Of the People

THE SURGE AND WHAT'S NEXT

October 7, 2026

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Welcome

When federal immigration enforcement surged, Minnesotans stepped up. Although unjust ICE operations continue, the people revealed our civic strength: Minnesotans are deeply rooted to each other and ready to act when it matters. We showed the world that “of the people, by the people, for the people” is not just a phrase from America’s past—it’s a promise we can choose to keep.

At today’s Minnesota Meeting, we’ll reflect on what happened last winter, what it reveals, and what it can mean for other communities under pressure. We’re glad you’re here for this important conversation and hope you leave more informed, energized, and committed to a future where our civic strength shines.

Agenda

Agenda

— 7:45 a.m. —

Doors Open

Light breakfast, gallery walk,
and networking

— 8:45 a.m. —

Opening Remarks

R.T. Rybak, Minneapolis Foundation

The Immigration Justice Gap

Kira Kelley, Habeas Collective;
Michele Garnett McKenzie, The Advocates for Human Rights; and Fabiola Velásquez, Fe y Justicia

Operation Metro Surge exposed deep fault lines in our immigration justice system, testing an already overloaded infrastructure as communities faced expanded detention powers, limited access to counsel, and inadequate safeguards against civil rights violations. This panel discussion will examine the gaps exposed by the surge, how legal aid organizations responded, and what we can do to create a more just and accountable system.

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This National Moment & The Response It Demands

Sharon Davies, Kettering Foundation

Love Poem to Minnesotans Disguised as a Matthew Olzmann Poem

Bao Phi, Poet

Why I Stepped Up: Voices of Some Who Did

This audience conversation will feature reflections from a diverse group of neighbors, friends, co-workers, and community leaders. We'll hear why these Minnesotans stepped up and how they drew on longstanding networks—from congregations and unions to artist collectives—to support families and communities during Operation Metro Surge.

Preparedness: What We Learned & Will Do

Rachel Sayre, City of Minneapolis

Agenda

The People's Role in American Democracy

Justin Lall, Gallup

The Democracy for All Project, a partnership between the Charles F. Kettering Foundation and Gallup, is the most extensive annual study of how Americans experience and participate in democracy. This presentation will provide a broader context in which to place Minnesota's story and include up-to-date research on public attitudes about our democracy.

— 10:50 a.m. —

Break

— 11:10 a.m. —

You, Too, Can Be a Truth Storyteller

Verónica Cadavid González,
The Advocates for Human Rights

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Impact Stories from the Immigrant Rapid Response Fund

Ambar Cristina Hanson, Mortenson Family Foundation; Hodan Omar, Hooyo Hour; Mary Hernandez, Mi CASA

The Immigrant Rapid Response Fund, housed at the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, offers a powerful example of how philanthropy responded to the surge with urgency and trust, providing nonprofits with resources to help families access housing, food, and other critical needs. Leaders from Minnesota nonprofits will share how the fund's resources were put to work, what they learned, and what it will take to sustain these networks and relationships going forward.

— 12:00 p.m. —

Lunch & Gallery Viewing

Agenda

— 12:45 p.m. —

The Press & Democracy-Affirming Coverage

Ubah Ali, The Somali Brief; Kathleen Hennessey, Minnesota Star Tribune; Candice Fortman, Blue Engine Collaborative

Operation Metro Surge unfolded across a rapidly changing media landscape, with traditional news organizations, community publications, independent creators, and residents documenting events from different perspectives in real time. This session will explore how information moved during the surge, how trust was built or challenged, and how different forms of storytelling shaped public understanding.

10 Groups Driving Democracy Momentum

Jo-Anne Stately, Minneapolis Foundation

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Honoring Nicollet Island's Sacred Past

Kate Beane, Minnesota Museum of American Art

"TENT Talks" – Choose a Group, Be Involved

Featuring Ayada Leads, COPAL, Groundwork Institute, ISAIAH, Minnesota Voice, MN8, Native American Community Development Institute, TakeAction Minnesota, Tending the Soil, and Unidos MN

— 2:30 p.m. —

Closing Remarks

R.T. Rybak, Minneapolis Foundation

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Our Speakers

Our Speakers

Ubah Ali

The Somali Brief

Ali was born in Nairobi, Kenya and raised in Rochester, Minnesota. After earning her degree at St. Cloud University, she returned to Rochester to begin her career as a multimedia journalist. Her passion for storytelling took her to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and eventually back home, where she joined WCCO-TV. Now, she's a reporter with The Somali Brief. Ali makes history in Minnesota as the first Somali-American TV reporter in the Twin Cities.

