

COMMUNITY ISSUES FORUM

THE ART OF BELONGING

Spring 2016



Key Summary of Findings from the Center for Public Deliberation

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ABOUT THE COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION

The CSU Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) serves as an impartial resource to the northern Colorado community. Working with students trained in small group facilitation, the CPD assists local government, schools boards, and community organizations by researching issues and developing useful background material, and then designs, facilitates, and reports on innovative public events. The interpretations and conclusions contained in this publication have been produced by CPD associates without the input of partner organizations to maintain impartiality.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

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.

BACKGROUND.

Just so you know how this all got started.

Community Issues Forum. Twice a year the city's public engagement office and the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) host a Community Issues Forum (CIF). Each forum focuses on a number of topics like AirBnB Regulation, the Downtown Plan, and the Recycling Plan. Community members are asked to come and provide input on these topics, which relate to issues currently being explored by city council or the planning offices. However, in Spring of 2016 the City of Fort Collins chose to dedicate the entire forum to the city's inclusion and equity goals related to social sustainability.

Triple Bottom Line. Social sustainability consists is one of the three core areas of Fort Collins' Triple Bottom Line. The City of Fort Collins uses economic, environmental, and social sustainability as key criteria for evaluating project plans. In particular, social sustainability refers to supporting, "a diverse and equitable community that successfully meets the basic needs of all of its residents" (Strategic Plan).



In recent years, the City of Fort Collins has implemented a number of changes to sustain this mission. In 2012 the City formed the Department of Social Sustainability to specifically address these needs by supporting human service agencies, increasing affordable housing, reducing poverty, and working internally with other city departments. In 2014, the City of Fort Collins contracted an external research firm to survey the current state of social sustainability. This [analysis](#), along with personal interviews, was used to inform the [Social Sustainability Strategic Plan](#). The Community Issues Forum was designed to gather feedback on two goals from the Social Sustainability Strategic Plan:

B.1 Promote and maintain a welcoming, inclusive community where people feel connected.

B.3 Expand the city's diversity, inclusion, and equity goals, with an emphasis on internal and external communications, education, and outreach.

However, forum participants were not asked to respond to these two goals or the Social Sustainability Strategic Plan directly. This was because conveners felt that more information gathering was necessary before moving towards specific action plans.

Planning the Forum. The City of Fort Collins, particularly the Department of Social Sustainability, planned the CIF in partnership with the Center for Public Deliberation. Annie Bierbower, Civic Engagement Liaison; Ginny Sawyer, Project and Policy Manager; and Janet Freeman, Administrative Assistant II met with Martin Carcasson, CPD Director; Kalie McMonagle, Graduate Student; and Sam Maldonado, Graduate Student to plan the event. Alma Vigo-Morales was brought in as a diversity consultant for feedback on the drafted process.



METHODS.

METHODS.

WHAT WERE THE GOALS OF THE EVENT?

Members of the public engagement team at the City of Fort Collins worked with the Center for Public Deliberation to plan this event. The following were the goals and desired outcomes of the event.

Purpose Information Gathering

Goal of Event Bring people together to continue a larger conversation about what it means to belong in the Fort Collins community. Conveners wanted to hear from residents what belonging looks and feels like now and how they picture it in the future. Conveners wanted to hear about work that is already being done and find out what the city is missing. Finally, participants brainstormed ways we can make the community of Fort Collins a place where all can feel like they belong.

Outcomes

- Expand the current conversation around belonging in Fort Collins.
- Take stories and learnings from the event to shape future actions and dialogues in partnership with the Human Relations Commission, Social Sustainability Department, the CSU Center for Public Deliberation, and other community organizations.
- Compile a report to disseminate to community organizations.

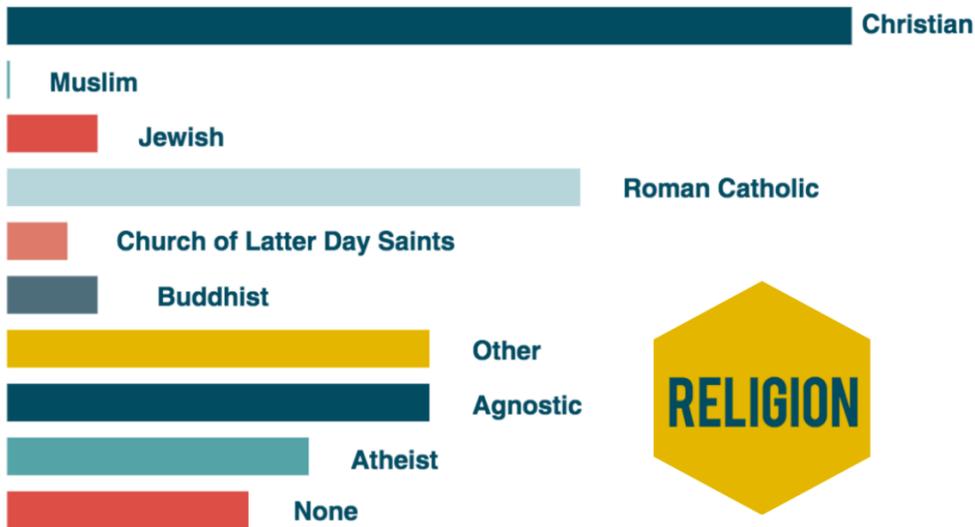
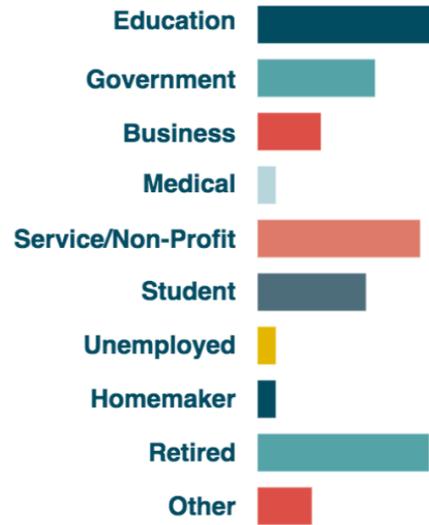


WHO WAS IN THE ROOM?

