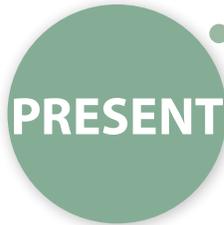


Connecting the Dots In Our Community...



# Welcoming Community II

*building a community for all*

The ability to attract and retain educated workers is vital for area businesses and our local economy. Heritage Fund's Outreach Committee designed the *Welcoming Community Project* to assess the welcoming factor in Bartholomew County among various groups of people – with a focus on “the creative class” or those individuals who can create a vibrant business climate and stimulate future economic growth.

The original study conducted in 2004 found that Columbus has many positive attributes but the community was not perceived as a welcoming community to all people, particularly:

- **People outside the traditional mainstream**
- **Young people**
- **Newcomers**

The Outreach Committee recommended four steps to improve the Welcoming Factor that could help business attract and retain talent workers and improve the economic vitality of our community:

- **Improve access to information and the community web presence**
- **Implement proactive diversity education strategies**
- **Develop an inclusive, vibrant, gathering place**
- **Take steps to redefine the Columbus Brand**

There have been significant changes within the community as a result of the original study. The downtown has become a vibrant gathering place, Columbus has a distinctive brand – *Unexpected Unforgettable* and several community organizations; such as CAMEO, Columbus Young Professionals and the Inclusive Community Coalition have been established.

At the beginning of 2011 the Outreach Committee pondered the question:

**Does *the community* think the welcoming factor of Columbus has improved, particularly groups from the original survey who felt disenfranchised?**

The Outreach Committee worked with Dr. Fredricka Joyner, original project consultant, to design a follow-up to the original *Welcoming Community* study. *Welcoming Community II* targeted the same demographic groups as the original survey however as “SurveyMonkey,” an online survey software, was used as the data collection method, the research project had a far broader reach into the community.

## Key Survey Findings:

- While the perception of improvement and positive change was seen across all of the question categories and demographic groups (with the most substantial gains in the groups that were most disenfranchised in the 2004 study), both strong positive *and* strong opposing opinions were expressed.
- There was a strongly expressed sense of pride in the community.
- The overall survey findings are particularly notable as they were achieved during turbulent economic times.

## Recommendations for Community Action Strategies

Out of the survey data, the Outreach Committee developed several recommendations and areas of work that builds on the “creative class” theory. The Committee also found new and emerging areas of work that could strengthen the quality of the community. The survey highlighted a marked concern regarding the welfare of low income families.

### Community Diversity Strategy

Most demographic groups reported improvement in *openness to differences*, but some issues remain.

#### Recommendation.....

Continue work on community diversity activities with increased emphasis on:

- expanding the role of CAMEO to have broader community influence.
- inclusion of the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) and Latino populations.
- increasing awareness and understanding of legal and formal processes for addressing discrimination.

#### Recommendation.....

Work together to develop and implement a strategy that supports access to comprehensive, updated sources of information that give a feel for what is special about Columbus, and that allow for informal networking. It is important that low income individuals have the ability to connect to key sources of information.

### Access to Community Information Strategy

Advances in technology have led to an improvement in *access to community information* but have also lead to higher expectations.

## Communication Strategy

While there is a strong interest in *community involvement*, there is also the perception of some barriers and challenges to involvement.

### Recommendation.....

Develop proactive outreach strategies to engage newcomers. Work with employers, key contact points (water company, schools, etc.), and other organizations and groups to facilitate connections between newcomers and formal and informal networks.

### Recommendation.....

Develop and execute a comprehensive, creative, and ambitious communication plan to increase the transparency of decision making and information related to community development strategies. Ensure that communication reaches all demographic groups, including individuals in lower socio-economic groups.

## Newcomer Strategy

Many people reported issues settling into the community, problems were greater for those without children. Many reported difficulty in making connections to establish friendships and information about the community.

## Entertainment/ Arts District Strategy

(Downtown Development)

There is broad recognition that a wide variety of *options for arts, entertainment, and cultural activities* exists in the region (and that these activities provide important opportunities for social connection), yet several barriers and challenges were identified.

### Recommendation.....

Continue to work to create opportunities for informal interaction not requiring advanced planning – a place where you can “bump into” activities and people. Create a sense of critical mass with an indigenous feel. Provide ample free and low cost entertainment opportunities for families.

## Community Leadership Development Strategy

There were concerns regarding the changes to the community leadership structure due to “Boomer” leaders retiring and the upcoming city elections.

### Recommendation.....

Support and increase awareness of the work currently being done in the community related to healthy lifestyles and environmental sustainability.

### Recommendation.....

Work with organizations, groups, initiatives, and individuals in the community to develop and implement intentional processes for the continuous development of community leaders. This would include proactive strategies to identify, mentor, foster, retain, and grow young professionals from diverse backgrounds.

## Healthy Lifestyles and Environmental Sustainability

New to the 2011 survey, an interest was expressed in actions and activities that support healthy lifestyles and a sustainable community.

**“For Columbus to be a good community...each of its citizens has an important role to play!”**

**– J. Irwin Miller**

Changing the welcoming factor is a community wide effort. No one group or person can do it alone. Effort must start with an understanding of the issues and a dialogue about improvement ideas. Heritage Fund Board and Outreach Committee members encourage individuals, community groups and organizations to discuss at least one of the recommendation strategies. It could be informally at a family dinner, as part of a church group, house of worship or formally as a collaborative endeavor. Consider these topics:

- How can I/my family/club/business ensure that others in our community no matter what their country of origin, sexual orientation or income level feel comfortable and welcome in our community?
- What can I/we do to help those new to our community to “feel at home” and develop a pride in living in Bartholomew County?
- In what ways can the community work together to ensure that the younger generation develop the necessary leadership skills to keep Columbus vibrant and growing?
- How can the community ensure that all residents receive consideration in the decision making process and there is no division between the “haves and have-nots”.

Additional information regarding the *Welcoming Community II* study including comparison data, Key Themes and Memorable Quotes is available on the Heritage Fund website [www.heritagefundbc.org](http://www.heritagefundbc.org)