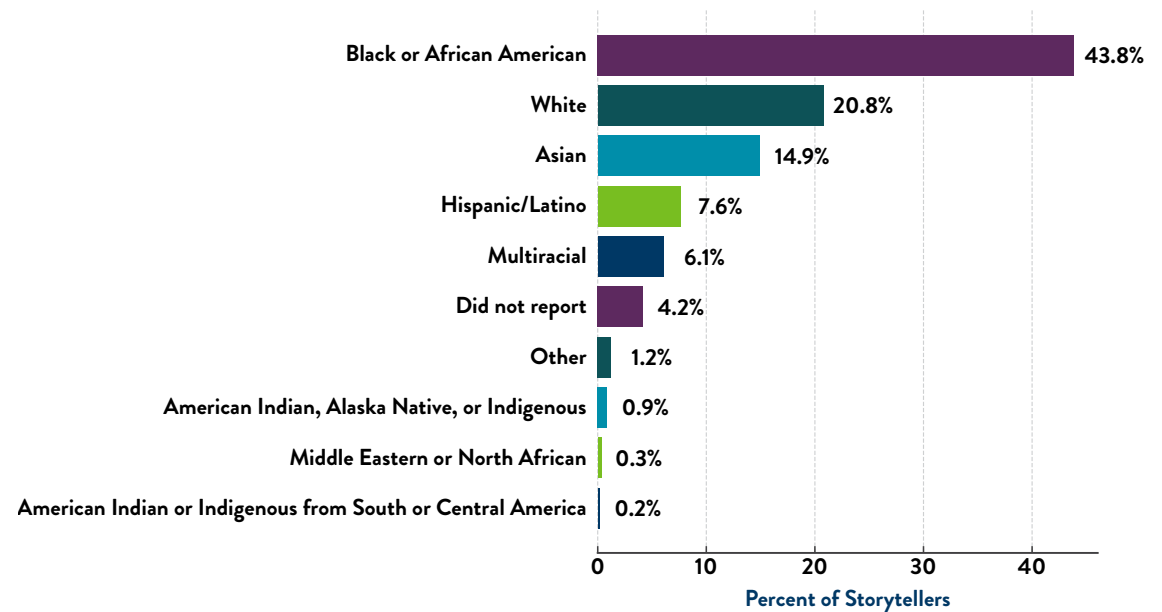


# Demographics

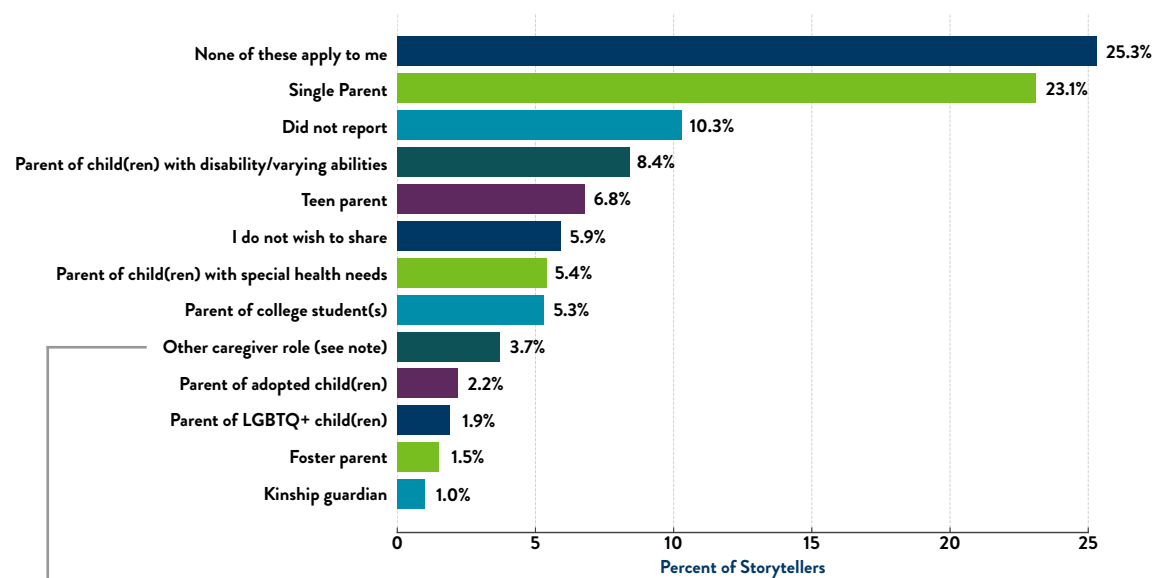
MNSC collected stories from across Minnesota. The charts on this page show information about the racial and ethnic identities and caregiver circumstances of storytellers in the second edition of the story collection tool. Additional demographic information, including community and age, can be found on the following page.



