

Community Conversations

IMAGINE COLUMBUS

AN INITIATIVE OF UNITED WAY OF BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY



DRAFT
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INTRODUCTION

To better understand the current state of equity more deeply in our community, Imagine Columbus engaged community members in meaningful discussions seeking to answer the question: How can we work together to be a more racially equitable community?

Over five months, the Guiding Team held a series of listening sessions on race relations to better gauge the opinions of those living in our community who have dealt with issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for their entire lives. Twenty-three sessions were held with over 220 people contributing their voices. These groups included Black, Latino, and Spanish-speaking, Muslim, Asian-American, Caucasian, and Hindu communities.

The purpose of these conversations was to:

- Elevate experiences, perceptions, and views of those not often heard. The process guided people to step forward and share perspectives authentically, with vulnerability in a safe space while in small group discussions. The conversations brought out a richness in dialogue and an unfolding of discussions while participants stayed true to themselves.
- Provide a permanent transcription of the voices, which were used to theme this report. United Way provided a platform to allow people to engage and become a part of the community process to bridge an understanding of racial inequities and move race relations forward in Bartholomew County. All voices are anonymous.
- Increase inclusion through the exchange of ideas, experiences, and views. When given a safe space, participants shared deeply meaningful thoughts about themselves and started to build on relationships amongst each other through personal sharing. Often, participants walked away with increased awareness and understanding of people's lives who were different than their own which can lead to the building blocks of an inclusive society.
- To spur collaborative action to address the voices that have emerged from these community conversations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

United Way of Bartholomew County would also like to sincerely thank the 228 participants that contributed their valued voices, views, and experiences to this body of work. It is only through their willingness to show up, to share their viewpoint, and to be a part of the solution that this document was possible. Many participants were hesitant to share their views out of a concern for retaliation for openly expressing their feelings regarding inclusion in Columbus. To these participants we extend our deepest gratitude as these were some of the most powerful voices we heard.

We would also like to thank the following individuals who have shown their commitment to Bartholomew County by contributing countless hours, expertise, and resources to the development of the 2021 Imagine Columbus Community Conversations on Race Relations Themed Report.

Over the past several months, the Guiding Team has worked tirelessly to listen to the four corners of the community, elevating voices not heard before and comprehensively assessing race relations through voices shared. Without their volunteer efforts – this document would not have been possible. In particular, Chris Price, Chair of the United Way Impact Committee, was instrumental in leading the theming process.

Volunteers

Chris Price
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THE PROCESS

Starting in August of 2020, and ending on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 2021, a series of 23 Community Conversations were held by the Imagine Columbus Guiding Team with 197 Community members. These conversations were held with diverse groups, including people of Asian, Black, Latino, and White ethnicities, across socio-economic backgrounds, with differing age ranges, first languages, religions, ability, and genders represented. A series of questions were asked that lead to frank and open discussions around race and inclusion in our community. Another 31 community members responded to an online survey.

All the feedback from the conversations and the survey was collected, translated, and transcribed. The Guiding Team then used the “Rose, Thorn, Bud” technique to identify what is going well, what is not going well, and opportunities that have the potential to go well with a little care. The team then identified commonalities in the feedback.

Finally, the key themes were summarized and any connections between the themes were documented to identify points of leverage and influence where change can be made if desired.

The Themes, Connections, and points of leverage and influence were used to create the final report.

THEME

RACISM EXISTS HERE

“ I grew up in California but until I moved to Columbus, I never realized that being Black was viewed as a negative thing...I became very aware that a lot of people, because of your color, they think different about you. Or, their parents don't want them hanging out with you.”

“**Racism exists here,**” but Bartholomew County has a lot of pride in its achievements and maintains a culture that is reluctant to examine itself deeply, failing to recognize discriminatory acts when they occur.

Participants voiced issues pointing to systematic racism existing in Bartholomew County and expressed hope that their voices would not be discounted. None of the participants contributed to the rhetoric of naming anyone or calling the community in which they live a racist town, which implies an active promotion of racism. They voiced that lack of cultural understanding, lack of awareness in race relations, and lack of education (such as the systematic effects of slavery) lead to insensitive or discriminatory decisions or statements.

Racism is acted out in a wide range of places including stores, workplaces, and schools, but it is often treated as acceptable, and people are not held accountable. This implied acceptance allows it to perpetuate.

There is a lack of sensitivity and empathy embedded in the Columbus culture supporting discriminatory behavior that perpetuates stereotypes, microaggressions, and implicit bias. Political rhetoric is exacerbating behaviors felt by local community members.