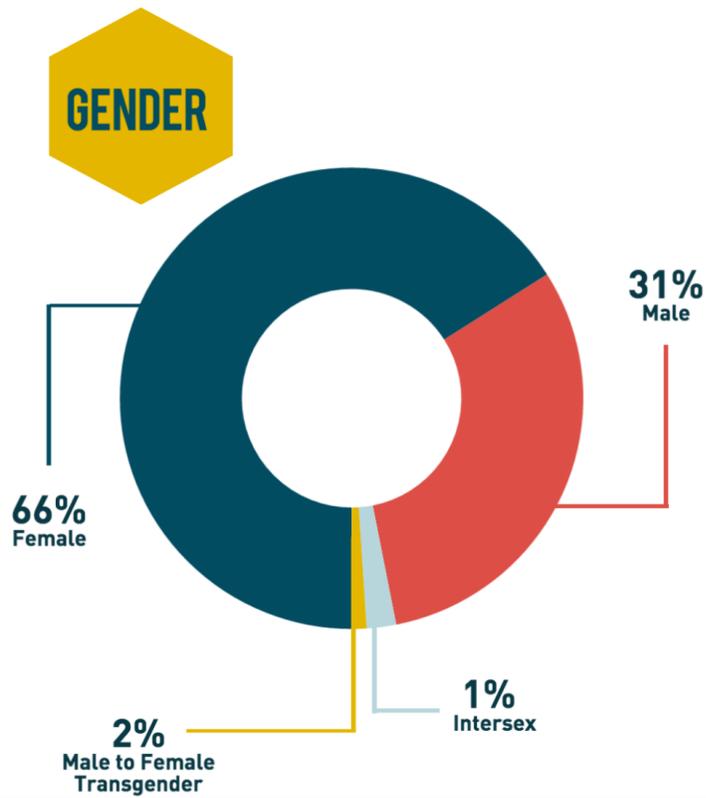
Those convening the forum attempted to gather a diverse group of residents to participate in the forum. They created a list of key stakeholders based on demographic categories (i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation). The event was open to anyone interested. However, capacity was limited due to the number of available facilitators. Around 100 individuals attended the event.

At the beginning of the event, participants reported key demographic information using keypads. Each participant was provided a keypad. Keypads are a remote clicker that allows participants to enter an anonymous response to a survey question. This event asked a series of demographic questions (age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, religion, etc.). Not everyone answered every single keypad question, but the data offers a general idea of who was in the room. See [full report](#) for appendix information.

EMPLOYMENT



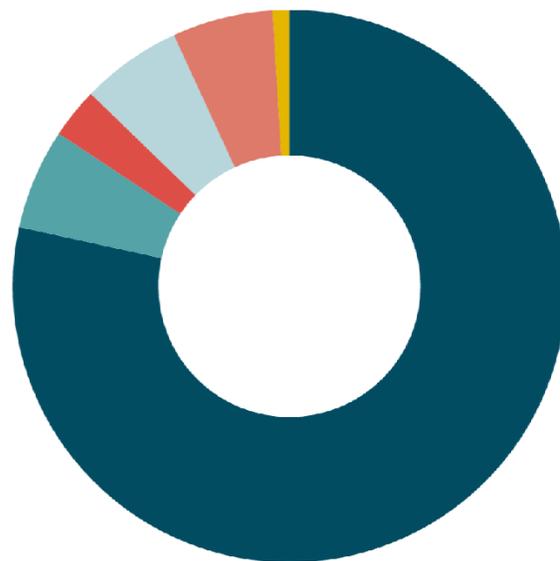
RELIGION



WHAT ARE PERSONAL PRONOUNS?

Oftentimes we use pronouns to refer to someone when we don't know their name. We might say, "I saw HER at the store," or, "HE just mentioned something really important."

But there are gender neutral pronouns too. Some folks use ZE instead of He/She and HIR instead of Him/Her. Others use They/Them/Their to refer to themselves. Instead of guessing, just ask: What pronouns would you like me to use?



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- Heterosexual (78%)**
- Lesbian (6%)**
- Gay (male) (3%)**
- Bisexual (6%)**
- Something Else (6%)**
- Prefer Not to Answer (1%)**

INCOME

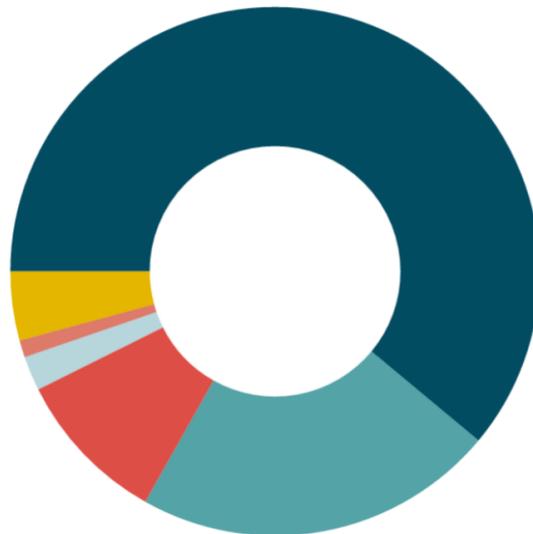


REGION

NorthWest NorthEast
 SouthWest SouthEast
 Outside of Fort Collins

ETHNICITY

White (61%)
 Hispanic or Latino (22%)
 Black or African American (10%)
 Native American or American Indian (2%)
 Asian/Pacific Islander (1%)
 Other (4%)



WHAT DID THE EVENT LOOK LIKE?

Background. On Wednesday, April 27th, The Art of Belonging CIF was held at the Lincoln Center. 16 tables were set up to host a facilitator, notetaker, and 6-8 participants. Due to overflow, some tables eventually held up to 10 participants. During the two-hour event, introductory speakers set up the conversation. Then participants spoke in small groups, guided by a facilitator, for an hour and a half.

Introductory Speakers.

Welcome en Español

Annie Bierbower, Civic Engagement Liaison, City of Fort Collins

Office of Sustainability Introduction

Jacqueline Kozak-Thiel, Officer of Social Sustainability, City of Fort Collins

Beth Sowder, Director of Social Sustainability, City of Fort Collins

Center for Public Deliberation Background

Martin Carcasson, Director of the Center for Public Deliberation, Colorado State University

Getting to Know the Room: Keypad Questions

Kalie McMonagle, Graduate Student, Center for Public Deliberation

Translation. One table was designated as a Spanish-Only table and a translator was provided for that table. Translation equipment was available for the sections of the event that were not round-table discussions (i.e. announcements from the front of the room).

Childcare. A supervised table of arts and crafts was available at the back of the room. Many families were able to take advantage of the childcare and participants interacted with the children throughout the event.



WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

DISCUSSION	PURPOSE	ACTIVITY
Introductions	Get to know other participants.	During introductions, participants shared their name, their personal pronouns (see pg. 9), and one place where they feel they belong in Fort Collins.
Common Ground	Give participants an opportunity to share personal stories, define “belonging,” and build trust.	Participants were asked to share a story of time when they felt that they belonged and identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar experiences • What creates a sense of belonging
Gaps	Find out some of the ways our community needs to grow.	Facilitators selected questions from the following list to generate conversation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What challenges do we have as a community in making everyone feel they belong?” • “Who in Fort Collins might feel like they do not belong? Why?” • “What are ways that people have felt like they don’t belong in Fort Collins?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Are there certain places that this happens more than others?” • “Is anyone willing to share a story of a time and place where they really felt they didn’t belong.”
Resources	Recognize actors in the community who currently help to make people feel like they belong in Fort Collins.	Participants drew maps of organizations that currently work on inclusion efforts within Fort Collins.

DISCUSSION	PURPOSE	ACTIVITY
Action Items	Puzzle out how we can make the community of Fort Collins a more welcoming place.	<p>Each table was given a group of Community Player cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government • Non-Profit • Businesses • People in the Community • Coalition/Collaborative groups • Neighborhoods • Education/Schools • Universities • Faith Communities • Me • Blank card for additional categories <p>On each Community Player card, participants wrote down a responsibility or action that belonged to that community player. For example: Martin mentioned earlier that we have a need for a night bus that runs from the North side of town to Old Town. This might be something that City of Fort Collins would be able to tackle. Grab the Local Government Card and write down that responsibility or task on the back of the card.</p>
Closing	Reflect on the event and evaluate the conversation using a post-survey. Share small-table discussions with the larger group.	At the end of the event, these Community Cards were organized by the community player (rather than by table) and posted around the room so that participants could see the ideas from other tables.

