

Oromo Community Assessment

Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood Survey

J U L Y 2 0 1 6

Prepared by:
Emma Connell
Ryan Evans

In partnership with:

The Oromo Cultural Institute of Minnesota



West Bank Community Coalition



451 Lexington Parkway North | Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700 | www.wilderresearch.org

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Other Wilder Research staff also contributed to this study: Nicole MartinRogers began talks with Hassan Hassan and other community partners, and Jenny Bohlke designed this report.

We also extend our appreciation to Wilder Research's Cross-Cultural Research Group, which funded the majority of our research staff's time on this project. Additionally, the West Bank Community Coalition provided funding to support this survey.

Finally, we appreciate the time and input of the 86 Oromo community members who completed a survey. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

Key findings

The Oromo people are indigenous to the horn of Africa, mainly in Ethiopia. Oromo people first started arriving in Minnesota in the 1970s as refugees, due to continued oppression of Oromo people by the Ethiopian government. In 2016, Wilder Research partnered with Girma Hassen and Abdissa Loke of the Oromo Cultural Institute of Minnesota, Hassan Hassan (a Minneapolis Oromo resident), and Mohamed Mohamed of the West Bank Community Coalition to conduct a survey about the concerns of Oromo people living in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. The following are some key findings:

- 93% of the Oromo community members who were surveyed have experienced difficulty communicating because of language barriers, and 65% experience this every day.
- The large majority of respondents disagreed with the statements that “most Minnesota residents know about Oromo culture and history” (88% disagreed) and “Oromo people living in Minneapolis are encouraged to celebrate Oromo culture” (66% disagreed).
- 67% of respondents disagreed with the statement that “political leaders in Minnesota are doing a good job of advocating for Oromo people in Minnesota.”

Based on these findings, Wilder Research offers the following observations:

- Many Oromo people who live in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood want space and support to celebrate and share their culture. This desire arose in many areas of the survey, and was mentioned as particularly important for Oromo youth. Many respondents said they wanted an Oromo community center.
- Many Oromo people who live in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood experience communication barriers on a daily basis. Institutions and organizations in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood would be better equipped to be of service to Oromo people if staff at those institutions spoke Oromo or if translation services were provided, and if written information was presented in Oromo. This was of particular importance for Oromo elders. Additionally, many Oromo people felt this was important at the buildings where they lived, and at hospitals, clinics, or other medical facilities.
- The survey findings suggest that it is important for political and institutional leaders to learn more about Oromo culture and engage directly with Oromo people. Additionally, these findings suggest that support for Oromo people to self-advocate may be of value.

About the survey

Purpose

The Oromo people are indigenous to the horn of Africa, and make up the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (with an estimated population of 38 million).^{1,2} Oromo people first started arriving in Minnesota in the 1970s as refugees due to continued oppression of Oromo people by the Ethiopian government.^{3,4} There are disparate estimates of the number of Oromo Minnesotans. The state demographer estimates about 8,500 Oromo people in Minnesota while the Oromo Cultural Institute of Minnesota estimates about 40,000.⁵

Despite a sizeable population and decades-long presence in Minnesota, there is, according to many of the Oromo community leaders we spoke with throughout this project, a lack of knowledge about Oromo Minnesotans. This lack of knowledge is exacerbated by the “East African” label, which is often used to describe Oromo people and other East African cultural groups, in particular Somali people. While Oromo people are from East Africa, this label erases ways in which Oromo people are distinct from other East African peoples. The purpose of this survey was to learn about the concerns of Oromo people living in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis.

Background and methods

This project was made possible with much in-kind assistance from Girma Hassen, Abdissa Loke, Hassan Hassan, and others from the Oromo community, as well as financial support from the West Bank Community Coalition and from Wilder Research’s Cross-Cultural Research Group.

¹ Oromo Cultural Institute of Minnesota. <http://www.oromocim.com/>

² Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Population Census Commission. (2008). Summary and statistical report of the 2007 population and housing census: Population size by age and sex. Retrieved from http://ecastats.uneca.org/aicmd/Portals/0/Cen2007_firstdraft.pdf

³ The Advocates for Human Rights. (2009). Human rights in Ethiopia: Through the eyes of the Oromo diaspora. Retrieved from http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/oromo_report_2009_color_2.pdf

⁴ Macalester College. (n.d.) Ethiopian diasporic profile. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/a/macalester.edu/refugees/ethiopian/diasporic-profile>