“Although the outer appearance may appear perfect, there are flaws on the interior of Columbus” that can be fixed by incorporating ideas such as respect, acceptance, collaboration, race representation, and empathy into everyday conversations, and providing everyone an equal chance to succeed. “Columbus needs to have honest conversations on the topic of race before progress can happen.”

THE VOICES:

"Our son was biking to school and a truck passed by him and a middle aged man in his 50s or so told my son to go back to his country and he pointed a middle finger at him and started cussing at him and intimidating him. My son felt like 'I'm an American, I'm a citizen of this country. Where do I go?' Even hatred is shown toward the children."

"I am an American citizen. I was born in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, something I have noticed the most in the community is the racism. It is the, how can I say this? It is the wanting to step all over us for being Latino."

"She said, 'oh they said they don't want to play with me.' I said, 'Why?' And she said, 'They said because of my skin color.'"

"I think making sure everybody understands and acknowledges that discrimination and racism are still very prevalent, even though it may not feel like it in our little pockets that we live in."

"Then I became aware that a lot of people, because of your color, they think different about you. Or their parents don't want them hanging out with you. I would want something where your color is not a defining characteristic of the type of person that you are."

"I feel like on the surface, it appears to be better, but I feel like it has just been hidden more. At my workplace there was an incident where an African American gentleman was called the N-word. HR got involved via an apology. In my estimation, those three individuals (that said the slur) should have been terminated immediately. For me, that is an issue. That doesn't make me feel like I'm in an environment that's going to protect me."

"I believe there is systemic racism, and it goes back to the very beginning. There's a lot of us that just didn't know. I think we have to say that there are things in this system that have severely impacted Black people over the last several hundred years. There are effects of that everywhere."

"Although I'm from India somehow when people meet me they think I'm from Mexico and their behavior kind of changes, the way they talk to me or they try to speak Spanish, or try to be more patronizing. My husband has faced people telling him to go back to his country. In spite of all the diversity we have in our community, still I feel there needs to be more inclusion or open-mindedness and accepting people for who they are, and as they are."

"But when I moved from Mexico, for the first few days, no students talked to me. In the cafeteria, I sat by myself and I saw that all the tables were very much segregated by race. Just like in that cafeteria eight years ago, I still see Columbus doing that. In a way, segregation persists. There are a lot of systems that make it like that. If you are a person of color, most likely, you are going to be lower class."

"And it's obvious when people look at me when I open my mouth, people know I'm not from here. It is really hard to try to fit in in Columbus. It stinks that I see it every day and it happens."

"I'm an old White lady, there's a whole lot that happened in our history that I really didn't understand. But I've always understood that people of color struggle, and I've always believed there is racism in our country and community – it's not a question of mine."

"I haven't been gunned down, but I've been pulled over for what I felt like was no good reason. I've been stopped in the street for no good reason. These things happen here, so we're just asking for the same rights, civility. We're asking for the laws that are being enacted to be enacted fairly."

"People don't recognize that racism exists. If you've been quiet and you haven't said anything against it, then you're a part of it. You're a part of the racism. Even if you think that you aren't racist and you didn't do anything to call them out, then you're part of the problem."

"When I was working in the schools last year, I overheard one of the students call an Asian American student 'The Corona' after she sneezed. I approached the teacher, she still didn't do anything, she didn't understand and I was so disappointed. I felt a weight in me, what if that had been my daughter."

THEME

FEAR IS A REGULAR OCCURRENCE

“ I feel like diversity is a surface issue in Columbus, and I don't really think it means inclusion. I don't think we really have a place at the table. It just looks good; I don't think it's meaningful. I'll use my kids' words. My oldest son said when we moved to Columbus from Indianapolis, “Our stuff is safer here, but I'm not.”

“Fear is a regular occurrence for many people of color.”

“When I say afraid, I don't want to give the impression that I walk around in fear of my physical safety on a regular basis. But I do walk around with a certain amount of emotional fear.” For low income Latinos, emotional fear is ever present as they go about their daily lives. There is an over-riding sense of uncertainty regarding how people will interact particularly with the police and immigration. Other group expressed facing similar feelings of fear such as Black residents and Asian Americans in particular, since the start of the pandemic.

Deep racial, socioeconomic, and geographic divides exist in Bartholomew County. These divides contribute to fear and the erosion of trust. Participants express emotional fear about the lack of trust due to stereotypes, micro-biases, and implicit biases that exist. Latinos and Black individuals express heightened emotional fear when interacting with people of authority such as store employees, human resource departments, housing managers, police officers, and federal immigration due to preconceived stereotypes.