WHAT INFORMATION WAS COLLECTED?

Keypad Questions. Each participant was provided a keypad. Keypads are a remote clicker that allows participants to enter an anonymous response to a survey question. Responses can then be displayed in real time in a Power Point. This event asked a series of demographic questions (age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, religion, etc.). By displaying the responses to these questions, attendees were able to get a sense of who was in the room that evening.

Table Notes. The CPD assigned a trained student facilitator and notetaker to each table. Notetakers were asked to record summaries of each section of the conversation. These notes are not a transcript and do not reflect the conversation exactly as spoken. However, notetakers attempt to capture the main ideas within the discussion and record stories expressed by the participants. Notetakers did not capture any personal identifiers and let participants know that their names would not be included. A full record of table notes can be found in the appendix. See [full report](#) for appendix information.

Resource Maps. During one section, participants were asked to reflect on the organizations who already contribute to creating a sense of belonging in Fort Collins. Each table was provided a large sheet of butcher paper and markers. Participants then created a organizational map of actors in the community who were contributing to inclusion. Solid lines were drawn between organizations that were *already* working together and dotted lines were drawn

between organizations that *should* work with one another.

Community Player Cards. During the last section, participants were asked to identify Action Items for different Community Players (i.e. Business, Faith Communities, Local Government). All of the tables was provided a card for each Community Player. Participants recorded Action Items for each Community Player on the corresponding card. At the end of the event, these Community Cards were organized by the community player (rather than by table) and posted around the room so that participants could see the ideas from other tables.

Surveys. Before the event, a pre-survey was completed by individuals who RSVP'd to the event and those who could not attend, but wanted to contribute their input. The pre-survey was used to identify some of the key issues prior to the event and find out the primary identities of those who would be attending. At the conclusion of the event, post-surveys were given to each participant to fill out. The post-survey collected information on how to convene future forums, evaluate the event, and gather demographic information.

Notetaker and Facilitator Reflection. Following the event, notetakers and facilitators were asked to provide reflection notes on the topics of conversation at their table and how the conversation went. These notes can be used to connect table notes, key themes, and pull out ideas from the tables. They can also be used to improve the

process going forward, by reflecting on how the conversation went.

KEY FINDINGS.

COMMON GROUND.

“Fellow community members care about building a better, more inclusive community...Everyone has a role in building such a community.” -Participant

This was an event centered around diversity, so we heard a lot of different perspectives and opinions throughout the event. You can check out all the different ideas in the next sections of the report. To start though, here are some of the common feelings that participants expressed.

Belonging. When it came to how participants defined the word *belonging*, a great number of similarities emerged. When community members RSVP'd for the event, they were asked to complete a pre-survey that asked them to define belonging.

Here's what a sample of what they said belonging meant to them:

- “Means being able to strike up a conversation with any one at any time.”
- “A sense of “home” where I feel welcomed, valued and safe.”
- “I feel comfortable being myself in public.”
- “Being with people of similar interests and goals.”
- “Knowing my neighbors by name.”
- “Significa envolverme y participar en algo.”
- “Belonging is being in the right place to thrive.”
- “Belonging is having access to community and actively participating in community as a citizen of Fort Collins.”
- “A feeling of affirmation and acceptance within all identities.”
- “To believe others care to know about you and respect you.”

Takeaway. One of the biggest areas of common ground actually came at the end of the event. In the post-survey, participants were asked, “What is the most important thing you want people to know from this meeting?” This question was designed to help the event planners decide what would be the most important next steps. The CPD expected that people would write down the issue that stuck out to them the most, something they learned about, or a specific action they thought should be taken. However, the responses were strikingly similar.

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.

GAPS.

“Fort Collins may have a lot of awesome stuff, but not everyone feels safe, welcome, or heard. So we still have a lot to do to truly become the ‘Choice City’ for everyone.” -Participant

When talking about areas of growth for Fort Collins, people used personal stories, arguments, and referenced other sources of information to make their point. To make sense of all these goodies, the following summary is divided into three sections: affected communities, public issues, and root issues.

PUBLIC ISSUES

Public issues are different issues or themes that arose from the conversations that represent tangible subject areas that call for responses both from the City and the broader community. This could be through the support of a public policy, new program, community forum, or financial support of an initiative. These public issues may affect everyone or just one sector of the community. We present them here to help organize the information in more manageable chunks that will hopefully invite discussion and action. There were three primary topics that came up again and again in discussions. This report will go into more depth on these three before turning to other public issues that arose throughout the discussions.

Primary Topics

- Affordability
- City Accessibility
- Neighborhood/Community Events

Secondary Topics

- Integration
- Fear of Violence
- Education
- Diverse Services
- Economic Opportunity
- Public Transit
- Parks & Recreation
- Media Representation

PRIMARY TOPICS

Affordability. The affordability of living in Fort Collins poses a threat to a number of communities. The Latino/a community expressed a feeling of invisibility, because of where affordable housing is located in Fort Collins. They spoke about options for housing often lying at the boundaries of Fort Collins or in nearby communities. Participants expressed the concern that students can not find employment opportunities upon graduation and are forced to exit the community. People with families have difficulties finding affordable child care. Homeless advocates worry about the number of resources for homeless individuals in Fort Collins.

While many of these groups share a common plight, participants differed on how they attribute the cause of the issue. Oftentimes groups expressed a concern that one part of the community was not receiving resources to address affordability, because another part of the community was receiving those resources. For example, some participants felt that students are priority area when it comes to City budgeting, while long term residents or homeless individuals don't pose as much of a priority.

City Accessibility. Community members expressed the desire to see themselves and diverse members of the community represented in local government. Some expressed the opinion that the City does not or has not had representative individuals in positions of leadership.

Accessibility also refers to the ability of citizens to participate in public life. Participants called for a greater available of public meeting times to accommodate for various work and family schedules. They also called for bilingual accessibility to increase throughout City of Fort Collins materials and events.

Lastly, participants expressed a feeling of disconnect between governmental actors (particularly City Planners) and the changes they see happening in their communities. They expressed a desire to be able to influence more parts of the political process, transparency in the process, and the ability to influence decisions before they get made.

Neighborhood/Community Events. Many people expressed how much neighborly behaviors contribute to a sense of belonging within Fort Collins. Neighborly behaviors are things like shoveling someone's sidewalk, being known by name at local institutions, and hosting block parties. These behaviors were often cited as something that used to happen in a previous community they lived in, but didn't happen or didn't happen often enough in Fort Collins. Some people worried that technology prevented the ability to connect with our immediate communities.

DID YOU KNOW?

