

**Contractor: Aviellah Curriculum and Consulting**  
**December 2024**

### **Overview**

This document provides a template for your reporting requirements.

Please provide 1-2 paragraphs (or as much as you'd like) in response to the following questions. Your responses will be vital information as we enter our period of reflection and adaptation.

We are happy to host you for a follow-up conversation at your convenience as well.

### **QUESTIONS:**

*The following are our responses to the reporting questions for the partnership between ACC and MNSC. We are also happy to have a follow up conversation with MNSC staff as well.*

**Question 1: Was there any new or important information you found in the stories? How does your organization plan to use that information?**

#### **Learnings and Takeaways from reviewing stories:**

- **We can be the change that we seek.** Although warranted mistrust of systems and institutions exist and actual support from systems and institutions is more limited than within other groups, Black Minnesotans have and can continue to innovate networks of trust and support outside of institutions.

*Aviellah Curriculum and Consulting (hereafter ACC) can encourage institutions to recognize the legitimacy of these networks and direct resources in innovative ways to these non-institutional yet effective networks and resources.*

- **Within the Black community:**
  - Trust is individually and situationally defined.
  - Trust is not a monolithic concept; Differentiating definitions by contexts within which it (potentially or actually) exists benefits the Black community—a community historically harmed by institutional cultivation of mistrust.
  - Individuals' perception of trust is nuanced and often does not have a linear relationship with the ease or difficulty of situations in which they find themselves.

*Aveillah Curriculum and Consulting can be more intentional in taking on endeavors that facilitate internally generated and experienced trust within the Black community. We can leverage the services we offer to mitigate or reduce barriers to these internal sources of trust.*

*ie creating community engagement that highlights within-community trust as a resource/protective factor.*

- **Resilience and navigation of ongoing oppression and it's precipitates are experienced in a range of ways and with a range of emotions by Black Minnesotans:**
  - Many participants said they felt positive about stories that appear to be negative or difficult experiences.
  - Experiencing tension between feelings and responses that are on opposite ends of the spectrum is a common experience. At first glance this appears counterintuitive yet when considering the nature of navigating the tenants of oppression this makes a lot of sense. For example, story sharers feel hope when reflecting on their accomplishments, perseverance and ability to access resources while simultaneously feeling discouragement / depleting hope when recognizing oppressive aspects of systems or situations.

*Aveillah Curriculum and Consulting will continue to create sessions and experience that make space to hold nuance and complexity. We will also advocate for other systems to avoid oversimplifying conclusions or settings that are likely to yield unhelpful dichotomies and/or conclusions.*

**Question 2: Tell us about your experience collecting stories. We are interested both in what went well, and how it might be improved for your community.**

Although the RFP suggested a methodology of sharing stories by bringing potential story sharers to the MN Story Collective Website, we knew that this method would be nearly or completely ineffective with the community we intended to serve.

Our process included:

- 1) Developing community engagement agenda for group sessions designed to facilitate trust and community connection, introduce the MN StoryCollective, and explore the value and expanded use of stories,
- 2) Developing recruitment strategy to engage identified populations within accelerated timeline
- 3) Training team members on project roles
- 4) Executing community engagement sessions:

Session Agenda Overview:

- Groundwork–Welcome, Introductions, Grounding, etc.
- Connection and Discussion–Comparing formats for sharing information–traditional data point vs story
- MNSC walk through–introducing participants to MNSC website and supporting participants in sharing a story
- Reflection and close

#### Session Agenda Objectives:

- To introduce engagement with MN StoryCollective tool within context
- To explore the (potential) value and purpose of storytelling
- To create a reciprocal rather than transactional exchange

#### Aspects of story collecting that went well:

- The large majority of participants expressed appreciation for experiencing the sessions within context/community. (See *Attachment 1: Question 3 and Question 4*).
- Approximately 150 Participants shared stories. The stories offered often captured nuance about whatever situation was discussed. Because the stories were shared in a space where trust was established—most stories were shared from an authentic participant lens rather than a more cautious, ‘share-only-what-they-need- to-know’ vantage point.
- Many participants expressed a sense of empowerment and/or renewed interest in community engagement/activism.
- Session participants felt a sense of ownership. One example is that several session participants attended the Sensemaking Session.
- We were able to ensure participation within the session that reflect diversity with the Black population including Black Minnesotans
  - experiencing housing insecurity
  - with lived experiences involving immigration
  - who have brought a new child within their lives within the last 18 months
  - between the ages 18-29
  - with lived experiences involving incarceration
- Successful sensemaking session was held on date with known barriers (many guests have holiday commitments, illness, short notice, etc)

#### Story Sharing Challenges/Opportunities for improvement:

- The limited project timeline strained our ability to set up some team members to feel capable and successful. While all team members did an exceptional job in the various aspects of the project—the compressed six week timeline inherently cultivated a sense of urgency which by nature is corrosive for relationships. It also hinders the ability to execute the work in a person-centered manner. Our six week timeline left minimal space for training and iterative feedback.
- One team member who initially contracted to translate and facilitate groups became unable to offer services midway into the project. We were able to locate contractors to recruit, facilitate and translate for Black Minnesotans whose first language is Haitian, Spanish and Somali. However, given an already tight timeline further reduced by change of circumstances with the initially contracted service providers, our second round of multilingual facilitators/translators were not able to deliver such services within a few weeks.