“Racial slurs and jokes are very hurtful.” Sometimes the jokes or slurs come from colleagues and are treated with a lack of empathy and consideration. The normalization of racial slurs or jokes often leads to the belief that this is acceptable societal behavior and causes a proliferation of racism.

Trust would be increased by the community addressing issues of safety, socioeconomic, geographic, and racial divides. To improve the feeling of safety and trust people of privilege need to understand that:

People have different perspectives on how safe and inclusive our community is.

People do not have access to the same resources.

Emotional fear (rather than physical fear) is a regular occurrence for many people of diverse backgrounds.

THE VOICES:

"I feel like diversity is a surface issue in Columbus, and I don't really think it means inclusion. I don't think we really have a place at the table. It just looks good; I don't think it's meaningful. I'll use my kids' words. My oldest son said when we moved to Columbus from Indianapolis, 'Our stuff is safer here, but I'm not.'"

"I do walk around with a certain amount of emotional fear."

"Asian friends are like me, afraid to get involved or show themselves. Because since Covid, they don't know what people are thinking or what their reactions would be."

"For instance someone said to me 'I don't know why they let all these people come here, it takes away from what it is to be an American.'"

"You really feel powerless."

"For me personally, I got stopped by the police and I was racially profiled. I was maybe 17 at that time. I was scared because previously, Black people have more stereotypes with cops than White people do and if Black people try to reach for their pockets, statistically cops will see that as a threat. So, I was scared but my sister stopped and parked right behind me if anything happened."

"On a personal level, I'm to the point where I'm tired of it. I have a fifteen-year-old son, I had to sit him down and have that talk with him. When I had to have that talk with him, I asked other people with older sons. I asked White people, did you have to have that talk? They all said no, and I was like okay now you see the difference. We have to have that talk if you're out and the police asks you this, this is what you need to do. They're not having that same talk – that's what I mean when I say it's not affecting them. And it should, but it's not. That's why I think it's not equal. You don't have to tell your son to keep his mouth shut and his head down because it's not going to happen to them."

"Just because we all speak English does not mean that is our safe space."

"If we don't have a safe space, especially in this type of climate, then we keep it all bottled in, but as soon as they get away from Columbus – they're not coming back."

"If they come back, it's because their parents live here. Once they get away, they will not come back, they can finally breathe."

"I want people to look at African Americans as people who have the same needs. I want to stop being dehumanized."

"I grew up in Columbus and had to learn to in order to survive, it's a method of survival."

"When you can go to a store and not be the only Black person there, that feels good."

"They tell me that they are calling the police and they feel like they will be calling Immigration. I tell the people that I know to have a voice. You have rights. You pay taxes. You pay for your home here and you are providing them a salary. Don't let them humiliate you. Don't let anyone disrespect you. What happens is that they put fear in undocumented people."

"I believe one of the ladies made reference to being followed in the store and being asked to show their receipt. That has happened to me. Why would they treat me differently than how they treated the people who don't look like me?"

"That feels emotionally scary."

THEME

PEOPLE MUST SELF-REFLECT

“I’ve met so many white folks who do care, there’s just a lot of ignorance and not hearing our voices. They have no idea of what’s going on. Everybody’s trying to change and address it, we can’t do it without white people. We need white folks who are willing to stand up.”

“**People must self-reflect** and change themselves to tackle racism and exclusion”

Many people acknowledge that they need to learn, grow and be part of the solution.

Participants voiced the need for continued self-growth and learning coupled with interacting with people different than themselves and the crossing of silos. With the building of relationships and a continued focus on education, racial inequity can have a chance of improving. However, there is concern that not everyone in the community is on board.

One role of community leaders is to provide ample opportunities for increasing knowledge and understanding of racial awareness topics for the community and to seek deeper learning for themselves.

To help individuals understand and address racism and diverse issues, parents must recognize racial barriers and be vigilant “for opportunities to bring these issues to the attention of people who make decisions and act as bridge builders to seek understanding.” “The educational system has a lot of work to do to reflect the diversity of students in their curricular learnings, teacher staffing, understanding of racism and systemic racism, and the incorporation of the true history of diverse groups.”

As the momentum for racial equity increases, diverse groups become more hopeful, and their trust is increasing as they witness leaders of the community coming together committed for the long run and not just the trend of the times. However, “people of color have more to lose” if people in positions of power wane in their interest over time.

THE VOICES:

"You hear White people say, 'I grew up poor, I pulled myself up by my bootstraps, anyone can do it.' I guess my dream is that people who think that being poor and White is the same as being poor and Black – it's not the case. If you're poor and White you do have less obstacles."