⁵ The state’s estimate is based on write-in responses to the American Community Survey, birth records, and school language data. OCIM’s estimate is based on immigration records and the number of residents from Oromia, the Oromo region of Ethiopia, and the estimate also includes American-born Oromo people. See MinnPost’s 2016 article: <https://www.minnpost.com/new-americans/2016/05/effort-engage-minnesotas-oromo-community-starts-not-so-simple-task-figuring-out>

Early organizing and planning

In 2015, Wilder Research was approached by a group of Twin Cities Oromo community leaders, organized by Hassan Hassan, to conduct a statewide Oromo community assessment. Because resources were not available to conduct a rigorous statewide assessment right away, Wilder Research proposed a preliminary assessment in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood to form the basis of a statewide assessment for the Oromo community. This preliminary community assessment for the Oromo community in Cedar-Riverside of Minneapolis included a focus group with and a survey of Oromo people living in the neighborhood. In order to accomplish these activities, Wilder Research partnered with Hassan Hassan, an independent community member and leader; Girma Hassen and Abdissa Loke of the Oromo Cultural Institute of Minnesota (OCIM); and Mohamed Mohamed of the West Bank Community Coalition (WBCC). Wilder Research was also assisted by the Oromo Community of Minnesota (OCM).

Initial focus group

In early 2016, with Hassan Hassan, WBCC, and OCM, Wilder Research completed a focus group with roughly 20 Oromo people living in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis (obtaining a final count was difficult because focus group participants continued to arrive throughout the first half of the group). This focus group included participants who were primarily male (there were two female participants) and of a variety of ages. The group's conversation centered on concerns that Oromo people had for Oromo people living in Minneapolis and Minnesota. The primary concerns identified were:

- Language barriers experienced by Oromo people
- Lack of understanding of Oromo culture by non-Oromo Minnesotans

The effects of these concerns were noted in many areas of life, including education, housing, politics, health care, and others. Additionally, two demographic groups were identified as of particular concern: Oromo elders (participants were concerned about language barriers for elders) and Oromo youth (focus group participants were concerned about cultural disconnection among youth). A brief summary of this focus group was written by Wilder Research; please contact Wilder Research if you wish to see this summary. These focus group findings guided the development of the survey instrument.

Cedar-Riverside neighborhood survey

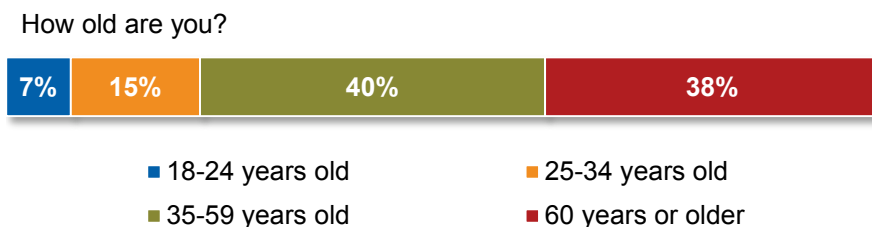
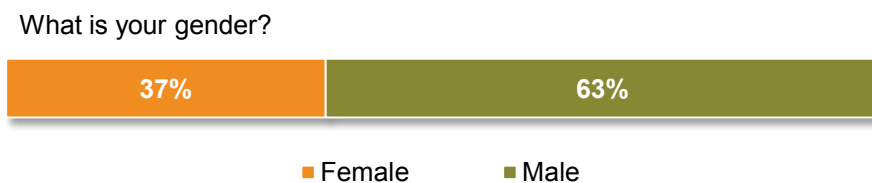
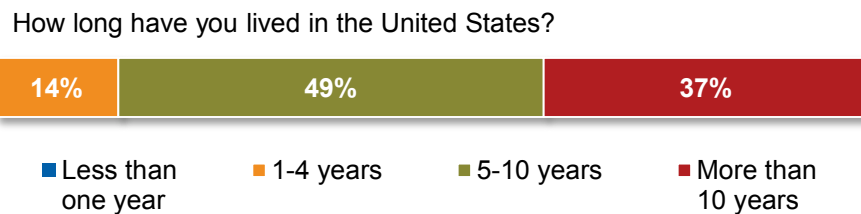
In mid-2016, in partnership with Girma Hassen and Abdissa Loke of OCIM, a survey of Oromo people living the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis was completed.

The survey for this needs assessment was based on the focus group findings, meaning that it asked specifically about language barriers, lack of cultural understanding, and the ways in which those concerns affect Oromo people’s lives in Minnesota. It also asked about Oromo youth and elders. While written in English, the survey was verbally translated into Oromo as needed by survey administrators (responses were recorded in English, regardless of the language the survey was completed in). Wilder Research developed the survey and the survey administration plan with input from Hassan Hassan. The survey was coordinated and administered by OCIM and its Oromo volunteers. Volunteers went door-to-door in the Riverside Plaza apartment buildings as well as to a number of churches and a mosque frequented by Oromo people who live in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood.