- We experienced new challenges with rapidly distributing participant compensation. In the past ACC has given session participants the option to choose from one or two compensation formats—usually gift card and an app like Cash App or Venmo. Offering these options has worked well for us in the past. However, many companies (gift card companies, Cash App, etc) have placed additional security measures that limited our ability to distribute payments as smoothly and as quickly as we prefer. In response to this we offered more options for payment and communicated the processing timeline to Participants allowing them to know what to expect. Even with these challenges we were still able to distribute payment within 1-4 business days for most participants. In the future we will explore working with bulk retailer gift card companies.

**Question 3: Please share your thoughts on the co-design process. First, how would you describe this process to a colleague? Did you feel empowered to make key decisions? Knowing that this was our first year co-designing engagements, how might we improve the process next year?**

The co-designing process for the Sensemaking session seemed effective as it brought an opportunity to utilize an effective, established format for engaging the community in making sense of the questions/responses in a way that was aligned with the norms and priorities of the communities being served.

We would describe this process to a colleague something like this:

*The co-design of the sensemaking session is an opportunity to engage with community starting with an innovative, non-linear format created by MNSC as the baseline but implemented in a way that aligns with the norms and priorities of the community being centered—which in our case is the Black Minnesotan community.*

The condensed project timeline meant that important aspects of co-designing the event occurred within days of the actual event. The stories were being collected (through group sessions) up until just three days prior to the event and we wanted to include as many of the stories as possible. Dustin Parks made himself extremely available for planning which was critical to ensuring the event was meaningfully co-designed. ACC defaults to relational measures (ie phone call) to navigate timeline pressures. At times this contrasted with MNSC's use written communication yet because both partners were invested in similar outcomes for the event these different approaches were named and successfully navigated.

Regarding co-design for the overall project (beyond the Sensemaking Session):

As described above, ACC advocated for an approach that engages participants within community rather than in isolation. This approach was ultimately approved and in this way both MN StoryCollective and ACC informed the design of the project. ACC and MN StoryCollective also met regularly to discuss logistics, project celebrations, and the

Sensemaking session event. To move even more towards a true co-design model ACC and MN StoryCollective could collaborate to gain shared more comprehensive understanding about all components of the project including contracting, timeline, budgeting, invoicing, changes and updates, etc.

**Question 4: What were your key take-aways from our co-designed sensemaking session? Do you feel this was a valuable addition for your team? Why (not)?**

ACC sees the Sensemaking Session as a valuable addition to our work. We received follow up from many participants about how the session added value to their work and lives as well. The experience seems to have gone beyond good conversation during the event but to meaningful connections and ponderings that stayed with participants.

**Here are some of our key takeaways:**

**People from a range of life and work positions left the event with ‘ready for change’ mindsets and postures willing to take action.** Participants at the event represented a range of personal and professional positioning, yet regardless of role and life position, all seemed to find an access point to the engagement for connection and change. State level decision makers were not saying ‘this is more for community members’ and therefore take on a passive role nor did individuals representing their families say I don’t have any power to change things—this is more for state leaders. Real change occurs when participation, thought leadership and action take place within a diverse range of positions and roles within any given community ecosystem.

**Moving away from [dependance on the written word](#)**—Processing of the written word seemed like a fundamental component of the Sensemaking session. We noticed that this didn’t align with some of the session Participants preferences/norms. One in the moment modification that we made was to offer to read the stories aloud. At ACC we are accustomed to creating engagement that includes but goes beyond the written word. Determining alternative formats to process stories seems like an meaningful growth area to consider—especially when sessions are centered around communities that are wealthy with non-written story sharing.

**It’s not always about novelty**—This session provided an important reminder that we don’t always need to make space for new learnings, but instead make space for updated insights even if those insights come from things we’ve already heard or learned. Given that we’re always changing and progressing, It’s important to make space for considering how both new and old information show up in our current lives and work.

**Value in non-linear presentations of information**—including but not limited to stories. One of the benefits of storytelling is that it conveys human nuance that is often lost in

over simplified dichotomies. The opportunity to engage within community in formats that are able to hold and convey nuance and complexity seems important. Modeling other ways to collect, examine and consider information has many benefits.

**Question 5: We invite you to provide any other feedback on MNSC that you may have. Feel free to share your thoughts on the initiative overall, your experience as a partner, or anything else that comes to mind.**

ACC appreciates the opportunity to engage the communities we serve regarding the MN StoryCollective. It was a great honor to build trust and create space for authentic story sharing that stands to inform state-level decision making. We also appreciate being a partner in the initial MNSC pilot and that MNSC both listened to and incorporated pilot feedback from us and other community partners.

Within the community we primarily served (Black/African-American) establishing trust between potential story-sharers and the MNSC is important and impacts both willingness to share and authenticity used to share stories. We would love to see MNSC create an infographic that communicates how stories collected have the potential to create change based on three timelines: short range/immediate, midrange and long range. After each timeline there would be an example shared. For example—one example of a short term way that collected stories will be used or could support change would be at a sensemaking session. A midrange or longer term example might describe the process of pulling particular stories for specific decision makers or projects.

We would love to see MNSC further explore a range of community-aligned formats for engaging participants from various communities. This alignment can be best executed with MNSC understanding of what's involved throughout the duration of the project from the onset of RFP to the final execution of project components.

We also found great value in how information is presented in the dashboard. Access and innovative presentations of data have informed our takeaways and growth opportunities.

We also see opportunities to align timelines and contract details with the needs and realities of small businesses—who often bring a unique and valuable perspective to the table.