Every year, the City of Fort Collins offers funds to neighborhoods to host events like block parties and neighborhood clean ups. Funds are available in amounts from \$25-\$250. For more information about Community Grants, contact Melanie Clark.

mclark@fcgov.com or
970-416-2351

Additionally, participants asked for a greater diversity in community events. This referred to the types of events offered and the location of community events. Oftentimes, people talked about Old Town as an overused or inaccessible location to people with disabilities, people of color, seniors, and those who didn't live in Old Town. Music events were talked about as a positive of the community, but said that these events weren't always reflective of all the identities that Fort Collins is home to.

SECONDARY TOPICS

Integration Geographically, community members felt that city was segregated between different disparate identities. Among the Latino/a community, there were experiences shared about feeling "pushed out" geographically. These community members talked about forces that have changed the demographic of Tres Colonias, three of the primary Latino/a neighborhoods in Fort Collins. These forces included the socio-economic burden of living in Fort Collins, unfriendly new neighbor behavior, cultural poverty, and gentrification as Fort Collins continues to grow.

Additionally, some community members felt that students should be more fully integrated into the larger community. It was thought that this would help instill accountability among college students.



Fear of Violence. This included violence or the threat of violence because of an individual's identity. Disempowered groups shared stories and experiences of being afraid to be in certain areas of Fort Collins at certain times, because of the threat of violence. Violence included death threats, drunken behaviors, police harassment, and physical violence.

Education. Participants identified education and educational systems (i.e. Colorado State University and Poudre

School District) as potential bridges that weren't being utilized enough. Part of this is that the university and school district house some of the most important connections to diversity that Fort Collins has. Participants would like to see more connections between the work educational systems are doing and the larger community.

Also, educational situations can be important sites for people to learn about people who are different from them. People talked about the importance of hearing from someone of a different religion or having Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) issues be a part of sexual education. However, people said that oftentimes educational sites can also be isolating experience for diverse individuals if their environment doesn't feel accepting.

Diverse Services. When it comes to everyone feeling welcome in Fort Collins, community members referred to some key services that were missing from the city. People of color mentioned the way that there are few, if any, salons that work with “ethnic” hair. Others looked at larger support systems, like community centers, missing for communities like the LGBTQ and Latino/a populations. There were calls for consistent WiFi access throughout the city. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for veteran services to provide mental health and material resources.

OK THESE ARE SOME THEMES, BUT WHAT WAS ACTUALLY SAID?

Well, here’s an example of some notes from the event. These aren’t transcripts. They’re general notes from the notetaker at each table. See [full report](#) for appendix information, including notes from the event.

Facilitator: Do people feel unwelcome for institutional or cultural reasons in Fort Collins?

Participant A: It’s neither, it is individual. I am Latina and speak Spanish but have felt very welcomed in the community.

Participant B: There was a Spanish woman who did all of the steps necessary to get her drivers license and the clerk at the DMV would not give the license to her, because they claimed she had cheated via the translator present while she was taking the test. This is not reflective of the DMV as an institution, but is a reflection of the person.

Participant C: There was a group in a high school parking lot with swastikas once. The administration should have responded and used it as a learning tool, however, they handled it differently.

Participant D: Institutions set the pace for how things are dealt with. For example, we have had compassionate councils and other councils who have showed more of a lack of respect for each other. These type of working groups impact our individual response.

Economic Opportunity. This issue refers to the availability of employment opportunities and the feasibility of financially supporting oneself and one's family. People would like to make attracting and retaining a diverse workforce a priority in Fort Collins. Concern was expressed that a failure to do so would result in an unqualified workforce down the line. This led to the desire for pipeline and mentorship programs to aid in this effort. In order to address this, participants also expressed a desire for businesses to diversify their hiring practices. For example, a company might be more willing to accept years of experience as an alternative to possessing a formal degree.

Public Transit. Participants agreed that public transit options have grown within recent years, but argue that growth in this area still needs to happen and with more accessibility. Attendees asked that bus stops become more accessible to people with disabilities, the City offer more night and weekend buses, and that the MAX extend farther north to reach low-income, underserved populations within Fort Collins. In addition to material resources, participants found that the Fort Collins attitude towards pedestrians (especially disabled and senior pedestrians) was less friendly than that of nearby communities, like Loveland.



Parks & Recreation. The availability of outdoor recreation opportunities was included as a source of strength for Fort Collins. However, participants also recognized that by putting a particular focus on these kinds of recreational activities, Fort Collins may send the message that the disabled community (who may not be able to participate) does not belong within the city identity.

When it comes to outdoor recreation activities, participants also talked about the cost of participation and how it limits who can use these amenities. Clubs and athletic teams require fees that may exclude parts of the community. People also talked about the lack of open spaces for "queer" youth to hang out for fear of discrimination.

Media Representation. When participants talked about the media, they mostly talked about national media and the way that including different identities can help to give people agency. However, participants also talked about a lack of diversity issues being featured in local media

(like the *Coloradan*). A number of participants also cited local documentary, *Choice City...for whom?*, as a key piece of media that should be more largely disseminated.

UNDERLYING BARRIERS

Underlying Barriers describe parts of the larger Fort Collins culture that contribute to problems of belonging. These 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 policy change or budget amendment.



Underlying Barriers

- Issues of Visibility
- Threats to Safety
- Representation
- Discrimination
- Outreach/Inclusion
- Communication/Collaboration
- History
- Bias/Acceptance

Issues of Visibility. Participants consistently talked about how feeling visible affected their experience of living in Fort Collins. Being able to see people who reflect their own identities was a large part of feeling a sense of belonging. This could be seeing two men holding hands while walking down the street in Old Town or seeing someone of the same race or religion at one of their favorite restaurants. Experiences in which individuals were able to see other people like them gave them a sense of pride, strength, and belonging. However, situations wherein people were the only member of a given identity caused increased isolation and increased the emotional burden of living in Fort Collins.

Threats to Safety. Disempowered groups shared experiences of feeling afraid to go certain places, at certain times for fear of personal safety. This fear occurred because of previous

“One homeless man stopped me in the parking lot of a grocery store to ask me for money. I didn't feel safe. I felt like I was being asked because I'm not white. There are lots of homeless people that just pass through. It's important to think about how safe we feel as a community.”

represent the needs of that community.

Discrimination. Community members shared stories of times they had experienced discrimination based on their identity. This could include retail behavior that indicates a lack of trust, like following people of color around a store or customer service staff failing to introduce themselves to people of color. It could be overt discrimination in the form of racial slurs and discriminatory language. It could also manifest as bullying for students within school settings.

“I remember when businesses used to place signs in their windows saying “NO DOGS AND MEXICANS ALLOWED.” Some of these businesses are still in business.”

recognized that Fort Collins can be a wonderful place to live for many of its residents. Many participants also questioned the impact of Fort Collins' core identity on its alternative residents. Fort Collins was seen as a sustainable, brewery-friendly, bike accessible city, but participants worried about whether enough outreach was being done to include folks who have other interests.

Communication/Collaboration. Many participants talked about the failed opportunities to leverage different institutions and link efforts. This could be the interfaith community promoting areas of diversity or the university connecting with City efforts. Discussions

experiences with or threats of violence, aggressive communication, and distrust of police.