"We need to open the can of worms on all the stuff that's been stuffed down and closed and subtle and everyone's just allowed it to be secret. No, I'm tired of it being secret, we can't deal with racism when it's a secret, it needs to be brought to life. It can be uncomfortable, everyone needs to be really, really, really uncomfortable. You cannot do anything until you're uncomfortable. There's no growth."

"This goes back to education. A lot of these beliefs are passed on from family members. Racism is taught."

"Especially now with social media and YouTube where white supremacy expands, and people can easily believe that and be persuaded to that way of thinking when people are not educated on these issues. So, I believe it all goes back to education."

"With respect to different generations, we may have these hidden biases. I've learned through psychology classes that the best way to address those biases is learning from experiences of other people. Having these learning opportunities and giving people the chance to talk with one another, learn from each other and know the perspectives. That educational experience of views and getting to know one another can help with biases and getting to that inclusion point."

"It's easy to plead ignorance, but nobody needs to be ignorant because there's so much opportunity to educate yourself on issues if you truly want to. When you get that understanding, then you can say that you're not the type of White person to say, 'well there's not systemic racism.'"

"Rural vs urban areas or is there a bias in the system – that's just one example. Could I do the same study with the Sheriff's office versus the city police department. Those are things that affect inclusiveness and people's feelings of safety. Affect willingness to collaborate."

"She can't feel safe there."

"Through the tool of education we can develop better empathy. That will make leadership more capable."

"Being separated, that started for me very early on. They separated us from the white children to do some testing. I believe they were testing our language skills and we had to pass that two times in a row to then be brought back to the same class as the white children. So, I think it starts very young and then we just subconsciously do it."

"We are not taught these things, we have not been educated like we should. It takes a lot of time and work to do that. Our systems have failed us."

"But, for Black kids, it's so much harder. They have to deal with microaggressions. My kids had to deal with stuff that they never had to deal with because we moved away and then came back. Now they get it. It's just harder, that's it."

"I believe that inclusivity and race relations can improve by educating the youth. Honestly, I'm mostly giving up on adults at this point, but young people need to be educated and get their facts right."

"Educating children and teenagers is definitely easier than unteaching and then having to reteach."

"There is alienation that needs to be gotten rid of."

"I've lived my life in Columbus in this inclusive bubble, it follows me where I go. We want to get to where you don't have to be in the bubble to have that experience. We want to expand that experience to others."

"A lot of people grow up in just a little pocket and they're not exposed to anything else. I think that's true for many parts of Bartholomew County."

THEME

OPPORTUNITY AND ADVANCEMENT ARE LIMITED

“ I think one of my issues is, a lot of the factories that we go to earn a living. If we experience racism we have to go to HR, but there’s nobody in HR who’s for us... I have to go to a European lady, or a man and tell my issues about racism which they can’t truly understand, and they might not even care. I’ve been in factories for over 20 years and I’ve been called the N-word and everything, I’ve been told ‘oh that’s just how he was raised, let him apologize to you.’ But if I was to go out and call somebody something disrespectful like that, I’m walked out immediately – there is no ‘oh that’s how he was raised... we have to go into these places and keep our mouths shut.”

Opportunity and advancement are limited for people of color in business and government.

Inequitable upward mobility is an issue in workplaces. Upward mobility for people of color is limited, particularly for employees of large corporations. Black employees are not drawn to live in Columbus as there are better opportunities for career advancement in larger cities. Black youth, in particular, and other diverse youth who grew up in Columbus choose to leave when they become adults. Solutions and encouragement for people to stay in Columbus are important to a viable economic future for Columbus.

While Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are good for the economy and allow corporations to expand when fully embraced, DEI needs to exist outside of the corporate walls in Columbus. DEI corporate initiatives are effective as an advocacy measure but also have areas for improvement.

“We need to break the economic and systemic barriers in the community that have been present since the 1960’s to effectively compensate for the pay gap for lower-paid jobs.” While many are grateful to be in this community, “we must improve the trajectory of progress to improve the community in 10 years instead of 50 years as younger generations can achieve equality and acceptance earlier.”

THE VOICES:

"If we experience racism in the factory we have to go to HR, but there's nobody in HR who's for us. We have to go into these places and keep our mouths shut."

"If you look at the last 10-20 years, we have been at 1-2% of Black population here and it hasn't budged. Other minority populations have grown, so that tells me something about whether we're welcoming enough or not. Why has that population not grown? Because Cummins is hiring people of all colors and cultures, they come here to work and go live somewhere else. They're making a choice. That's a red flag to me."

