



# Focus Groups with Potential Visitors from Latino and African American Communities

*A study with the Charles A. Lindbergh Historic Site and the  
Mille Lacs Indian Museum & Trading Post for the Minnesota  
Historical Society*

**O C T O B E R 2 0 1 5**

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# Summary

The Minnesota Historical Society contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a total of four focus groups with residents in central Minnesota from Latino and African American cultural communities at two of their historic sites in central Minnesota, the Charles A. Lindbergh Historic Site (LHS) and the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post (MLIM). The purpose of the focus groups was to learn more about why individuals from these communities do not visit these sites and what could be done to better engage with these communities. This goal is closely tied to the Minnesota Historical Society's institutional priority of diversity and inclusion.

Four focus groups were convened in June and July of 2015; each site hosted one focus group with Latino participants and one with African American participants. Prior to each focus group, participants took part in a site experience that included a guided tour of portions of the site and free exploration of exhibit spaces. Following the site experience, participants shared their perceptions of the site experience and how that experience could be improved through a focus group led by Wilder Research staff. The focus groups were recorded, then transcribed and analyzed for themes that arose within each site and/or cultural group.

Key findings of this study include:

- Participants had little to no awareness of the sites beforehand, but there was clear interest in learning more; almost all participants who signed up for the focus groups attended, and all four focus groups were at or near maximum participation capacity.
- Participants understood how these historic sites could be relevant to them and their communities.
- Participants wanted to see more connections between sites and their cultural community or heritage.
- Participants wanted to see more interactive and/or family friendly programming.
- Participants had concerns about cost and/or transportation to each of the sites.
- Participants wanted to see marketing and advertising that was more reflective of their communities and available through media they use (radio, billboards, Facebook, etc.).
- Participants wanted more information on other activities near each site to make the site visit part of a larger experience.

- Participants wanted more historical information and context (particularly regarding pre-European contact at MLIM and Charles Lindbergh's family at LHS).

The following recommendations emerged as a result of examining the key findings:

- Provide translations of brochures and exhibits for visitors who are not proficient in English.
- Create (or showcase existing) connections to other attractions in the areas surrounding both sites.
- Provide marketing materials that are inclusive of diverse audiences and indicative of the audiences that MNHS seeks to attract.
- Provide training for staff to discuss sensitive topics that are connected to the historic sites (e.g., Charles A. Lindbergh's anti-Semitism).
- Update exhibits and programming to reflect current issues and include family audiences.
- Conduct similar research at other sites and within other cultural communities in Minnesota.

# Introduction

In February 2015 the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a total of four focus groups with residents in central Minnesota from Latino, and African American cultural communities at two of their historic sites in central Minnesota, the Charles A. Lindbergh Historic Site (LHS) and the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post (MLIM). The purpose of the focus groups was to learn more about why individuals and families from these cultural communities do not visit these sites and what could be done to better engage with these communities and improve their access to and awareness of these historic sites, as well as their visit experiences.

These focus groups tie into broader institutional goals for MNHS. MNHS has identified diversity and inclusion as a strategic priority for the organization as a whole; as a result, MNHS has an interest in increasing their understanding of challenges and barriers to engaging cultural communities that typically do not use MNHS programs and sites. While MNHS has completed some survey work within their existing audience, that audience is predominantly white. MNHS has less information on those who do not visit their sites, including (and particularly) communities of color. Therefore, these focus groups were the first step to learning more about attracting a more diverse audience and developing more inclusive programming and messaging.

MNHS intentionally chose to begin this work outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area as a way to extend the work of the institution's new department of Inclusion and Community Engagement outside of its headquarters in St. Paul. St. Cloud was chosen as a population center for recruitment because central Minnesota has a fast-growing non-white population, and Latinos and African Americans represent the fastest-growing communities in that region. In addition, LHS and MLIM staff identified that both Latinos and African Americans were present in the region surrounding their sites but were not current users.

