

FINAL DELIVERABLE

Title Maquoketa Welcoming Newcomers Policy Study

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Date: December 8, 2021
To: City of Maquoketa
From: Emily Blenck, Mariana Cedillo, Bailey Hochstein, Mario Manzella, Connor McCaffrey, and Bailey Swartzendruber
Re: Maquoketa Welcoming Newcomers Policy Study

SUMMARY:

What makes a community a home? Answers to this question vary with lived experiences and general lifestyle preferences. However, it is safe to assume that community members value acceptance and protection from surrounding neighbors. Surrounding consensus from Maquoketa leaders reveals that those who have recently moved to the community, as well as residents who derive from unique cultural backgrounds, have and continue to present feelings of isolation from their fellow community members. As Maquoketa continues to welcome people to their town, the issue of providing resources and community contacts to this rising resident influx is a growing issue in need of concrete solutions.

BACKGROUND:

When approaching the idea of newcomers and diversity, interviews were conducted with Maquoketa Mayor-elect Tom Messerli as well as Maquoketa's Chamber Director, Kristie Carr, to better understand community challenges. According to both Carr and Messerli, the city of Maquoketa has lacked diversity in the past—the only population that has stood out in terms of diversity were residents of Micronesian descent, who make up about 3% of the town's total population. The leading racial demographic of the town consists of white citizens coming in at 93.7% of the community. Further research reveals that Maquoketa's Micronesian population has hosted festivals that showcase artwork and celebrate Micronesian culture. However, the community itself has not hosted events emphasizing other local-resident culture—including the 2.1% Hispanic, 0.9% African American, and 0.3% Asian populations—nor is there a present committee whose role it is to incorporate diversity and inclusion in community affairs.ⁱ

Upon researching what resources may already be available for newcomers from all backgrounds, the only easily accessible materials were the Chamber of Commerce's website, along with a somewhat outdated "welcoming newcomers" brochure.ⁱⁱ Both resources are only available in English, making them inaccessible to new residents who do not speak/read English as a first language. Besides the aforementioned resources, there is little to no guidance available for those new to or unfamiliar with the Maquoketa community, emphasizing the need for stronger collective efforts in making Maquoketa a home for incoming residents.

BEST PRACTICES:

- **Making it Home (Spring Valley, MN):** In 2018, the rural, southeastern community of Spring Valley, Minnesota partnered with the University of Minnesota's Extension Program to attract and retain more newcomers to their town. In order to address Spring Valley's marketable qualities, the program trained six facilitators to lead "local study circles." These focus groups consisted of community members from all different walks of life, including "school children, retirees, teachers, newcomers, and others"—the main goal of the conversations was to highlight the core benefits of living in Spring Valley.ⁱⁱⁱ After these core benefits were identified, the town led a final action forum in which community members utilized these benefits and created a drafted plan to attract new residents. One of the primary attributes of this plan was to revamp the community's website. This entailed promoting Spring Valley's assets and amenities so newcomers would get a "feel" for the town prior to moving, as well as to attract those who may be searching for a new community via the Internet. Social media-involved residents also began using the hashtag "#GetRuralMN" to promote a positive narrative of rural living.^{iv} While

funding for the Making it Home initiative is not clearly published, the community is in association with the “Spring Valley Area Community Foundation,” which provides funding and grants for the purpose of community building and engagement.^v

- **Hastings Cultural Festival (Hastings, NE):** For the past 12 years the community of Hastings, Nebraska has held an annual cultural festival. This festival entertains residents with a variety of ethnic-themed performances, activities, and booths that serve foods from various cultures.^{vi} Events for this festival span throughout the course of a week, giving residents ample opportunities to either volunteer and/or participate. Residents who live in Hastings get a chance to socialize with their local community members, advocate for inclusivity, and celebrate diversity. This festival began as a method to showcase, celebrate, and promote Hastings' diverse population. All of this is done with the goal of striving towards a more inclusive community, which has been a highly discussed benefit of throwing cultural events in rural communities.^{vii} To fund these festivities the city relies on local businesses, schools, residents, and is sponsored by Hastings College, the multicultural association, and the Hastings YWCA. The Hastings YWCA focuses on eliminating racism and empowering women.^{viii}

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Data Collection**

Prior to creating any concrete plans to welcome new residents to Maquoketa, it is important that community leadership has a general idea of how many citizens are newer to the town. An efficient way to discover this information is to release a community-wide survey. Research done by BMC Medical Research Methodology demonstrates that postal surveys are the most cost-effective option for data collection, starting at about \$16 per questionnaire if approved through county funding.^{ix} A physical survey copy could also reach many Maquoketa residents who do not have a personal computer. According to Maquoketa's incoming mayor, Mayor-elect, past surveys have been sent through residents' water-bills and have asked to be sent back along with their water payments.