Our Speakers

Dr. Kate Beane

Minnesota Museum of American Art

Beane (Flandreau Santee Dakota and Muscogee Creek) holds a bachelor's degree in American Indian studies and a doctorate in American studies from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. She is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Museum of American Art, has taught at both the University of Minnesota and Minneapolis College, and serves on the boards of Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi and Jerome Foundation. She was also appointed by Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz to serve on the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board and the Governor's Council to Record the Truth of Operation Metro Surge and Operation

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PARRIS (the “Minnesota Truth Council”). In 2018, Beane and her father completed a documentary film, “Ohiyesa: The Soul of an Indian,” and in 2019 she presented a Minneapolis TEDx Talk, “The Lasting Legacy of Place Names,” on her family’s work restoring the Dakota name Bde Maka Ska at their ancestral village site in south Minneapolis (Bdeota).

Our Speakers

Verónica Cadavid González

The Advocates for Human Rights

As a Legal Advocacy Advisor at The Advocates, Cadavid González leads advocacy and research on violence against women at the United Nations and in regional human rights systems, in partnership with a network of global human rights defenders. She advises on collaboration with individuals with lived experience and human rights defenders in the diaspora. Cadavid González is also one of The Advocates' experts on protection from and prevention of sex trafficking and exploitation. Cadavid González is a human rights attorney and practitioner with a decade of experience working across the nonprofit and private

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sectors, academia, and international governmental organizations. She specializes in integrating human rights principles into law and policy development, with extensive thematic expertise in violence against women; economic, social, and cultural rights; and the rights of people in rural areas.

Our Speakers

Sharon Davies

Kettering Foundation

Davies is President and CEO of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. Her career spans both academic and non-academic fields. From 2017 to 2021, Davies was Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Spelman College. She joined Spelman from The Ohio State University, where she was Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer.

Davies was also a member of OSU's Moritz College of Law faculty for 22 years, serving as the Gregory H. Williams Chair in Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. In addition, she directed the university's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity,

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an interdisciplinary engaged research institute known nationally for its work in social justice, equity, and inclusion. She also held an appointment to the Ohio Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

Our Speakers

Candice Fortman

Blue Engine Collaborative

Fortman is a media strategist, community-powered journalism leader, and organizational builder who has spent much of her career asking a simple question: Who is journalism actually built to serve?

She was the founding Executive Director of Outlier Media, the Detroit-based nonprofit newsroom that grew into a roughly $2 million organization using an innovative, needs-driven approach to journalism. She often refers to her work at Outlier as her love letter to Detroit, her hometown. After stepping down as Executive Director, she joined Outlier's board, continuing to support the organization and mission.

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She now serves as Executive-in-Residence at Blue Engine Collaborative, where she coaches newsroom leaders and teams on audience growth, revenue diversification, organizational strategy, and digital transformation.

Our Speakers

Ambar Cristina Hanson

Mortenson Family Foundation

Hanson, MPA, is the Executive Director at Mortenson Family Foundation. Hanson moved to Minnesota from the Dominican Republic in 1997. Since moving to the U.S., she has been dedicated to promoting and advocating for immigrant communities and communities of color, with a focus on ensuring equal opportunity and access to higher education, living-wage jobs, healthcare, housing, and safety. Currently, Hanson serves on the boards of the Minnesota Council on Foundations, the Latino Economic Development Center, Minnesota Public Radio, and the F.R. Bigelow Foundation. She is also a finance committee member at the

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Headwaters Foundation and an ambassador for Listen to Community.

Our Speakers

Kathleen Hennessey

Minnesota Star Tribune

Hennessey serves as Editor and Senior Vice President for the Minnesota Star Tribune, joining the media platform after spending the three prior years at The New York Times as a Deputy Politics Editor.

Hennessey brings a breadth of reporting and editing chops to the Strib. She spent much of her career in Washington, where she covered politics, Congress, and the Obama White House, initially for the Tribune newspapers and then for the Associated Press. Hennessey began her editing career in 2016 as AP's White House Editor and was quickly elevated to Deputy Washington

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Chief, playing a key role in leading the global news service's coverage of the first Trump administration.

But Hennessey is not a typical creature of Washington. She has reported from statehouses in Sacramento and Carson City, and written about brothels, casinos, and the beauty pageants from Las Vegas. As an editor, she pushed for deeper coverage of voters and the political currents coursing far from the Beltway. The work eventually allowed her to move back to Minnesota, where, before joining the Times, she led a national team of AP political reporters who lived in the communities they covered.

Our Speakers

Mary Hernandez

Mi CASA

Hernandez is a visionary leader in Scott and Carver counties, co-founder of the Shakopee Diversity Alliance and Mi CASA. Recognized as one of YWCA's "20 Hispanic & Latina Women to Know" in 2020 and one of the "Top Women to Know" in 2024, Hernandez has dedicated her life to building inclusive communities.