MNHS's strategic priority around diversity and inclusion seemed to resonate with focus group participants. One participant in the Latino focus groups noted the need for more inclusive programming at institutions like MNHS and beyond:

*"We need to be visualized in the coming years. Talking about the next 10 years, the majority minority group in the United States, guess who it's going to be. Latinos! Are we ready? Are we preparing our institutions, our agencies, our companies, to be inclusive of us? This is an opportunity to be visionary, to show what we can do with these kinds of places [like the Charles A. Lindbergh House]."*

*– Latino focus group participant*

Another focus group participant from the African American community acknowledged the importance of having conversations around inclusion at MNHS:

*“[The focus group] was a really great experience and I’m glad that you all decided to start these important conversations and head into a more inclusive direction.” – African American focus group participant*

# Methods

The four focus groups took place in June and July of 2015 and were split evenly among the two sites: two focus groups took place at MLIM (June 24 and July 22), and two focus groups took place at LHS (June 25 and July 23). There were 63 total participants between the four groups, with 35 African American participants and 28 Latino participants.

<b>Site/Group</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Latino</b>
Lindbergh Historic Site	16 adults (4 children)	12 adults (5 children)
Mille Lacs Indian Museum	19 adults (0 children)	16 adults (6 children)

MNHS and Wilder Research worked together to develop the focus group protocol. MNHS was responsible for providing space and refreshments for the groups.

Through personal contacts and recommendations from MNHS and Wilder Research, Wilder Research contracted with two individuals from community organizations in the St. Cloud area to recruit participants for the focus groups. St. Cloud is the only major metropolitan area in close proximity to these historic sites, and which has a higher concentration of the targeted cultural communities when compared with the surrounding areas of greater Minnesota. Recruiters focused on encouraging working-age adults from the Latino, and African American cultural communities in and around the St. Cloud area who were proficient in English to attend one or more relevant focus groups.

The focus groups took place in the evening, with dinner provided by MNHS. In addition, each participant was given a \$50 Visa gift card and two free regular admission passes to any MNHS site as an incentive.

Each focus group began with a brief introduction followed by a 90 minute site experience led by MNHS site managers. The site experiences were designed to mirror experiences offered to regular visitors, including a guided tour of portions of the site and free exploration of exhibit spaces. After the site experience, participants were involved in a focus group led by Wilder Research staff with MNHS staff present to take notes and answer questions when appropriate. Focus group participants were asked questions about their perceptions of the site experience and how the experience (programming, exhibits, and site marketing) could be improved to be more responsive to and inclusive of their particular cultural communities.

See Appendix A for more information on the recruitment process and focus group protocol.



# Key findings

The following sections of this report outline key themes that emerged within the focus groups. First, key themes that appeared across both cultural groups and sites are described; next, detail is given about themes that developed within one of the two sites and across both cultural groups; and, finally, themes are described that came to light across both sites but within one cultural group.

## Overarching themes across cultural groups and sites

A number of themes emerged across all four focus groups, meaning they were discussed within each cultural group and at both historic sites. These themes are described in more detail below, with suggestions on how to adjust site programming and/or exhibits, as appropriate.

**Intercultural connections.** This theme emerged most consistently throughout all four focus groups. Individuals from each of the groups and at each of the sites wanted to see intersections between their cultures and the overarching story or themes at each of the sites.