Representation. In addition to feeling visible, people expressed the desire to see members of their own communities in positions of power or influence throughout the city. They talked about the importance of having disempowered identities working throughout businesses, government, and educational institutions. Seeing members of their community in these roles increased the feeling that this organization was accessible and accountable. Furthermore, community members expressed the desire for intra-group public spaces, like an LGBTQ or a Latino/a resource center that could better

People who could pass as members of dominant groups (i.e. transgender individuals who have transitioned or multiracial individuals) shared stories of how they get treated differently depending on if someone is aware of their disempowered identity.

Outreach/Inclusion. Participants

“I am Jewish and was once talking with a Christian when I first moved here (I am from California). She could not believe that I did not believe in Jesus and told me that I would go to hell because of it.”

around communication and collaboration brought up a key tension between intra- and inter-group efforts. Some people argued that diverse groups should be better integrated with other groups in the city, thereby exposing people to a greater variety of interests, beliefs, and identities. Others called for greater collaboration to increase resources for certain identity groups, like a clearinghouse website for the LGBTQ community. A clearinghouse website would be a place to collect and distribute information for that group.

History. Some participants talked about how much Fort Collins has changed over the years, often mentioning that it has become a great deal more inclusive than it used to be. Some participants also called for the need to remember or rectify parts of Fort Collins' less-inclusive history to help the town become more welcoming. Participants discussed whether regional history should also be considered a part of the Fort Collins history (i.e. the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming).

Bias/Acceptance. Participants discussed how implicit biases affect how diverse groups are able to interact in Fort Collins. Creating acceptance seemed key to creating a more welcoming environment. In order to do so, participants advocated for reducing biases through education and exposure to people different from themselves. Throughout this discussion, community members recognized that everyone, including disempowered groups, have biases. Reducing biases in the community is, therefore, a shared responsibility.



ACTION ITEMS.

The Action Items section of the forum was designed to let participants reflect on the ways that community change comes from multiple places throughout the community. It is the responsibility of many Community Players to ensure that Fort Collins is a welcoming community for all. During this section of the forum, each table was asked to brainstorm specific actions that various Community Players could perform to improve the sense of belonging for everyone in Fort Collins. Each table was provided a set of 10 Community Player Cards, which allowed them to write down ideas and actions for the various players to consider.

COMMUNITY PLAYERS

- Local Government
- Non-Profit
- Businesses
- People in the Community
- Coalition/Collaborative Groups
- Neighborhoods
- Education/Schools
- University
- Faith Communities
- Me
- A blank card for additional categories

COMMUNITY PLAYERS

Various people, groups, organizations, and entities throughout the city that could take action following this discussion.

At the end of the event, those cards were posted on easels around the room. Each easel organized by each category of community player, so everyone could look at all the business ideas or all the non-profit ideas generated by the other tables. For a full look at all the unedited comments from the Community Player Cards please refer to Appendix 4. See [full report](#) for appendix information.

When it came to suggestions for what different Community Players should do, the participants filled the Community Player Cards with a lot of great information. Some provided specific action steps, while others simply wrote a word or two on how to increase a sense of belonging on a broader scale. Within each of the 10 community player categories a variety of themes emerged. Below are recurring themes, identified by the CPD staff, organized by community player. We hope that members and groups within the community can use these insights and will share them with other groups across Fort Collins. Before considering at each individual community player, let's take a look at some common themes that emerged through that data as a whole:

COMMON THEMES.

-  **Connect and Collaborate.** It is possible that some community partners are not aware of others. This can be mitigated through networking with one another or having a central group in charge of making connections and bringing organizations together to collaborate.
-  **Spread Awareness.** There are likely members of the community who do not know that others feel like they do not belong in Fort Collins. Many community players have the ability spread the word about issues in the community, as well as share information and organizations that aid in community belonging.
-  **Educate.** Beyond spreading awareness, many participants asked for more diversity trainings and cultural events to help educate the community on diversity and the various cultures that make up the city.
-  **Diversify Staff.** Many felt that if the community at large could see more diversity on an everyday basis, the overall sense of belonging would increase. Hiring more diverse individuals throughout all entities of the city was the primary suggestion to increase the presence of diversity in Fort Collins.
-  **Increase Accessibility.** Whether it was physically being able to access something like transportation or having access to certain schools and programs, accessibility was noted a number of times on the Community Player Cards. In general, equal access for all community members was a repeated concern for folks at the forum.

PLEASE NOTE

The comments in Appendix 4 (see [full report](#)) are unedited replications of the comments written on the Community Player Cards. Some of the information may be inaccurate. However, the information on these cards represent folk's personal experiences and the Center for Public Deliberation is presenting the information as it was reported at the event.

ACTION ITEMS BY COMMUNITY PLAYER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT



- **Increase Accessibility.** Many participants wanted access to accurately translated information from the City, both online and through flyers. Increasing the use of translation services throughout Fort Collins is one way to help all groups feel a sense of belonging within the city. Access to public transportation was discussed in relation to insufficient bus stop locations around certain areas of town. Some participants felt that public transportation caters too much to the CSU and Old Town. This is particularly an issue because many of the large events

and festivals are held downtown, making it hard for some folks to go to these events using public transportation. Participants wanted to improve bus routes to accommodate folks that commute from all areas in and around city limits.

- The City could make public transportation for folks with disabilities more accessible by placing all bus stops near clear and even sidewalks.
- Work on making restrooms accessible for gender inclusivity as well as accommodating folks with disabilities.
- **Increase Affordability.** Many participants noted concerns about affordable housing. The U+2 law was described as working against individuals who may not be able to afford living with fewer people.
 - Increase affordable housing options.
- **Diversify Representation.** One way the participants felt the City could show their dedication to inclusion is by having more diverse staff members and leadership. Some participants wrote about having this diversity in offices like the Office for Sustainability, while others wanted more diverse representation on City Council.
 - In general, people wanted the City to be more aware of their hiring process so that all voices have representation and can be heard.
- **Acknowledge Mental Health Concerns.** The topic of mental health came up a few times in this category. One comment explicitly referred to more police training around issues of mental health. Other participants simply wrote “mental health” suggesting that local government should have some type of role in addressing this concern.
 - Increase mental health trainings and policies throughout the city.
- **Increase Cultural Competence.** Attendees showed an interest in learning about various cultures throughout the community player cards.
 - Diversity trainings, retreats (i.e. the City’s Multicultural Retreat), and more public cultural events were suggested to increase the community’s cultural competence. These trainings, retreats, and events could be open to the public and offered to key players of the community through invitation.
 - In general, the participants felt it was important to increase cultural competence throughout the community in order to increase a sense of belonging for all.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

A set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program or among individuals, which enables them to work effectively, cross culturally.

NON-PROFITS



- **Spread the Word.** Participants highlighted the importance of making these organizations known throughout the community. Some members of the community do not know about the non-profits around town, let alone what they can offer.

- Hold open-houses to spread the word about what is available for members of the community to learn about this community player at large.
- **Connect and Collaborate.** It is possible that some non-profits are not aware of others. This can be mitigated through networking with one another or having a central group in charge of making connections and bringing non-profits together.
 - A central hub for collaboration could be the City or United Way.
 - To avoid duplicate projects occurring in multiple organizations, collective impact needs to be a priority.
- **Educate and Accommodate.** Diversity trainings for staff would help non-profits work better as advocates on community issues. This is one way of increasing cultural competence within non-profits. Ensuring this sector knows who they are serving and what is going on around the community will help them understand how to do so effectively. Participants stressed the importance of this when serving underrepresented and minority populations.
 - Hold more diversity trainings.