"Housing is one that we've heard over and over. All the things you talked about come out. Access to healthcare is another. Transportation is another. Education. And all of those affect your ability to get a job and keep a job. That, in turn affects your ability to pay for healthcare. It's a complex system. The analogy of a can of worms. You pull one thing that's hanging out of the can, and the whole mass moves. There's no single leverage point. You can't say 'oh if we just fix this everything else would be perfect.'"

"Don't think that just because we are undocumented, we don't have talent. We come here to work. Some people sometimes have multiple shifts. I believe that it's the most hardworking community, a community that strives and there is a lot of talent, and there are brilliant people that we can obtain the best of them."

"So why is it important for my children to see people as themselves as teachers, cops...It's because it feels like a community that sees them."

"He was a big authority on how to act and that gave a lot of prejudiced people the mindset to go out and be racist or sexist. I'm a DACA student so people who were born here can't really experience financial aid even though I've lived here for 16 out of my 18 years in Columbus. They can't understand that but through education, that's the closest that they would get to experiencing what I or others go through."

"Not everyone has the same access. Not everyone feels safe or think that its inclusive. It depends on where you are."

"Then I became very aware that a lot of people, because of your color, they think different about you. Or their parents don't want them hanging out with you. I would want something where your color is not a defining characteristic of the type of person that you are."

"I feel like on the surface, it appears to be better, but I feel like it has just been hidden more. At my workplace there was an incident where an African American gentleman was called the N-word. HR got involved via an apology. In my estimation, those three individuals (that said the slur) should have been terminated immediately. For me, that is an issue. That doesn't make me feel like I'm in an environment that's going to protect me."

"It's a small enough town that as an individual you can get involved and make a difference. The catch is getting invited."

"If we already have that segregated society where Black people live here, Hispanic people live there, and White people over there. So, with segregation, they said okay let's get rid of these terms, but they had already segregated everyone and kept certain groups at the margins from opportunities."

THEME

WE NEED TO DRAMATICALLY INCREASE THE DIVERSITY OF LEADERSHIP

“One thing you mentioned is role models. And it’s harder for us people of color to see ourselves as successful people if we don’t see people like us in leadership positions. I went to high school here and I believe that I only had one teacher that was a person of color. If all my role models are my teachers as a child, and none of them look like me, then I don’t know what success looks like for me. Having representation at school as well is also extremely important. We can talk about representation in the media and all the sort of stuff, but that’s not something that we can control here.”

We need to dramatically increase the diversity of leadership in government, business, and education.

People of color must be able to see themselves reflected in the leadership of civic institutions, workplaces, and schools to feel a sense of belonging and increase their trust in those institutions.

To work towards inclusivity, “some community leaders will need to step outside of their comfort zone.” They “need to look beyond their bubbles and participate in the creation and cultivation of a free, open society” in Columbus, where coalitions of people and organizations can “come together with honesty, vulnerability, and respect to create a truly equitable community.”

“The education system has a lot of work to do” to reflect the diversity of students in their curriculum, teacher staffing, understanding of racism, and diversity of administrative staff who serve as decision-makers. Many voiced support for improving the educational system to be a hub of knowledge for youth and adults for healing racial divisions. Ideas discussed included faculty modeling inclusive behaviors for children, updating curriculum to reflect accurate racial and ethnic history, and leading by example. The importance of the incorporation of the true history of the different diverse groups was emphasized.

Community leaders should continue the many conversations present in the community about diversity, equity, and inclusion as there is still a long way to go.

I don’t trust that anything is going to change”. “This all sounds great, but we don’t actually believe it is going to change anything”. “We have heard all this before.”

THE VOICES:

"One thing you mentioned is role models. And it's harder for us people of color to see ourselves as successful people if we don't see people like us in leadership positions."

"I don't think we really have a place at the table."

"Well, it's the same people doing everything."

"What we need is that same diversity to be represented in our leadership and decision making."

"It starts at the top, but it doesn't end at the top."

"The perception is that it's an elite group of people, and they run Columbus."

"I went to high school here and I believe that I only had one teacher that was a person of color. If all my role models are my teachers as a child, and none of them look like me, then I don't know what success looks like for me."

"Having representation at school as well is also extremely important. When problems occur and decisions are being made, who's got our back? We can talk about representation in the media and all that sort of stuff, but that's not something that we can control here."

"I think the biggest hindrance to that is White people in Columbus who turn a blind eye or try to fix things just for show. White people are a huge hindrance to people of color because they hold the power, they're in political positions, they're running the schools and universities and half of them don't give a damn."

"It takes leadership to address what has been most resistant to change."