Survey respondents

In total, 86 Oromo residents of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood completed the survey. Almost all survey respondents (98%) were born outside of the United States. Of those born outside of the United States, 86 percent had been living in the United States for five or more years. About 6 in 10 survey respondents were male (63%), and almost 8 in 10 survey respondents were 35 years old or older (78%) (Figure 1).

1. Respondent demographic characteristics

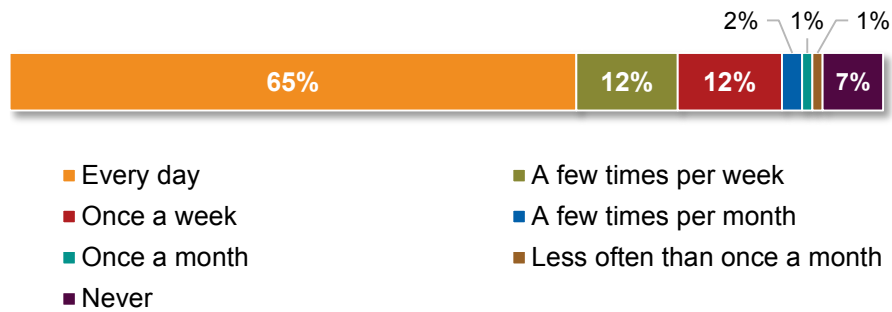


Findings

Language barriers experienced by Oromo people

At the focus group with Oromo people who live in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, language barriers were a primary concern. This is reflected in survey findings as well, as almost all respondents (93%) have had problems communicating with someone due to a language barrier, and the majority of those respondents reported that they experience difficulty communicating every day (65%) (Figure 2).

2. On average, how often do you experience difficulty communicating because of a language barrier?



When asked where they have had trouble communicating, almost all respondents indicated they had experienced difficulty communicating at the following locations:

- City, county, state, or federal government offices (95% of respondents)
- Nonprofit organizations or social service agencies (94%)
- The building where they live (94%)
- At a hospital, clinic, or medical facility (94%)
- At their school or their child's school (84%)

Other locations where respondents had encountered a language barrier included at their job (34%), banks (1%), and day care facilities for children or adults (1%).

Regarding the one location where it was *most important* for respondents to communicate easily, at the building where they live (47% of respondents) and at a hospital, clinic, or other medical facility (31%) were chosen most often (Figure 3).

3. At which of these locations do you feel it is most important for you to communicate easily?



- At the building where you live
- At a hospital, clinic, or medical facility
- At city, county, state, or federal government offices
- Other
- At nonprofit organizations or social service agencies
- At your school or your child's school

Lack of knowledge about and support for Oromo culture

Lack of knowledge about and support for Oromo culture from non-Oromo Minnesotans was another primary concern that arose during the initial focus group. This is supplemented by survey findings (Figure 4). The majority of respondents (88%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “most Minnesota residents know about Oromo culture and history,” and 66 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “Oromo people in Minneapolis are encouraged to celebrate Oromo culture.”

4. Perceptions of knowledge about and support for Oromo culture

Most Minnesota residents know about Oromo culture and history.



Oromo people in Minneapolis are encouraged to celebrate Oromo culture.



- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Quality of life measures

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with a variety of statements about their quality of life in Minneapolis. They were asked about topics ranging from police treatment to housing size.

Measures with majority positive responses

Respondents were most positive about their family’s access to quality health care, with 75 percent indicating that they have access to good quality health care when they need it. A majority of respondents were also positive about the Oromo community’s interactions with police and other public safety officers, and indicated their housing is big enough for their families (about 60% strongly agreed or agreed to both statements) (Figure 5).

5. Health care, police and public safety, and housing size

You and your family can get high quality health care when you need it.



Police and public safety officers in Minneapolis treat Oromo people fairly.



Your housing is big enough for you and your family.