*“In order for us to believe the history of the museum we need to feel our relationship with the place... What is happening with the war [World War II] in the Latino community? How did Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, other countries get affected because [Lindbergh] flew from the United States to France?” – Latino participant*

*“[It would be more appealing if] you had more pictures from [Lindbergh’s] trip to Africa. I don’t know if he took a lot of pictures there but just to see my people standing there, in here [the historic site], that would’ve been nice to see.” – African American participant*

*“The Europeans came here seeing some similarity in all the American continents, from Canada to Patagonia. And what we need to do in these spaces [historic sites] is to learn about what is the past, and what is the connection that all of us – mestizos, indigenous – have? That connection is with these conquerors. And how has that affected us in the past, in the present, and how is it going to affect us in the future?” – Latino participant*

*“I don’t know about anyone else but for me, knowing I have Native American history in my background makes me want to dig into it more.” – African American participant*

Participants from both cultural groups understood that these historic sites were not specifically connected to their cultural heritages, but had suggestions for ways that each site could make some intercultural connections:

- *Share more about Lindbergh’s travels to Africa.* Individuals from the African American focus group were intrigued by Lindbergh’s travels and wanted to know

more about what motivated them and what kind of exchange Lindbergh had with African peoples.

- *Connect Lindbergh's agrarian childhood to similar methods and tools used in contemporaneous Latin America.* Latino participants in the focus groups noted similarities between the tools seen at the Lindbergh house and tools used in Latin American homes around the same time.
- *Make connections between the contact of Anishinabe people with Europeans and European contact with tribes elsewhere in North and South America.* Latino participants were especially interested in knowing the similarities and differences between American Indian/European contact in Minnesota and other areas.
- *Tell the story of American Indian and African American contact.* African American participants were intrigued by stories they have heard of cultural exchange and intermarriage between American Indians and African Americans, and many shared that these kinds of intermarriages are intertwined with their personal family histories. While MLIM is more focused on the Ojibwe people of this region, and this kind of intermarriage is more common with tribes elsewhere in the United States, it might be helpful to compare and contrast with the experiences of other tribes in the Americas.

**More interactive and/or family-friendly programming.** All four focus groups discussed two particular ways that programming could be changed to be more appealing and encourage more visitors:

*More family-friendly activities.* Participants in both the African American and the Latino focus groups mentioned that their cultural communities are very family-oriented. Having activities that cater specifically to families, particularly those with young children, would encourage parents to make the trip to attend.

*"An outing is usually a family outing for us. So I think I would be really excited about some family field trips where [my sons] can partake... My son may not know that he likes aviation because he doesn't know about a place like this. He doesn't know about Charles Lindbergh. It's about exposure and taking the extra steps to connect... and making it a family experience is a big thing for black people." – African American participant*

*More interactive programming.* Participants in one of the focus groups mentioned that they liked the interactive nature of the Lindbergh house tour. Participants from all four focus groups mentioned that having more interactive or "hands-on" exhibits would engage them more and encourage them to return to the site.

*“My take on this is that we should be passing this history down to the children using arts and crafts and other hands-on activities so that they can learn by doing and have something to keep.” – Latino participant*

**Additional information and historical context for each site.** Participants from all four focus groups had additional questions about aspects of context that could be addressed at each site. For example, focus groups at LHS wanted to know more about Charles Lindbergh’s family (his mother and father as well as his wife and children) and his inventions. Participants from the MLIM focus groups wanted to know more about the life of American Indians, particularly the Mille Lacs Band, before European contact.

**Transportation and cost.** Participants from all four focus groups noted challenges with transportation and/or the cost of attending the historical sites, especially given the need to pay for children to attend or childcare if no children attend.

*“If you don’t have a car, how do you reach this place? ... If the museum reached out and said, one day a month there’s going to be a bus leaving the public library, there’s going to be transportation – we’ll pay, but affordable cost and public transportation, that would be helpful.” – Latino participant*

**Regional interest.** Three of the four focus groups had questions about other activities to do or places to go in the area in order to make the site visit part of a larger experience, particularly for families.

**Advertising and marketing.** Finally, the majority of participants in all four focus groups mentioned that they had not heard of either MLIM or LHS before being recruited for the focus group. These groups had suggestions for ideas to better market or advertise MLIM and LHS in the area, and to these cultural groups in particular. These suggestions included:

- *Connecting to organizations that serve target populations.* This suggestion came up most consistently across the focus groups. Focus group participants suggested that MNHS get in contact with local schools, libraries, and places of worship – places where MNHS could distribute information on the historic sites and any upcoming programs specific to those sites.
- *Using social media.* Focus group participants shared that they would like to see advertisements for programs or events on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.
- *Using local print and broadcast media.* Focus group participants noted that they would like to hear advertisements on a local radio station, see them on a local TV station, and/or read about them in the local newspaper.