"For me, we can't change people, but I would like to see more people getting involved in the government and school systems and to get more involved in the community. I would like to see more people of color running for positions like mayor, judges, police, principals. It will open more doors. I would like to see a community with more people of color working everywhere, not just at Cummins."

"The leadership and government in Bartholomew County should represent the community that is already diverse. I believe that we have many people from many places here. We can thank many companies for that. But that diversity that we have in the community has not been represented in leadership in my opinion."

"We need to know all of our history, not just a portion of it – not just the whitewashed version of our history. How to advocate for an expansion or correction for our history curriculum in school and elsewhere."

"I guess I can see that housing here seems to be pretty segregated. On the east side, if I'm driving through, I see Black people. On the west, north it's pretty White."

"There is a lack of empathy and consideration for people who look different than themselves"

"We have a huge problem with racism. We always have and we haven't dealt with it. I just feel like we're not winning. We're just not dealing with things the way they should be dealt with."

"I think it's who it is and how you connect to them. I started with 11 African people, there's only 2 of us left. As you get higher in the company, there's nobody left. Nobody that looks like you. I think that's why people leave."

THEME

THE POWER STRUCTURE OF WHITE PRIVILEGE MUST BE ADDRESSED

“The majority of people in Columbus who are government officials are White. And they are also middle aged or older. They are the ones to constantly make sure you feel that you are not welcomed.”

“The power structure of White privilege must be addressed before anything will change.”

“White people hold all the power.” The same small group of people sit on all the boards of influence and people of color are not included.

Effective equitable community leadership is needed at all levels including the grassroots and the grass tops.

“To make Columbus the most equitable city in America, the power structure of White privilege must be addressed before solutions can emerge.” “People of color must see themselves reflected in the leadership of civic institutions, workplaces, and schools to feel a sense of belonging and increase their trust in those institutions.” We need to dramatically increase the diversity of leadership in business, government, law enforcement, and education. “White people hold all the power;” they are in the highest decision-making positions. “It seems the same small group of people sit on all the boards” of influence and generally people of diversity are not included.

“Columbus should strive to be a community that attracts anyone” because it encourages and endears community pride in all who come, by reducing the present divisions, treating all people as humans, improving mutual understanding to spread harmony, and pinpointing areas of Columbus that are shallow.

The diversity of Columbus is a community asset - if that diversity is acknowledged, appreciated, and celebrated. “People want to belong” to their community but, we have more work to do to get there.

THE VOICES:

"If we don't see a representative leadership, not everyone in the community is going to be benefiting."

The majority of people in Columbus who are government officials are White. And they are also middle aged or older. They are the ones to constantly make sure you feel that you are not welcomed."

"I think a lot of it is also because in Columbus, a lot of the people who are in positions of power, are people who are born in Columbus, they are White people from Columbus."

"Instead, I have never seen the police here meet with the Latinos, which we are the diverse majority here in Columbus, Indiana, to tell us to not be afraid to call at any time, to not be afraid to call because you are undocumented."

"They want to do the right thing. The question is do they want to continue to do the right thing when it gets hard? How much resistance will they take? J.I. Miller was the godfather here, and he set the way it was going to be. I don't think you have someone with that level of influence in Columbus."

"I think if you are relatively high income, in the bubble then things are fine. But, if you're not in that bubble, those people don't feel welcome. And that's not saying everyone in the bubble feels welcomed but there's a big difference in the experiences."

"Earlier this week there was a student who made six racist jokes during class. Like it was demeaning. I went to administration and felt unsupported. And I don't think - he's not a racist person. He's just someone who has always been White. I think a lot of it is also because in Columbus, a lot of the people who are in positions of power are people who have a limited understanding as to what the range of unwelcoming can be. They don't understand what to look for. They don't know how to address it when it happens."

"Behavior changing is the hardest thing."

"The predominate race here is feeling threatened by the voices of people of color so they're trying to quiet us and let it pass."

"I'm on the diversity council in BCSC, I'm on multiple committees, and I know that they have initiatives like recruiting and retaining teachers of various backgrounds or creating systems to teach students about racists comments. And I'm on all of those committees because I believe in the end goal, but sometimes when I sit in on those meetings, or talk to people individually, it's just that unless everyone believes in this system, it's not going to make a difference. Unless everyone believes there needs to be change, I feel like it's not going to make a difference."

"It's kind of hard for people of color to get authoritative power because we have these preset stereotypes that have gone through ages. All the way back to when slavery was abolished. That preset mind can still give us a disadvantage."