Surveys should ask each household how many residents they have, when they moved to the community, their ethnic background, and any resources that they feel would be important to the town. Questions from other policy teams regarding youth engagement, housing concerns, opportunities for women, and civic engagement could also feature on the survey. In order to ensure that residents fill out the document, coupons or gift cards to local businesses could be mailed back in exchange for participation.

- **Creation of Cultural Committee**

New residents of Maquoketa would greatly benefit from establishing a committee dedicated to welcoming residents from diverse backgrounds. In order to emphasize the importance of the committee, it could become an extension of a pre-existing commission, such as the Chamber of Commerce. The committee would plan and head special events such as a Maquoketa Multicultural Festival where diversity is celebrated through different types of vendors, displays of culture, and family-friendly activities that bring the community together. The committee could also provide important spaces for those from different backgrounds to discuss and learn about a variety of cultures.

The Maquoketa Fine Arts Center could be rented out by the committee to host “cultural coffee chats” in which all are welcome to discuss diversity concerns over a cup of coffee. Lastly, the

committee could create a community “buddy system” in which new residents are paired with older residents to exchange contact information and advice about living in the community. This resource should be made available to all newer residents rather than those coming from different backgrounds. This partner system would allow both old and new residents to connect with each other, creating a more close-knit town. Lastly, the establishment of a Cultural Committee within the existing Chamber of Commerce would provide more civic engagement opportunities for minorities and women—this being one of the other goals expressed by Maquoketa leadership.

- **Updating the Maquoketa Website**

The current Maquoketa Chamber of Commerce website includes a “Moving Here” packet that details community resources for incoming residents. While the packet is abundant in resources, many facets need updates; and many community leaders are unaware of its existence. If Maquoketa redesigns and updates the resources on their website, new and old residents would have an easier time accessing important community resources such as upcoming events, postal/garbage information, nearest hospitals, and local business information. The redesign of the website could function as a fascinating volunteer opportunity for Maquoketa High School students who are in touch with newer forms of technology and their community. Students could exchange their time working on the website for official community service hours. It is important that the website is translated into other languages (particularly Spanish) in order to make these resources accessible for non-native English speakers. This also offers an interesting volunteer opportunity for high school students studying Spanish or taking part in the high school’s Spanish Club, for they could gain valuable skills in translation, as well as service hours.^x Lastly, it is important to note that an abundance of Maquoketa residents do not have at-home computer access. According to the US Census Bureau, 18.2% of Maquoketa households do not have a computer, and 26.2% lack broadband Internet Services.^{xi} In order to ensure all residents—new and old—can utilize the website, the Maquoketa Public Library could link their computer homepages to the new-and-improved site, automatically engaging those who do not have a personal computer to view these resources.

SURVEY QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever utilized the city’s website?
- Do you have any interest in joining a cultural committee?
- Do you feel accepted and/or welcomed in Maquoketa?
- Would you attend a cultural festival?
- How can Maquoketa's leadership be more inclusive?

NEXT STEPS:

- Speak with local businesses about sponsoring local events to welcome new citizens
- Send out survey(s) to residents
- Gather volunteers for a cultural committee

Endnotes:

ⁱ *U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Maquoketa City, Iowa.*

www.census.gov/quickfacts/maquoketacityiowa.

ⁱⁱ “Moving Here.” *Maquoketa Chamber*, maquoketachamber.com/moving-here/.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Making It Home in Spring Valley.” *UMN Extension*, extension.umn.edu/source-magazine/making-it-home.

^{iv} “Making It Home.” *Welcome New Residents | UMN Extension*, extension.umn.edu/rural-brain-gain-migration/making-it-home.

^v “Spring Valley Community Foundation.” *Spring Valley Area Community Foundation*, 11 Nov. 2021, smifoundation.org/spring-valley/.

^{vi} “Cultural Festival Featuring Food, Music Set for Sunday, November 17.” *Hastings College*, 14 Nov. 2019, www.hastings.edu/news/cultural-festival-featuring-food-music-set-for-saturday-november-17/.

^{vii} “Festivals Can Bring a Community Together.” *Center For Rural Affairs - Building a Better Rural Future*, www.cfra.org/blog/festivals-can-bring-community-together.

^{viii} “YWCA.” *YWCA Adams County Nebraska*, 1 Dec. 2021, www.ywcaadamscounty.org/.

^{ix} Sinclair, M., O’Toole, J., Malawaraarachchi, M. *et al.* Comparison of response rates and cost-effectiveness for a community-based survey: postal, internet and telephone modes with generic or personalised recruitment approaches. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 12, 132 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-12-132>

^x “Clubs & Organizations.” *Maquoketa Community School District*, 29 Oct. 2021, www.maquoketaschools.org/activities/clubs-organizations/.

^{xi} *U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Maquoketa City, Iowa.*

www.census.gov/quickfacts/maquoketacityiowa.