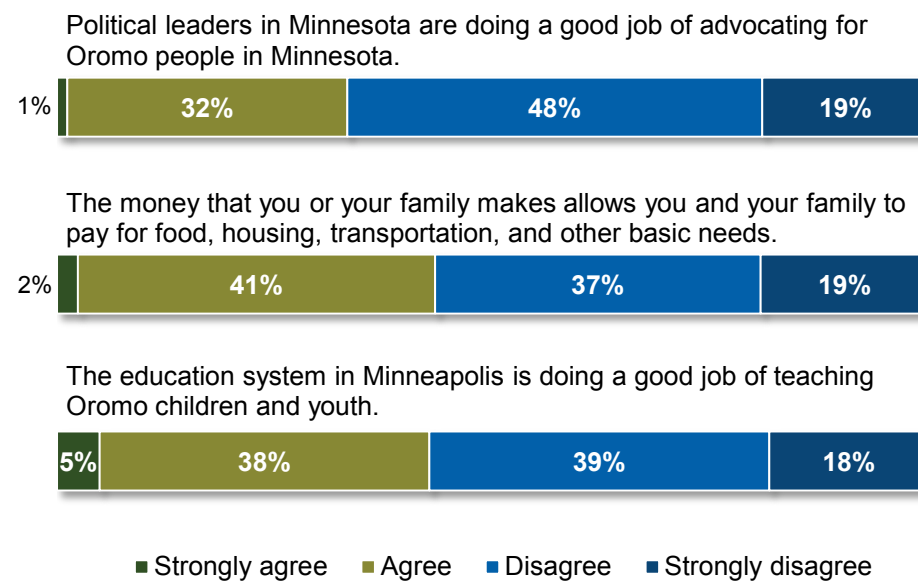


■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Measures with majority negative responses

Respondents were least satisfied with political representation, educational opportunities for Oromo youth, and their families' financial access to basic needs. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that political leaders in Minnesota are doing a good job of advocating for Oromo people in Minnesota (Figure 6). In addition to a lack of political representation, the majority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they have enough money to pay for basic needs and that the education system was doing a good job of serving Oromo children and youth.

6. Political representation, money for basic needs, and education



Youth and elders

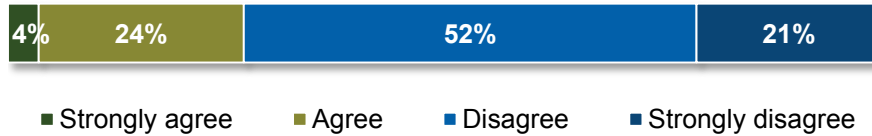
In the initial focus group, a primary concern was how well Oromo youth and elders are doing in Minneapolis. Because of this, specific questions were added to the survey to learn about respondents' perceptions about these groups of people.

Youth

About three-quarters of respondents disagreed that Oromo youth are doing well in Minneapolis (Figure 7). When asked to explain why they answered this way, respondents were most likely to state that youth are not connected with Oromo culture and language, with 73 percent of these respondents answering this way. Ten percent of those who spoke to the loss of Oromo culture in the youth expanded on this, saying that there was a need

for a community center to provide Oromo adults with the space to teach the youth about their culture and language.

7. Oromo youth are doing well in Minneapolis

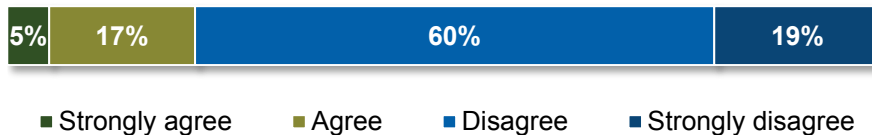


When respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that Oromo youth are doing well in Minneapolis were asked to elaborate, they most frequently cited that Oromo youth have access to good education, with 46 percent of these respondents citing this. Other responses included Oromo youth being actively engaged in and supporting the Oromo community (25%), that Oromo youth have jobs (13%), and that they have access to the things they need and want (4%).

Elders

Respondents were also asked to what extent they agree with the statement “Oromo elders are doing well in Minneapolis.” Seventy-nine percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (Figure 8).

8. Oromo elders are doing well in Minneapolis



Respondents were asked to elaborate on their response. Of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that Oromo elders were doing well, respondents most frequently mentioned a need for language services, particularly translations (31% of those who disagree or strongly disagreed recommended this). Also frequently mentioned (29%) was a need for a community center in which to socialize with other Oromo individuals and connect around their shared culture and language.

Difficulty for Oromo elders in assimilating to American culture was mentioned by 18 percent of those who disagreed with the statement that Oromo elders are doing well; within this, several respondents described Oromo people being frequently mistaken for being Somali and language services being offered for the Somali community in Minneapolis, but not for the Oromo. Some respondents drew a comparison between Oromo elders and

youth, in that the youth are more integrated with American culture and can easily adapt to the new environment, whereas elders have a more difficult time adapting to their new environment. Other responses included having issues with transportation, safety, and being disconnected from Oromo culture.