- *Producing advertisements that reflect the population(s) MNHS seeks to attract.* Similar to the language barrier theme (described in more detail below), Latino focus group participants shared that having advertisements in Spanish would encourage them to visit. Both groups noted that the visitors pictured in MNHS site rack cards are predominantly white adults, giving the impression that people of color and children are not encouraged to attend the site and may not be welcome.

*"I would put more minorities in [the brochures]. You know, like Mexicans, African Americans, Indians, because it's not just Caucasians... If they wanted African Americans to come to this historic museum, I would have something in here that we could relate to."*

*– African American participant*

*"I'd like to see more diversity in the pictures of visitors. It's not just that they are all white, but there are no children – they have no children [on the brochure]." – Latino participant*

*"Look at the pictures of the people they have [in the brochures]! This is the audience that they are trying to attract." – African American participant*

## Themes by site

In addition to the main themes above, a few themes emerged that were specific to a particular historical site, either MLIM or LHS.

Four themes emerged that were specific to MLIM:

- **Perspective.** Participants in both focus groups had questions about whose history was being told at MLIM, and from whose perspective the history was being told. This included comments about the focus of the museum (on the Mille Lacs Band specifically) and on more complicated aspects of the history of contact with Europeans.
- **Food and the arts.** Participants in both focus groups wanted to connect to Anishinabe culture through food and/or art specifically. A participant in one of the focus groups suggested that the trading post feature local American Indian art more prominently than it currently does.
- **Spirituality.** Both focus groups were interested in learning more about Anishinabe spiritual beliefs and practices.
- **Connections to the present.** Both focus groups discussed bringing Ojibwe history forward and connecting it to the present day, reflecting that Anishinabe culture continues to exist and thrive in the present.

*“The one thing I would want when we leave the museum is that the kids are not saying, this is what the Indigenous people used to be or what they used to do... You’re seeing history that is still going on today. It is not history.” – Latino participant*

Two themes emerged that were specific to LHS:

- **Difficult history.** Both focus groups had comments on the more “difficult” portions of Lindbergh’s history, particularly his antisemitism and connection to Nazi Germany. However, participants from the African American and Latino focus groups had different perspectives and different ways to address that history. In particular, participants in the African American focus group wanted the site to focus less on Lindbergh’s connections to Nazi Germany and more thoroughly discuss how his political views may have changed over his lifetime.
- **Universal themes.** Both focus groups wanted to connect to the “human story” within the universal themes presented at LHS, particularly those shared during the house tour: Lindbergh’s ingenuity and his inventiveness, his desire to be connected to the land, and his connections to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) through aviation and scientific inquiry.

*“To me, [LHS] is STEM. It’s the story of an individual, but we’re talking about a visionary who developed machinery and who was smart and courageous enough to do some crazy stuff, and that’s really what we want our kids to be open to doing, to explore the world.” – Latino participant*

## Themes by cultural group

Two themes emerged that were shared in both sites by each cultural community but not across cultural communities:

- **Language barrier.** Participants in both Latino focus groups noted that having materials in other languages (Spanish, Somali, and Mandarin were mentioned specifically) would help to make each site more welcoming to visitors who are not proficient in English.
- **Site accessibility.** Participants in both African American focus groups noted that the sites could provide better access to those with limited mobility, particularly in cases where tour groups are walking longer distances or up and down stairs (as with the Lindbergh house tour).

# Recommendations

Following the examination of the key themes, a number of potential short-, medium-, and long-term changes arose as potential ways to address these key themes.