"I ask myself sometimes, what is out there that I wouldn't die for, but I'd be willing to give up a lot for. Let's say I see somebody get called the N-word by somebody higher up, and I've got to decide if I ride this ride, I could be jeopardizing my career. But we still need the businessmen, the politicians, we still need the people."

"I think what's interesting about the Columbus is that I feel like there are certain people who do want to make things better. And there are initiatives that intend to make things better, but I feel like a lot of that is just rooted in superficiality. They want to make it look like they are working to make things better, and that in it of itself is frustrating to me."

"It will take courage as leaders to get us to where we need to go."

THEME

WE NEED CONTINUOUS ETHNIC CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

“ I think I’d like to live in a community where we go beyond the one-off sort of celebrations like Ethnic Expo and are able to support things over the long-term.”

We need continuous ethnic cultural experiences

and engagement opportunities to get us to an inclusive community.

“To fully engage people in the community, we need to create more meaningful events that enrich racial learning and deepen inclusivity.” “To create change we need to look beyond our own bubbles, overcome the bystander effect, and create space for people from all backgrounds to come together.”

Providing opportunities for people to meet people different than themselves “encourages and deepens learning and appreciation about ethnic cultures.” This helps “counter behaviors learned during upbringing and develops an appreciation for people from other backgrounds.” While some believe “Ethnic Expo and CAMEO events have helped increased inclusion” in the community, others believe that “community events do not do enough to help with underlying inclusion and diversity perceptions.” “To fully engage people in the community, we need to create more meaningful events that enriches racial learning and deepens inclusivity.”

People have a “hard time connecting with different groups and cultures because there are not enough opportunities to connect;” or individuals simply are not eager to connect with others. To create improved inclusion, groups acknowledged the need to interact between their silos.

A core value of Columbus is to continually create and nurture community structures that ensure that all are respected, treated equitably and all are given an opportunity to participate in the life of the community such as in schools, government, business, etc.

THE VOICES:

"I don't mean to be pessimistic and say we're not trying; I just don't know how much an Ethnic Expo does to change underlying perceptions and beliefs that people have as it relates to inclusion and diversity. I'm not saying it isn't a great activity, I just don't know how much it really gets at that fundamental change."

"All of a sudden, we have a lot of Asian companies building factories here and it wasn't exclusive to Japan – it was a large swath of companies. We created Ethnic Expo which was 'okay for all of you' that have never been exposed to other cultures, here's your opportunity to get exposed.' The funny part is, it keeps coming back to this, it was over food. That's what it started as. Celebration of different cultures' food. While we've done all sorts of things, all sorts of initiatives over the last 25 years, I don't know that we've created anything to take our community from an inclusive standpoint to that next level."

"We come together for Ethnic Expo, vigils and for rallies but as far as really associating with each other I don't believe that we do. We aren't really working together. I don't know how we would work on that."

"However, I don't want a melting pot, I don't want cultures to evaporate I want people to still be able to maintain their cultural backgrounds and maintain traditions, languages and so on. I think that's really important."

"We need more White people who were born here to support us. Media is covering like 1% of what people of color are doing, the ones crossing the border, drugs, all of that – they are covering 1% of what these different races are doing and that is getting to everyone's mind instead of covering when a DACA student graduates from an Ivy League college."

"You want to survive here, you want to thrive here; you can't associate. In general immigrants and minorities aren't treated the best here. You know there's this whole community that's not seen as equal, then why would you? You want your family to grow and prosper."

"I guess that's another effective statement, to wear t-shirts, caps, masks that say BLM, but to be visible in the community as White people supporting BLM. I think the more people see that. The best example I can think of is the stop smoking campaign. Everybody used to smoke, in a very few years that shifted, the message coming from all sides."