Those who strongly agreed or agreed that Oromo elders were doing well mentioned that elders were getting government assistance (31%) and were able to have access to resources to meet their basic needs (25%). Other responses included being able to communicate, being able to practice their culture, and living in a free country.

Community and family needs

Respondents were asked about what would be most helpful for the Oromo community in Minneapolis and what one thing would most improve their life or their family’s life. For both questions, the top two responses were: a community center for Oromo people to gather and share their culture, and translation services.

Community needs

When asked an open-ended question about what would be most helpful for the Oromo community in Minneapolis, 47 percent of respondents spoke to a need for an Oromo community center in Minneapolis to give the Oromo community space to share their culture and language, particularly across generations (Figure 9). Second most frequently mentioned was a need for language services, including translations, interpreters, and access to English language classes. Eleven percent of respondents mentioned a need for Oromo individuals to represent the community by being in leadership positions, either political or otherwise. Other named needs include community cohesion to solve problems collectively, inclusive social services, and educational opportunities.

9. Oromo community needs

What is one thing that would be most helpful for Oromo people living in Minneapolis?	%	Total (N= 84)^a
Community center	47%	39
Language services	28%	23
Political, social representation	11%	9
Strengthened internal community	7%	6
Services (unspecified)	6%	5
Education	5%	4

Note: This table shows the number and percent of respondents who provided an answer that falls in each of the given categories.

^a While 84 respondents answered this question, some offered more than one suggestion, resulting in more responses than total respondents.

Family needs

When asked an open-ended question about what would most improve their life or their family's life in Minneapolis, the need for a community center was again most frequently mentioned, with 31 percent of respondents mentioning this (Figure 10). Second most frequently stated was a need for language services (20%), including English language classes and translations. Respondents also spoke to a general need for educational opportunities (15%) and for their neighborhoods to become safe and peaceful spaces (13%).

10. Individual family needs

What is the one thing that would most improve your life or your family's life here in Minneapolis?	%	Total (N= 84)^a
Community center	31%	26
Language services	20%	17
Education	15%	13
Safety/safe spaces	13%	11
Improved external community relations	12%	10
Other	11%	9
Services (unspecified)	10%	8
Political/social representation	6%	5
Employment	5%	4

Note: This table shows the number and percent of respondents who provided an answer that falls in each of the given categories.

^a While 84 respondents answered this question, some offered more than one suggestion, resulting in more responses than total respondents.

Recommendations and next steps

Recommendations for Cedar-Riverside organizations and institutions

The results of this survey indicate that many respondents: feel that non-Oromo Minnesotans do not understand their culture, and that they are not encouraged to celebrate their culture; experience difficulty in the community because of language barriers on a daily basis; and feel that they are not well-represented by political leaders in Minnesota.

Based on these findings, community organizations and institutions in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood could consider:

Celebrating and supporting Oromo culture

- Advocating for an Oromo community center, as was requested by 47% of respondents, which could serve as a center for cultural exchange and language learning, as well as for Oromo people to socialize.
- Holding community events to gather Oromo individuals and others in celebration of Oromo culture and history and actively promoting cultural events targeted at Oromo people throughout the Cedar-Riverside area and the greater Twin Cities metro area. These events could be specifically targeted at Oromo youth, who some respondents feel are drifting from the culture.

Addressing language barriers

- Advocating for the inclusion of Oromo language and translation services. Respondents noted that they particularly need these translation services at buildings where they live and at medical facilities (49% and 31%, respectively). These language supports may involve providing both written and oral language services or hiring Oromo interpreters.
- Determining ways to provide English language classes or access to these classes for Oromo community members, with a particular focus on providing these classes for Oromo elders – 28% of respondents highlighted language services as most helpful for the Oromo community. Additionally, English language classes may be more effective if taught by an Oromo-speaking educator.

Supporting engagement in local, state, and national politics

- Encouraging and supporting Oromo community members to campaign for and hold public office, and providing training to teach Oromo community members how to effectively engage in political advocacy. Only one-third of respondents felt the Oromo community is politically well represented, and 11 percent highlighted greater representation as most helpful for the Oromo community. It should be noted that in 2015, an Oromo-American caucus was started in Minnesota; already-existing efforts such as these represent opportunities for supporting engagement in local, state, and national politics.

Next steps for further research

Wilder Research was initially approached by Oromo leaders to do a statewide community assessment and population estimate of Oromo people. This preliminary community assessment in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is a first step toward these goals. Moving forward, Wilder Research recommends partnering with additional Oromo community partners throughout the state, working with the Minnesota State Demographer's Office (and perhaps other research partners), and seeking additional funding to accomplish these larger research efforts.