BUSINESSES



- **Educate and Accommodate.** Offering diversity and inclusivity trainings to employees is a key way participants felt businesses could increase the sense of belonging in Fort Collins. These forms of education would help employees know how to accommodate to certain clients and customers. Educating employees is all about being aware of who the clientele is and how to recognize and satisfy their needs. For instance, seniors, youth, folks with disabilities, and all gender identities require a variety of accommodations and services. Some participants noted that it was hard to find certain products and services depending on their identity. For example, finding barber shops that know how to cut African American hair was a challenge.
 - Hold more diversity trainings.
- **Sponsor.** Businesses could show their dedication to belonging by sponsoring inclusivity and cultural events.
 - Sponsor both public events and diversity trainings that are open to the public.
 - Provide volunteers for these events.
- **Diversify Staff.** Similar to the Local Government cards, participants would like to see more diverse employees in Fort Collins businesses.
 - Work to adjust the hiring processes and be more purposeful with hiring people of color and folks with disabilities.
- **Be Welcoming.** This section might seem like common sense, but many of the comments suggested simple ways businesses and employees could work to help everyone feel welcome at their location.

“Should hang ‘welcome all’ signs in all windows downtown where [historically] ‘white only signs’ used to be.”

- A simple smile goes a long way, especially when it is aimed at a person who may not typically feel welcomed into the community.
- For businesses that have regular customers, simply learning the names of individuals was suggested.

PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY



- **Spread Awareness.** Because some community members are not aware that others feel like they don't belong in Fort Collins, it is important to spread the word about the issues throughout the city.
 - Listen to the experiences of others.
 - Speak up against problems witnessed throughout the community.
 - Ask questions, learning as much as you can, meeting different people, and challenging exclusive ways of thinking.
- **Be Welcoming.** Though this a broad action, it came up at multiple tables. Whether it is welcoming a neighbor or making someone feel welcomed in a public space, the broad act of being welcoming is something everyone can do. Welcoming diverse individuals in a city that is not very diverse can help people feel as though they belong in Fort Collins. Many people in the community may not have the means to act as a host, but broadly be welcoming.
 - One specific example noted was to host a foreign student.
- **Increase Political Efficacy.** It seems that being more involved in local decision making processes could help people in the community have a voice and feel like they belong. In general, participants expressed the importance of community and civic involvement.
 - Go to City Council Meetings.
 - Reach out to local government officials.
 - Vote.
- **Be Community-Centered.** Many participants expressed for a different mindset around town. This shift asks that people be more focused on the needs of the overall community, rather than being focused on the needs of the self.
 - Have people in the community offer assistance through language classes.
 - Aid in transportation.
 - Offer assistance to fellow community members.
 - Join groups around the community.

COALITION/COLLABORATIVE GROUPS



- **Spread the Word** Many participants didn't seem to know of many of these groups. A big step in spreading the word about coalition groups is identifying them and publishing their information in a central location.
 - Use a shared calendar or webpage for collective information.
 - Make sure community members know about these groups and have an opportunity to be involved in them.

- **Connect and Collaborate.** Coalition groups have the ability to reach out to other groups and community players in Fort Collins. Networking and partnering with other coalitions, the City, Poudre School District (PSD), Colorado State University (CSU), organizations, and families can help expand education and information across entities.
 - Hold quarterly or monthly networking events for coalition groups. These types of collaboration will allow coalition groups to communicate their vision and missions with other groups in the community.

NEIGHBORHOODS

- **Establish Clear Neighborhoods.** It was noted that not all participants know how to pinpoint neighborhoods throughout the city. There are many “unorganized” neighborhoods that may not have the same voice as more established ones. Rather than thinking specifically about neighborhoods, many separated Fort Collins into North and South. Regardless of the how people separate regions of the city, more connectivity and collaboration between neighborhoods is desired.
- **Connect Within** The term “block party” came up again and again on these cards. Folks really want the opportunity to get to know their neighbors.
 - Connect through social media groups and the Nextdoor app.
 - Form service project days or community garage sale weekends around neighborhoods to establish more community cohesion.
 - Wave while driving down the street to make connections and generate relationships within your neighborhood.
- **Continue the Conversation.** Many expressed interest in continuing the conversation on belonging on a neighborhood level.
 - Holding an open forum, more conversations like this Community Issues Forum, or even just more meetings could help foster the belonging conversation.
 - Neighborhoods could also hold more diversity programs and cultural events at their parks and community centers to spread awareness.

WANT MORE INFORMATION ON NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT?

Visit [fcgov.com](https://www.fcgov.com) to learn more about the Neighborhood Connections Project.

EDUCATION/SCHOOLS



- **Increase Accessibility.** Access for low income and homeless students was a key concern on these cards. Accessing transportation to various schools, uniforms, instruments, and other school fees put low income students at a disadvantage.
 - Many participants advocated for equal opportunity for all students.

- Have gender inclusive areas to ensure the safety of LGBTQ students and faculty.
- **Educate.** It is important to educate both student and faculty about diversity to ensure all individuals in the PSD community can feel safe and accepted.
 - Promote diversity trainings and awareness programs to both students and staff members.
 - Include more diverse American history classes, such as Native American history.
- **Connect and Collaborate.** Schools have the ability to connect and collaborate with other community players like non-profits and the University. These collaborations help build trust throughout the community and could result in events and mentorships.
- **Diversify Staff.** As suggested in some of the above categories, a diverse faculty can help promote diversity awareness. Diversifying the staff refers to teachers as well as individuals who work for the school district at large. There were some comments on getting to know the needs of families and students to help accommodate youth with disabilities, single-parent households, or others who may face challenges.
 - Be purposeful in hiring more diverse staff members and teachers.
 - Hiring more family liaisons, who can easily communicate with families around Fort Collins and can help to identify the needs of students.

UNIVERSITY



- **Connect and Collaborate.** Many other community players were listed as being able to collaborate with the University for greater community involvement. Collaboration between CSU and other community players can help bridge the gap between students and other community members.
 - CSU should work to collaborate with the City, PSD, neighborhoods, and other community players to host events openly advertised to the community at large.
 - Allow various groups in the community to use university resources.
 - Connect with other community players when making decisions that affects off-campus life; for instance, parking.
- **Educate.** Participants felt that it was important that students know how to be good neighbors and community members in the City of Fort Collins.
 - Many folks suggested that CSU students should be required to have some sort of

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY'S PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY

Integrity
Respect
Service
Social Justice
Inclusion

“We create and nurture inclusive environments and welcome, value and affirm all members of our community, including their various identities, skills, ideas, talents and contributions.”

diversity training. This could be a training similar to ones given by other community players, online short courses, or a required humanities course.

- **Diversify Staff.** As mentioned throughout these cards, having diverse individuals present and visible is important in making all feel welcomed. It was noted that having diverse staff members may attract more diverse students, which would increase the diversity in Fort Collins.
 - Hire role models who will spread positive notions of inclusivity and cultural competence.