A devoted mother of four and wife, Hernandez's 13 years as a Cultural Liaison in local schools laid the foundation for her deep connection to the community. Under her leadership, Mi CASA has earned numerous accolades, including the Latino

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Organization of the Year (2023), the Mayor's Choice Award (2023), and People's Choice Award (2024) from the Shakopee Chamber of Commerce for its holiday programs.

Our Speakers

Kira Kelley

Twin Cities Habeas Collective

Kelley is a part-time staff attorney at the Climate Defense Project and has a part-time, entirely pro bono solo practice. For the past dozen years or so, they've been learning from and working with people and movements across the country who fight coal plants, pipelines, mines, landlords, white supremacists, borders, police violence, and other forms of corporate/state repression.

Our Speakers

Justin Lall

Gallup

Lall is a principal at Gallup, where he leads the firm's U.S. research on democracy, technology, and American life. He designs and directs some of Gallup's largest research partnerships, producing rigorous, independent evidence that helps leaders understand the people they serve and make decisions grounded in Americans' actual experiences. His portfolio spans flagship studies of American democracy and economic life, community research programs that bring residents' views into the decisions that affect them, and a growing body of work on how artificial intelligence

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is reshaping American institutions. Lall previously served as Director of Strategic Partnerships, Associate Principal in Gallup's public sector division and as a consultant in its education and workforce development practice.

Our Speakers

Michele Garnett McKenzie

The Advocates for Human Rights

McKenzie leads The Advocates, ensuring the organization fulfills its mission to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law. As Executive Director, she is responsible for all aspects of The Advocates' programming and operations.

McKenzie has served on the national leadership team of the Immigration Advocates Network and as chair of Detention Watch Network. She chaired the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault public policy committee, served on the Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, and was a member of the Immigrant Defense Network's

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steering committee. She is admitted to practice in the State of Minnesota and has worked as an adjunct clinical faculty member of Mitchell Hamline College of Law and the University of Minnesota Law School.

Prior to joining The Advocates, McKenzie was in private immigration practice and served as a judicial law clerk for the Executive Office for Immigration Review in Arizona and Nevada.

Our Speakers

Hodan Omar

Hooyo Hour

Omar is the founder and Executive Director of Hooyo Hour Organization, a Minnesota nonprofit focused on women's leadership, family support, youth empowerment, and community well-being. With 20 years of experience in community and educational work, Omar is committed to creating inclusive spaces where families can connect, lead, and thrive.

Our Speakers

Bao Phi

Poet

Phi is a Vietnamese American refugee, Minnesotan, spoken word artist, poet, children's book author, and single co-parent father. He has won numerous awards locally and nationally over the years, is widely published, and has been an in-demand public speaker and performer nationally for over three decades.

Our Speakers

R.T. Rybak

Minneapolis Foundation

Rybak joined the Minneapolis Foundation in 2016 after careers in journalism, publishing, urban development, and marketing, and 12 years as Mayor of Minneapolis. Under his leadership, the Foundation has more than doubled the money it invests in communities, now granting more than $100 million a year in Minnesota and around the world. The Foundation's grantmaking program focuses on equity and justice in education, economic mobility, and the environment, creating what Rybak calls a "community of generosity" to align fundholders at the Foundation with emerging community needs.

Our Speakers

Rachel Sayre

City of Minneapolis

Since October 2024, Sayre has served as the Director of the Emergency Management Department for the City of Minneapolis. She led the City's Emergency Operations Center in response to the Annunciation mass shooting in 2025 and to the impacts of Operation Metro Surge in 2026. Sayre joined the City after thirteen years at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), including a decade of leading the U.S. government's response to humanitarian disasters in the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. Sayre led USAID humanitarian aid responses in dozens of countries,

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including war and disaster zones in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and Haiti. In addition, she was the Senior Advisor to USAID's Administrator in 2014-2015, where one of her many accomplishments included overseeing efforts combatting the international Ebola epidemic.

Our Speakers

Jo-Anne Stately

Minneapolis Foundation

Stately's areas of focus include workforce development, job creation, support for BIPOC businesses, housing, and family financial security. A member of the Foundation's team since 2009, she has more than 30 years of experience in philanthropy. She serves as co-chair of the Northside Funders Group and as a member of the Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative. Nationally, she is the past chair and has now served six years as treasurer of the board of Native Americans in Philanthropy. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and enjoys the outdoors.

Our Speakers

Fabiola Velásquez

Fe y Justicia

Velásquez is a Community Organizer with Fe y Justicia in Central Minnesota, where she has spent the past four years organizing, empowering, and supporting the Latinx immigrant community. Originally from Venezuela, she moved to the United States seeking safety from violence and political repression and to continue her education.