- **Translate brochures and exhibits for visitors who are not proficient in English.** Providing translations to reflect the common languages of the region would provide a more welcoming environment for visitors who do not speak or read English.
- **Create and/or showcase connections to other attractions in the area.** Making connections with restaurants, hotels, parks, and other attractions in the areas surrounding MLIM and LHS would help entice parents to make day- or weekend-long visits to the area and include these sites as part of their stay.
- **Create marketing materials that are inclusive of diverse audiences and audiences that MNHS seeks to attract.** This includes both print marketing (brochures and rack cards) and other forms of marketing materials (Facebook posts, billboards, etc.)
- **Provide training for staff to be able discuss sensitive topics that may emerge with site visitors.** This includes topics that may emerge as a result of site exhibits or programming (for example, Charles A. Lindbergh's anti-Semitism) and those that may emerge due to cultural differences among visitors.
- **Consider ways to address issues of cost and transportation for potential visitors.** For example, consider expanding the advertisement of the Limited Income Family Program, where adults enrolled in a low income program are offered a reduced general admission rate (and children 17 and under are offered free admission). Sites could potentially also work with the department of Inclusion and Community Engagement to identify other resources to address cost and transportation issues.
- **Update exhibits and programming to shed light on contemporary issues at each site.** This is also an opportunity to create exhibits and/or programming that is more interactive for visitors and inclusive of families, particularly those with younger children.
- **Conduct more research with other cultural communities and at other historic sites.** This effort revealed a lot of enthusiasm and potential investment by the cultural communities involved, indicating the potential for more involvement and investment with other cultural communities and other historic sites.

- **Maintain connections created at these focus groups moving forward.** The focus groups seemed to generate a lot of enthusiasm for MNHS and for culturally responsive and inclusive programming at LHS and MLIM; participants also seemed interested in working in partnership with MNHS to continue to move this work forward. We encourage MNHS to use this momentum to its advantage in working to achieve its diversity and inclusion goals in the region and beyond.

# Appendix A

## Recruitment methods

There were two main challenges to recruiting participants for these focus groups. The first challenge relates to the purpose of the study: asking non-visitors to participate in a study of why they do not visit a particular organization or institution. Non-visitors may be difficult to identify and difficult to encourage to attend. The second challenge is regional: Wilder Research and the central office of MNHS are both located in St. Paul, which are somewhat removed from the focal area of the study.

Wilder Research and MNHS took a multi-pronged approach to overcoming these recruitment obstacles. First was contracting with local organizations to help with recruiting. Wilder Research compiled a list of community contacts through suggestions from MNHS, Wilder, personal networks, and groups found on social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). A Wilder Research Assistant emailed each of the community contacts and followed up with phone calls. A Research Associate also followed up on a few contacts with a personal note.

Through personal contacts and recommendations, Wilder found two individuals from community organizations in the St. Cloud area, Mayuli Bales (with the St. Cloud Diocese and Casa Guadalupe Multicultural Community) and Alisha Williams (with the Greater Minnesota Worker Center), who were willing to contract with Wilder to recruit participants for the focus groups. Recruiters focused on encouraging working-age adults from the Latino and African American cultural communities in and around the St. Cloud area who were proficient in English to attend one or more relevant focus groups.

Wilder and MNHS also sent out a social media blast with the flyers for the focus group events. MNHS and Wilder also compiled a list of community organizations in the area to contact via social media, but ultimately did not need to send out a social media blast to these organizations.

## Procedure and protocol

The four focus groups took place in the evening, with dinner provided by MNHS. In addition, each participant was given a \$50 Visa gift card and two free regular admission passes to any MNHS site as an incentive.

Each focus group began with a brief introduction followed by a 90 minute site experience guided by the site manager. The site experiences were designed to mirror experiences



offered to regular visitors and included a guided tour of portions of the site and free exploration of exhibit spaces.