FAITH COMMUNITIES



- **Connect and Collaborate.** The main takeaway from this set of community player cards is collaboration and cooperation between various faith institutions and communities. The Interfaith Council was noted many times as doing great work.
 - Increase partnerships between Spanish and English speaking institutions.
 - Implementing translation services into these communities would benefit Spanish speaking community members.
 - Faith communities could aid the homeless population by acting as temporary shelters or asking their affiliates of any known job openings.
- **Educate.** Participants expressed a desire to learn more about various faith communities purely for educational purposes. Some fear that aid from faith communities would come with



an intent of conversion. Acceptance is key here, so being able to take part in diverse discussions around different faiths would be important.

- Hold educational open houses.
- Reach out to learn about other faith groups.

ME



- **Spread Awareness.** Many participants felt that they had the ability to spread awareness on issues around the city. Some participants specifically wanted to speak against racism, while others simply wanted to have their voice be heard in order to mitigate silence.
 - Voicing personal opinions.
 - Speak up for those who cannot or do not feel comfortable doing so.
- **Be Open.** Along with speaking up, folks wrote a lot about listening and being willing to understand others.
 - Be open-minded, look at all sides of an issue, question certain ways of thinking, and challenge yourself.
 - Seek out opportunities to interact with other identities to learn more about what you do not know.
- **Continue the Conversation.** This conversation seemed to really move some of the folks in the room.
 - Take part in more conversations around belonging.
 - Start similar conversations on your own.
 - Attend more City council meetings and forums like this one to keep the conversation going.

BLANK CARDS FOR ADDITIONAL CATEGORIES

- **Artists.** Art has the ability to bring diversity and cultural history throughout the city. Creative outlets such as food, theater, and storytelling are just some of the ways artists can spread cultural awareness.
- **Library.** On some of the previous Community Player Cards, participants expressed interest in having a go-to “hub” that is filled with information about belonging in Fort Collins. The library could act as a “hub” for people



interested in learning about diversity and other cultures. The library website could also be used to get the word out about resources and groups in the community.

- **Media.** The main takeaway here is that there needs to be more inclusive portrayals displayed in media. This can be done by diversifying advertisements. The thought behind this is that diverse ads mean more visibility of minority groups. Increasing visibility is suggested to normalize a diverse community.
- **Miscellaneous.**
 - A central community calendar (similar to the idea mentioned on the Community Player Card created for the Library) would help with collaborative efforts. This calendar would include all of the community players listed in the Action Items section.
 - Accessibility as it relates to public transportation is very important to consider. Seniors and people on the outskirts of Fort Collins have a hard time getting around town.
 - Educating the community about different cultures through classes and programs is a great way to help people feel connected with the community.



NEXT STEPS.

NEXT STEPS.

The spring 2016 Community Issues Forum (CIF) was designed to serve as a catalyst to additional conversations and community actions around issues tied to inclusion and diversity issues in Fort Collins. We hope that this report serves as a useful tool to spark multiple next steps in the community, supported by numerous organizations and individuals. A number of key organizations are already directly connected, such as the City of Fort Collins, the CSU Center for Public Deliberation, the Fort Collins Human Relations Commission, and the Fort Collins Office of Social Sustainability. In addition, right around the time of the CIF, a group of concerned citizens from the City, university, school district, and other community organizations began meeting to discuss these issues. Many attended the event, and are currently working to organize more officially this summer. The group is currently calling itself the “Community Equity Initiative.”

All four of these groups will be utilizing this report to help structure their work in the coming years. We can in particular speak for the CPD, which expects to host additional events focused on themes identified in this report, and provide support for additional community groups that may want to utilize the information.

Lastly, some specific key actions that seemed to emerge from the conversations and the pre-meeting survey that are currently being examined by the City and the CPD more closely include:

- More ethnic/diverse celebrations, speakers, music, events
- More diverse bilingual employees/staff/leaders. In particular, we are examining how to get more diverse participants involved in the CityWorks program as well as the city’s boards and commissions and budget processes.
- Removing barriers to civic participation through better marketing to marginalized groups, more Spanish notifications and translations, providing child care options, etc.
- Expanding educational opportunities on the value of diversity and the awareness of bias/privilege. Those interested may be particularly interested in the City’s annual Multicultural Retreat as well we CSU’s Diversity Symposium.

We at the CPD hope to announce plans in conjunction with community partners for a fall event to share this report, invite responses, and prioritize action steps in the near future.

To be notified about future events, you can sign up for the CPD e-mail list. Questions or comments about this report can be sent Martin Carcasson with the CPD at cpd@colostate.edu or Janet Freeman with the City of Fort Collins at jfreeman@fcgov.com.

EVALUATION.

EVALUATION.

PARTICIPATING IN DELIBERATION

Post-Survey. During this event, we asked diverse community members to come together, share experiences, and move towards action on the issue of belonging in Fort Collins. From our experience as practitioners and research on deliberation, we know that the kind of talk that happens at a table of ten community members can be very different from that of a town hall meeting or televised debate. At the end of the event, we asked participants to evaluate the event. We did this so that we could find out how people rated the experience of talking in small, diverse groups.

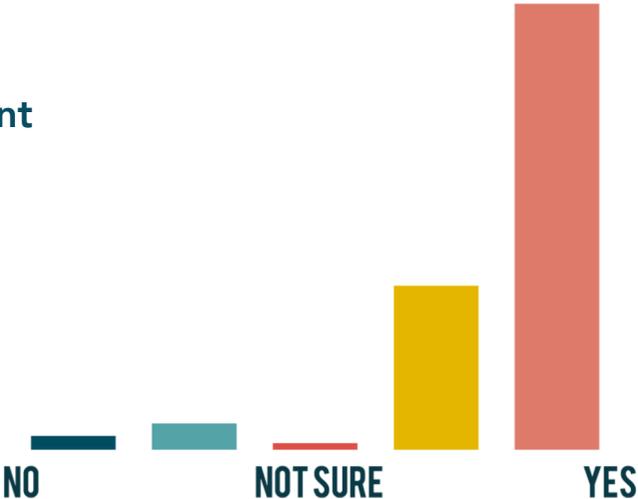
Choosing Questions. There's a lot of evaluation questions we could have asked. We could have asked them to rate their facilitator or answer open-ended questions about what they liked about the event. For the sake of brevity, we asked a couple of questions that helped us to understand how impartial people felt the event was. To understand whether people felt the event was biased in some way, we asked them to reflect on whether they felt they had equal opportunities to participate, considered different viewpoints throughout the discussion, and to what extent they felt mutual respect at their table.