## Racial and Ethnic Identities



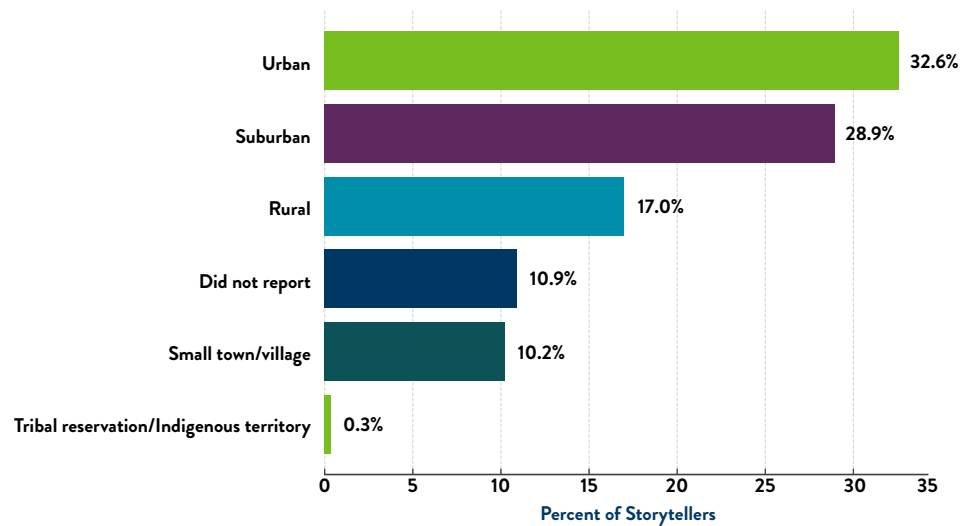
## Caregiver Circumstances



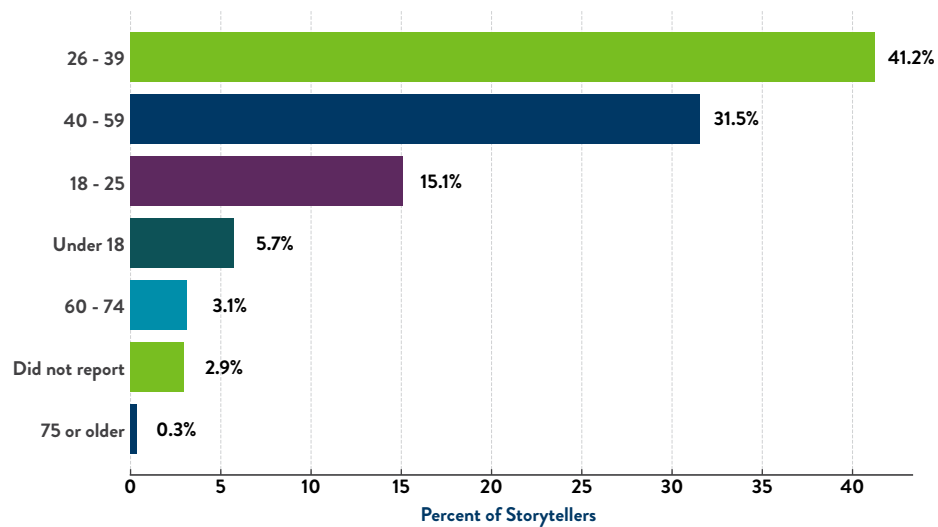
\*Original survey label: 'Something else about my parent or caregiver role is important (please tell us more).'