After the site experience, participants took part in a focus group led by Wilder Research staff, with MNHS staff present to take notes and answer questions when appropriate. The two focus groups with African American participants were conducted in English; the two focus groups with Latino participants were conducted in both English and Spanish (to accommodate participants who were more comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their opinions in Spanish).

Focus group participants were asked the following questions:

- What is one word you would use to describe your experience with the site?
- What did you like best about your experience?
- What, if anything, would you change to improve your experience?
- What would make you most likely to return to this site?
- The Minnesota Historical is interested in supporting relationship building and understanding between cultural communities. With this in mind, what changes could MNHS make to the site programming to work toward this goal?
- What might make the site more appealing to people in your [insert cultural group] community?
- What might keep people in your [insert cultural group] community from visiting this site?
- When you look at these [marketing] materials, what do you think the program is about?
- Do these materials reflect whether this site is a place for you or people from your [insert cultural group] community?
- What, if anything, would you change about these materials?

## Recording and analysis

A staff member from MNHS was present to take notes at each focus group. In addition, each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed. Once the focus groups were completed and transcribed, themes were identified from each group and compared across groups to find common themes. Wilder staff categorized these themes using participants'

own words and ideas as well as those identified by MNHS staff who were present at the focus groups.

## Limitations and issues to consider

While these four focus groups garnered valuable information, there are some limitations to the study and issues that we suggest considering in the future.

### *Limitations of focus group format and population reached*

First, while focus groups are ideal for gathering qualitative data from a defined group on a specific subject, the focus group format does not lend itself to gathering statistically representative data about the cultural communities that participated in the study. The nature of the recruitment process also meant that participants were drawn almost exclusively from the St. Cloud metropolitan area. Accordingly, the themes shown here may not represent the full range of beliefs and thoughts of the African American and Latino cultural communities in the broader central Minnesota region. In addition, there are other cultural communities in the area who were not invited to participate in these focus groups, so their opinions and beliefs are not represented at all. Contact from people who work with immigrant communities in the St. Cloud area, who could not participate due to focus group size and population limitations, suggest that there is interest and opportunity for MNHS to continue and expand its work. Going forward, MNHS may consider finding ways to solicit opinions of potential visitors from other cultural communities in the area and from all cultural communities that are typically underrepresented as visitors at other historic sites across the state.

Next, the combination of focus group size and location proved challenging for gathering data in an effective manner. Recruiters were encouraged to find between 10 and 20 participants for each group with the assumption that there would be some late cancellations or no-shows due to the time commitment involved. However, almost all participants who were recruited showed up for and participated in the groups. While this seems to indicate a high level of enthusiasm from these communities and a high potential for buy-in to MNHS's overarching goals for inclusion in the area, the larger group sizes posed some logistical issues in terms of recording and effective note taking. If focus groups are pursued in the future, MNHS may consider convening more groups with fewer participants within each group. Another strategy would be to assess participation when the groups arrive (if similar recruiting methods are used for future groups) and to be prepared to split into two separate groups for the discussion.

On a related note, many of the focus groups included individuals with young children and there was no plan for childcare. In addition to potentially discouraging some potential

recruits from participating, some children attended the focus group, leading to some challenges for participants and facilitators. MNHS may consider offering childcare options or finding alternative avenues for parents of young children who would like to participate and share their opinions on programming.

### ***Limitations of language barrier***

Another limitation of the study was the language barrier that affects many individuals in the area. This limitation was mentioned explicitly in the Latino focus groups – which were facilitated in part in Spanish to accommodate a few participants who were more comfortable sharing their opinions in Spanish – but is also experienced by other immigrant and cultural communities. For example, a number of Somali individuals from the area expressed an interest in participating in the focus groups, but were unable to participate due to a lack of proficiency in English. For future initiatives, MNHS may consider offering bilingual focus groups to include these individuals. It is worth noting, however, that including people who do not speak English in focus groups is not terribly relevant if none of the programming or site-specific information is available in their primary language.