Diversity in Deliberation. We selected these questions, because of what we already know about deliberating in diverse groups. For everyone involved, speaking with a group of

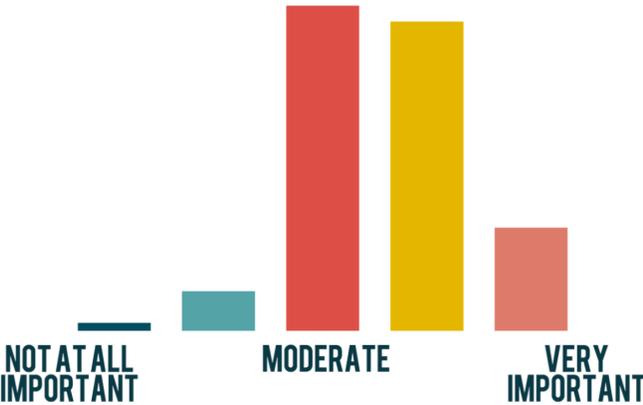
diverse community members can cause people to be exposed to a greater range of viewpoints, be open to learning, and reconsider previous viewpoints¹. When speaking in groups of white and non-white individuals, people of color express a marked appreciation for the opportunity to be heard and to speak². Researchers have also found that in racially diverse groups, women are perceived as more persuasive and likely to say more than they would in all-white groups³. However, when disempowered groups are included there are also risks to participation. Minority participants can be seen as less authoritative and speak less often in forums⁴. When managing token positions within conversations, underrepresented individuals can feel greater isolation and the need to adjust their responses, based on how they feel others will interpret them⁵. Based on what we know, we felt it was important to keep asking questions about the experience of deliberation for diverse groups.

Findings. The majority of participants felt they had the opportunity to be heard, felt mutual respect, and felt heard. In our analysis we found no significant difference between minority and majority groups (i.e. people of color and caucasian people) in these areas. This means that minority groups didn't feel more or less heard or respected than majority groups. Take a look at the results.

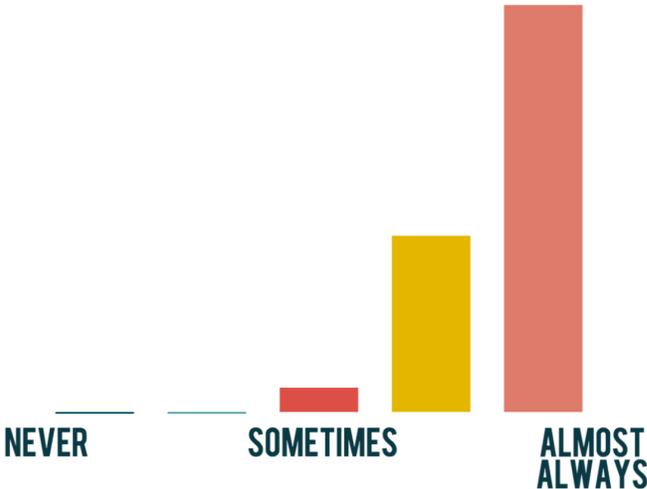
Would you say you had sufficient opportunities to express your views today?

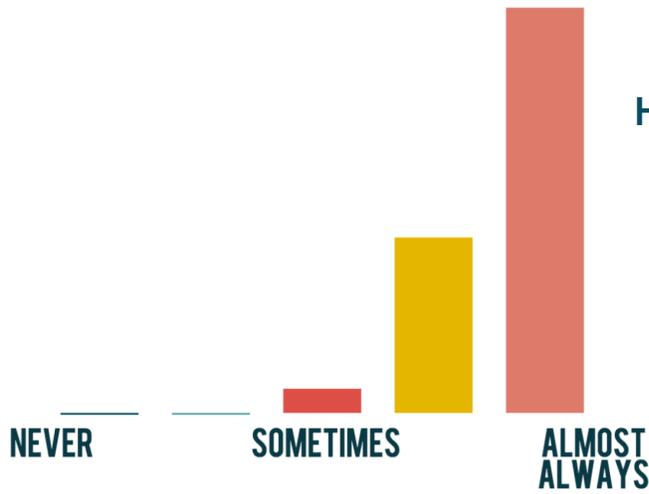


How important a role did you play in today's discussions?

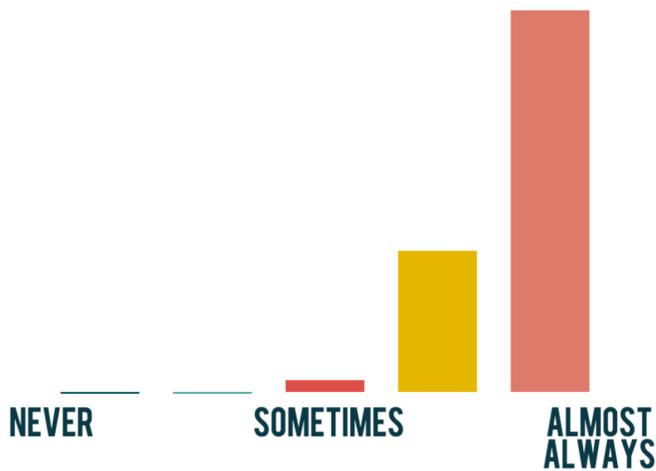


When other participants expressed views different from your own today, how often did you consider carefully what they had to say?

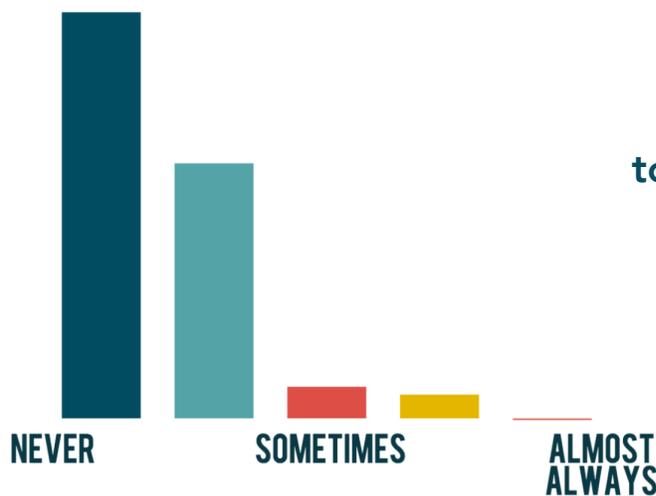




How often do you feel that other participants treated you with respect today?



When you spoke today, how often did you feel your ideas were heard by your fellow participants?



How often did you feel pressure to agree with something that you weren't sure about?

ENDNOTES

1. Ryfe, D. M. & Stalsburg, B. (2012). *Democracy in motion: Evaluation the practice and impact of deliberative civic engagement*. Nabatchi, T., Gastil, J., Weiksner, G. M., & Leighninger, M. (Eds.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
2. Abdel-Moneem, T., Bingham, S., Marincic, J., Tomkins, A. (2010). Deliberation and diversity: perceptions of small group discussions by race and ethnicity. *Small Group Research*, 41, 746-776. doi: 10.1177/1046496410377359
3. Toosi, N. R., Sommers, S. R., Ambady, N. (2012). Getting a word in group-wise: Effects of racial diversity on gender dynamics. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 1150-1155. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2012.04.015
4. Karpowitz, C. F. & Raphael, C. (2014). *Deliberation, democracy, and civic forums: Improving equality and publicity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
5. Fung, A., Young, I. M., Mansbridge, J. (2004). Deliberation's darker side: Six questions for Iris Marion Young and Jane Mansbridge. *National Civic Review*, 47-54.