A graduate of St. Cloud State University, Velásquez holds degrees in political science and international relations. She combines her education with her lived experience to organize and train community members around immigration, community justice,

Our Speakers

civic engagement, and leadership. Through her work with Fe y Justicia, she is committed to helping immigrant and marginalized communities build collective power, advocate for themselves, and create lasting change.

“TENT Talks”

Choose a Group,

Be Involved

“TENT Talks”

AYADA LEADS equips New Americans, particularly women from the African diaspora, to excel in leadership positions in their communities. The organization works to support nonpartisan voter education and civic engagement through Village Voices, a community-centered initiative designed to build civic confidence and increase voter participation among Minnesota’s African diaspora and other historically underserved communities.

COMUNIDADES ORGANIZANDO EL PODER Y LA ACCIÓN LATINA (COPAL) is a member-based organization that works to improve the quality of life for Latine families in Minnesota by building collective power, transforming systems, and creating opportunities. COPAL is currently implementing a statewide election plan that centers on civic engagement, voter outreach, voter participation, and election protection.

“TENT Talks”

GROUNDWORK INSTITUTE equips local leaders—community organizers, policy advocates, and more—with the skills needed to build community power, challenge oppressive systems, and ensure that institutions prioritize community needs. Groundwork is currently supporting nonpartisan assistance training and a multilingual voter hotline.

ISAIAH is a statewide, multiracial, nonpartisan network that organizes through faith communities, barbershops, childcare centers, college campuses, rural communities, and manufactured-home parks. This election season, ISAIAH is emphasizing relational organizing, integrated communications, and election protection, including preparing faith and community leaders to respond to misinformation, intimidation, and potential disruptions at the polls.

“TENT Talks”

MINNESOTA VOICE convenes and coordinates Minnesota’s largest nonpartisan civic engagement network. It provides partner organizations with data, training, grants, coordinated voter registration, and statewide nonpartisan Get Out the Vote support, as well as the Democracy Protector Training Program and the coordination of rapid-response call lines across its statewide network.

MN8 election work is grounded in a long-term commitment to building civic power in Southeast Asian communities. This includes support of culturally relevant, multilingual voter education and election protection for Southeast Asian immigrant and refugee communities across Minnesota.

“TENT Talks”

TAKEACTION MINNESOTA unites the power of diverse individuals, communities, and organizations in active grassroots democracy that builds racial, social, and economic justice. This election season, the organization will produce a nonpartisan voting guide and a pro-democracy and defense program.

TENDING THE SOIL is an alliance of five power-building nonprofit and labor organizations representing more than 10,000 working-class and BIPOC Minnesotans. Its local democracy work includes support of voter engagement and turnout, election protection, rapid-response coordination, legal and communications strategies, and community preparedness for potential threats to democratic participation.

“TENT Talks”

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (NACDI)

strengthens Native-led civic participation in Minneapolis’s American Indian Cultural Corridor and statewide. NACDI’s Make Voting a Tradition program is a culturally specific, year-round peer-to-peer outreach effort to educate and mobilize Native voters to overcome barriers to the ballot, and to train community members in election safety, voting rights, and voter assistance.

UNIDOS MN is a grassroots organization that builds power with Minnesota’s working families to advance social, racial, and economic justice for all. Unidos MN supports training related to story collection, precinct and county protection, corporate defense planning, Get Out the Vote, and neighborhood election defense activities.

Get Engaged

Get Engaged

Keep supporting democracy work

Today you heard from 10 groups that are driving democracy forward. The Minneapolis Foundation recently awarded $825,000 in grants to these groups to help ensure all Minnesota voters have the information and support they need to cast their ballots this fall. We invite you to join us in supporting these groups, and to consider democracy work in your philanthropy beyond election seasons.

Participate in upcoming elections

Vote—and make sure your friends do, too! Not sure if you're registered, or have another question about voting options? Head to the Minnesota Secretary of State's website.

Get Engaged

Support local businesses

This year, the Minneapolis Foundation helped muster emergency aid for small businesses through the Economic Response Fund and Salt Cure Restaurant Recovery Fund. But local entrepreneurs and commercial corridors are still struggling with the fallout of increased immigration enforcement activity. Now more than ever, shopping local is a critical way to support your neighbors and Minnesota's economy.

Stay connected

If you're looking for ways to get involved and support your community, the Minneapolis Foundation is here to help. Check out upcoming events and sign up for email updates—and reach out to our team if you're looking for new ways to turn your charitable intentions into impact. Get started at GiveAdvised.org.

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