\*\*Storytellers were prompted to select all that apply. Percentages represent the proportion of storytellers selecting each option.

## Community Descriptions



## Age Ranges





# MNSC Cycle: Making Sense of Stories

As stories and other responses are collected, communities also participate in sensemaking sessions. Most often, 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. MNSC calls these events “sensemaking sessions.”

## What Happens in a Sensemaking Session?

Prior to sessions, MNSC prepares “story packs,” which are collections of stories, data visualizations, and discussion prompts to guide the conversation. Sessions usually involve both small group discussions and share-outs. Events typically run from 90 minutes to 3 hours and center on reading and discussing stories. Sessions often conclude with an activity focused on action, where participants discuss how the State, community organizations, and individuals can be responsive to the issues, challenges, and successes discussed during the event.



## A Sampling of Community Sensemaking Sessions Held in 2024

- Virtual Sessions
- Sensemaking Sessions at Food Access convenings in Morton, Bemidji, and Saint Paul
- Sensemaking Sessions at state agency events including MN Department of Education’s Extended Learning Opportunities convening in Eagan
- Community Partner Co-Designed Sessions in Bloomington, Saint Cloud, and North Minneapolis



# MNSC Cycle: Reflection and Adaptation

During the first two stages of the cycle (story collection and sensemaking), MNSC gathers multiple sources of information—including stories, data from responses to other questions, and ideas offered in Sensemaking Sessions—and shares that information with community partners and state teams.

MNSC also asks for feedback on key components of the initiative such as the story collection tool, community partners' experience of participating, and more. Each year, MNSC devotes time to using this feedback to develop the initiative.

## Why Does Reflection and Adaptation Matter?

MNSC proactively seeks feedback from collaborators and reserves time for reflection and adaptation each year. MNSC relies heavily on partner, participant, and colleague feedback to shape our work:



Reflection and adaptation are central to MNSC. In 2024, there were extensive adjustments to the story collection tool, development of new approaches to engagement with and support for community partners, refinement of sensemaking methods/activities, and improvements in methods to capture, report, and loop back with community members and partners.





## Community Partners

Each year, MMB uses public processes to contract with community-based organizations to raise awareness about MNISC, gather stories, support sensemaking, and provide feedback on all aspects of the program. These partners contract with the State of Minnesota to facilitate story collection in their networks, reaching the communities they work with most closely to include their experiences in this program.

Collaboration with community partners allows MNISC to reach people across the state through a trusted network. Community partners collect stories according to what works best for their community. In 2024, more than 75% of the over 600 submissions were made through a community partner's link.





### Partners in 2024 Included:

- Avillah Curriculum and Consulting
- Chinese Community Center
- Good Trouble
- HueMan Partnership
- Humanize MN
- Indigenous Visioning
- United Way of Central Minnesota

### What Was New in 2024?

One of the most prominent outcomes from MNSC's reflection and adaptation time in 2024 was a major re-design of the story collection tool, including moving to a platform which would enable some of the requested changes. This section highlights a few examples of changes to the story collection tool. MNSC is continuing this practice in 2025, and will continue to share about how the work has shifted based on partner and participant feedback in a future report; in the meantime, you can subscribe to our newsletter to stay in the loop.

MNSC devotes time to reflection and adaptation each year. Community partners contribute feedback that helps shape MNSC's ongoing development. Based on previous partner feedback, MNSC took the following actions in 2024:

- Significantly changed the story collection tool (see previous section on Reflection and Adaptation).
- Developed a new community partner onboarding process, which featured more discussion and practical examples of story collection and split the session into multiple meetings.
- Developed new outreach materials, including a Storyteller FAQ and additional flyers, and refined email templates and talking points for story collectors.
- Included sensemaking session co-design in partners' scope of work and supported partners in making decisions about their session.
- Collaborating and co-designing sensemaking sessions



# State Agency Partners/Collaborations

MNSC collaborates with community partners across the state and teams within state agencies. Partnering with state teams supports the goal of embedding MNSC data and approaches into the ongoing work of centering community voices in the work of serving people across Minnesota. State and local partners who oversee the budgets and policy for programs are then able to incorporate the learnings into changes. In 2024, MNSC supported increased understanding of issues affecting peoples' lives in many ways, some of which are highlighted on this page.

