

# The VOICE Project

## Valuing Our Individual Cultures through Engagement

The VOICE Project (Valuing Our Individual Cultures through Engagement) uses storytelling and story-based dialogues to engage community members from various cultural backgrounds to share their insight about how culture is connected to food, healthy weight, and body size.

Between June 2011 and January 2012, the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support convened and video-recorded a series of VOICE dialogues with members from the American Indian, African American, Latino, Hmong, and Somali communities. Community-based organizations and community leaders hosted the events and served a cultural meal at each event. VOICE used asset-based inquiry questions related to:

### Food:

- How would you describe a “good” meal?
- How does a “good” meal make you feel?

### Body size:

- How does food relate to how others view you?
- Does your size impact how you are viewed- or how you view and feel about yourself?

### Connections between, food, culture, place & time

- How have cultural traditions around food evolved or changed over time?
- In what ways do the seasons, or your where you live now affect the foods that you and your family eat?

Between the spring and summer months of 2012 transcription and analyses of the VOICE dialogues was completed, seven themes emerged across cultural groups.

### **VOICE Themes:**

1. Cultural foods are connected to feelings and memories
2. Family-friendly spaces and social connections make exercise easier
3. Good eating habits are shaped by mealtime
4. Cooking together and sharing knowledge increases awareness about healthier food options
5. Close food should be good food  
*\*Food that is close by should be good food*
6. Eating habits and food choices should be talked about and can spark change
7. Cultural foods once associated with sustenance and healing, today may harm health



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### VOICE Resources

The Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support has created a series of web-based VOICE Videos that showcase each VOICE Theme and the impact the dialogues had on individual participants and groups.

VOICE Videos are available to the public and can be used to spark more dialogue and increase engagement.

VOICE Videos can be accessed through the City of Minneapolis YouTube Channel and the Healthy Living home page at: <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/ship/index.htm>

In November 2012, the health department will issue a dialogue guide as tool for communities and stakeholders to further engage residents in community transformation, with the aim to achieve health equity and promote healthy living.

There is tremendous power in sharing stories and talking that can lead to healthier behaviors. The impact of VOICE has been multi-faceted. For example, some VOICE participants have adopted healthier behaviors related to food choices and cooking. Also, a 2011 Food Day event was organized by a group of African American VOICE participants and United Methodist church members. Over 40 community members came together to discuss food and culture, and learned about local church-based community gardens.

Through stronger partnerships and increased resident engagement, Minneapolis' public health work aims to be more inclusive and meaningful to cultural communities. The health department has already integrated some VOICE Themes into its Healthy Living initiatives by:

- Creating Health Hubs to increase social connections around healthy living and community gardening
- Expanding the Healthy Corner Store Initiative and increasing fresh produce at food shelves to make food that is close by good food
- Exploring "Healthy Mealtime" as a new initiative to promote healthier eating

Going forward, the health department plans to use the VOICE Videos as a tool to further engage various communities around food-related dialogues and apply the story sharing method to other public health topics.



For this material in an alternative format please call Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support at 612-673-2301 or email [health.familysupport@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:health.familysupport@minneapolismn.gov).

Videography and media production provided by Community Blueprint. Data collection with video recording provided by Minneapolis Television Network. Resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were also used to create this product. The VOICE Project was funded through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) and the Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives; Communications and Evaluation Unit

Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons may use a relay service to 311 at call 612-673-3000. **Hmong** - Ceeb toom. Yog koj xav tau kev pab txhais cov xov no rau koj dawb, hu 612-673-2800; **Spanish** - Atención. Si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para traducir esta información, llama 612-673-2700; **Somali** - Ogow. Haddii aad dooneyso in lagaa kaalmeeyo tarjamadda macluumaadkani oo lacag la'a