

# COMMUNITY ISSUES FORUM

## THE ART OF BELONGING

Spring 2016



**Executive Summary from the Center for Public Deliberation**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

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What you really need to know.

This report explores findings from the Spring 2016 Community Issues Forum. Over 100 community members gathered to discuss what it means to *belong* in Fort Collins. The CSU Center for Public Deliberation and the City of Fort Collins worked to gather a diverse group of community members. The event conveners then asked participants to discuss opportunities for growth, current resources, and action items for creating a city that makes each community member feel like they belong.

**Barriers to Belonging.** Many participants felt that Fort Collins had made large strides in making sure that the community felt inclusive over the years. However, there were key areas that community members felt needed work to promote and maintain a welcoming, inclusive community. Areas of growth fell into two categories: public issues and underlying barriers. Public issues are different parts of how the community functions. These issues tend to be ones that can be addressed through specific policies, programs, or initiatives.

## Public Issues

- Affordability
- City Accessibility
- Neighborhood/Community Events
- Integration
- Fear of Violence
- Education
- Diverse Services
- Economic Opportunity
- Public Transit
- Parks & Recreation
- Media

These differ from underlying barriers, which may be personal experiences with the problem or may be ways of thinking about why the problem exists. Underlying barriers tend to be harder to address with a single ballot initiative or budget amendment. Rather they require a culture shift.

## Underlying Barriers

- Visibility
- Safety
- Representation
- Discrimination
- Outreach/Inclusion
- Communication/Collaboration
- History
- Bias/Acceptance

**Community Players.** Participants identified many community players that currently work to create a greater sense of belonging. They also identified ways in which these community players can help to address the current gaps. Schools, religious institutions, non-profits, businesses, recreation centers, libraries, senior centers, city programs, and service organizations were named as key community players. The specific action steps that participants recommended for each of these community players can be found in the Action Items section.

There was a wide breadth of information that was collected on each of these community players. Collectively, participants requested increased communication and collaboration between key players. Part of this was to avoid the duplication of services, but also to help different community players take advantage of the diverse programs already being offered. Future conversations may need to take a bird's eye view of the web of resources available.

Alternatively, future conversations may need to prioritize key areas of growth and focus on a specific public issue, root issue, demographic group, or community player. The aim of this event was to spark conversation and collect ideas. The information collected will hopefully help key community players to prioritize next steps.

**Continuing the Conversation.** Participants expressed a marked appreciation for the opportunity to speak openly with diverse members of their community. When asked to name the most important thing that they wanted people to learn from this meeting, many participants expressed that:

- There's a large community of people who care about this issue.
- Communication about this issue is possible and needed.
- Fort Collins has come a long way, but has a long ways to go.
- Action needs to follow productive conversations.

In an analysis of surveys following the event, it was found that there was no significant difference between minority and majority members in feeling heard, feeling respected, and having the opportunity to speak. This indicates that it is possible to discuss difficult and oftentimes personal community issues in productive ways. Conversations tend to be more successful when community members are provided with a trained facilitator, opportunities to speak in small groups, and a framework for discussion.

**See the [full report](#) for the extended analysis.**