## Snapshot of using MNSC data:

In late October 2024, MNSC worked to provide stories from teen parents to the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) team at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. The team's goal in reading these stories was to learn from the information that has already been shared through MNSC as they prepared for their own engagement with teen parents in 2025. One of the goals of MNSC is to reduce the number of times community members have to repeat their stories to state teams. The MFIP team knew they wanted to engage teen parents in the coming year and read through stories from that community because they believe that "gathering these insights may help determine how we host these future events," according to one MFIP team member. MNSC was happy to provide the stories and perspectives of teen parents to the MFIP team to deepen their future engagement sessions.

## Snapshot of agency partnership:

MNSC partnered with two teams in the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (the Office of Economic Opportunity and Employment Assistance and Economic Support Division) throughout 2024 to explore factors contributing to food insecurity in Minnesota communities, and to gather and analyze data to support responsive state, regional and local solutions. In virtual and in-person sensemaking sessions (Bemidji, Morton, and Saint Paul) external partners, Tribal leadership, counties, and communities came together to read stories and analyze data. They then identified gaps, and discussed policy design, shifts, and modifications through feedback loops with communities who experience food insecurity.

# Impact

In 2024, MNSC began learning about how community stories are informing policy and programming to impact outcomes. MNSC was launched in 2023 to bring community and state agencies together to make meaning of, and learn from, qualitative and quantitative data and then, based on those learnings, lift up ideas for supporting community well-being. This is a meaningful and effective feedback loop, with lived experience at the center.

## Community ideas are informing programs

MNSC is having an impact on state programs, including funding opportunities. In each sensemaking session, communities make recommendations about possible responses to what they discussed and read in MNSC stories. A state colleague shared how a community recommendation from a community sensemaking session directly led to an expansion of the types of opportunities which were eligible for a family wellbeing sponsorship opportunity:

*Our team was reaching out about a sponsorship opportunity. We provide sponsorships of \$1,000-\$5,000 for sponsorship. We had also heard a lot about the value of a social network and social capital – for that reason, we broadened eligibility for the sponsorship opportunity to also include block parties.*

– Community Based Prevention Consultant, Promotion and Prevention, Child Safety and Permanency.

The change to the funding opportunity after the Sensemaking Session was to include block parties as a community event eligible for this funding.

## Community feedback loops are being created and strengthened

MN state agency staff shared examples of how MNSC supported their own feedback loops with partners and communities:

*MN StoryCollective has been awesome to use as a platform with the food security work. We have been able to share stories about real lives where people were able to think about the impact of our programs on people. We were able to work across programs and create recommendations together on how the programs could be improved. We were also able to share back some things we have already incorporated or have been working on.*

– Deputy Director, Economic Assistance and Employment Supports division, Department of Children, Youth, and Families

## More community stories are being collected

83% of state colleagues who requested sensemaking sessions for their teams are planning to collect, or already collecting, more stories from community and are incorporating community stories into their reflection, evaluation, and assessment of program/service impact.



# What's Next



We are looking ahead to the next phase of work, including:



Releasing a new iteration of the story collection tool



Collaborating with new community partners



Welcoming two new team members



Sharing information about trends in the stories shared



Working with grantees of state programs to collect stories in their communities, including Community Resource Center grantees



Co-designing sensemaking sessions with community partners to take place across Minnesota

# Thank You

On behalf of the MN StoryCollective Management team, thank you for your interest in MN StoryCollective, our work, and the stories of people in Minnesota. We hope you have enjoyed this overview of MNSC, our goals and vision, our unique cycle of engagement, and an exploration of who has shared with us.

We hope that you share  
**YOUR** story in 2025.