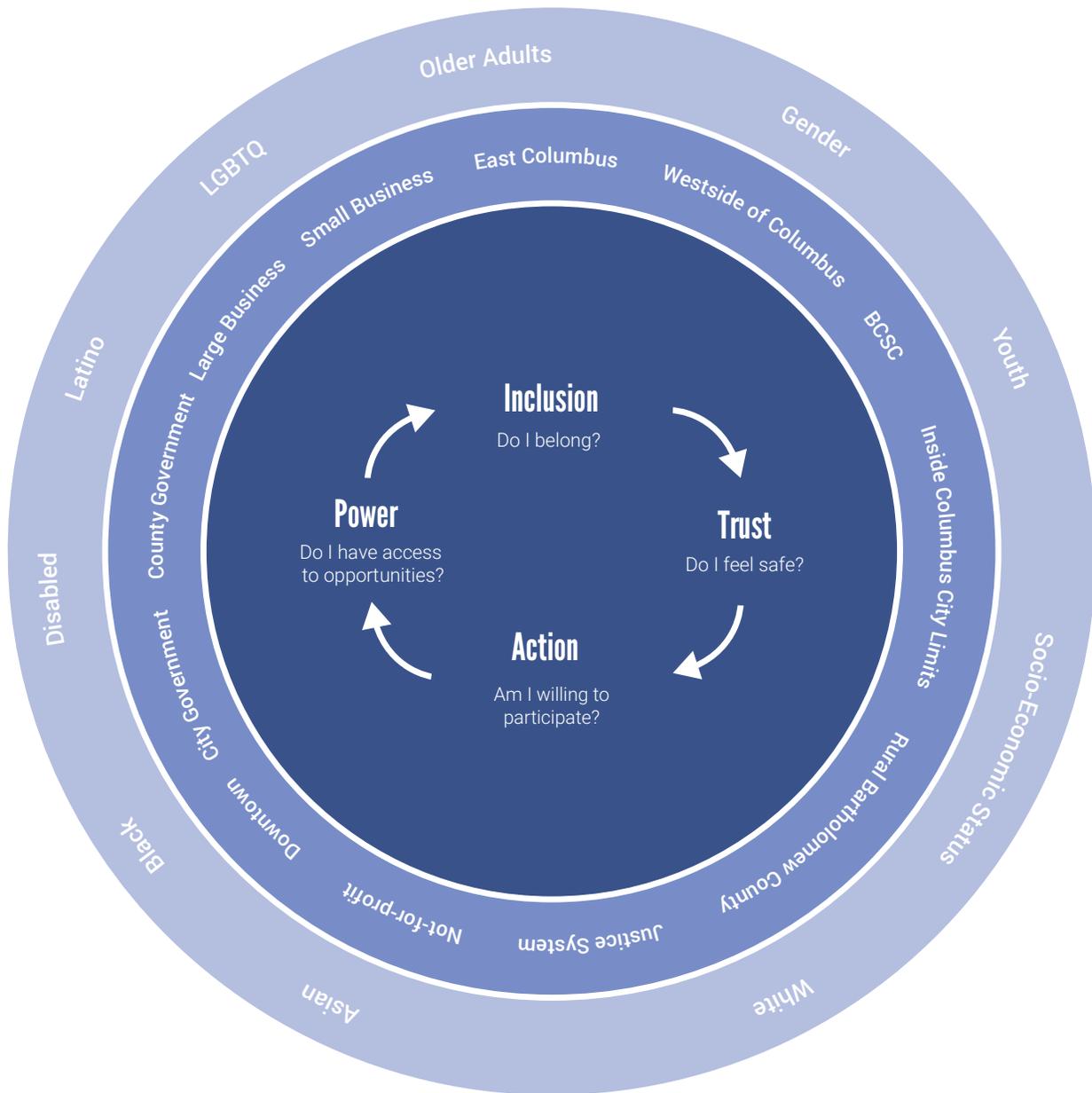
"I feel like if I had shut him down and just was like, 'oh that's offensive and you're a racist' then it would have been over for the both of us. And he wouldn't have learned why that was unacceptable and he wouldn't have changed his usage of words. It took us serving together for three years for us to build that relationship to where I trusted him and I knew he was a good guy, and he trusted me enough to be able to ask me those questions. I just feel like there's that learned patience on both sides. It's just a longer process, I don't think it's a training you can just take. It goes back to making sure everyone has food on the table, and they're safe and then we can go from there. Then we can say okay let's build trust and have these conversations. It's not as easy as 'we need diversity training,' it's not that easy."

"My son is 14 and he has friends because of social media and Play Station, all races and cultures. He talks to them on that just like they're everybody else. It does give me hope and I enjoy seeing that from him. I think our job as parents is to foster that. Of course, I know there would be parents that would try to inflict their beliefs or thoughts onto their kids and hopefully we're seeing less of that happening because my grandparent's generation and even in my generation they would. Would I be able to have a Black friend over? I don't know, probably not. But can my son? Yes. The barrier in my generation – those walls are getting broken down. But still, I heard some racial slurs from my grandmother, I mean that happened. She was the most Christian person that I knew but she would fly the N-word and I would just almost stop in my tracks. The generations are what is great to see. I think every generation the wall gets broken down further and further, and I can definitely see that between the generation X and Y and the Gen Z's. Of course, it's going to take time, because the 50's and 60's honestly was not that long ago and those things happened and until the generations move on, I think it's still going to be here."

Inclusion, Trust, Action, and Power

VOICES

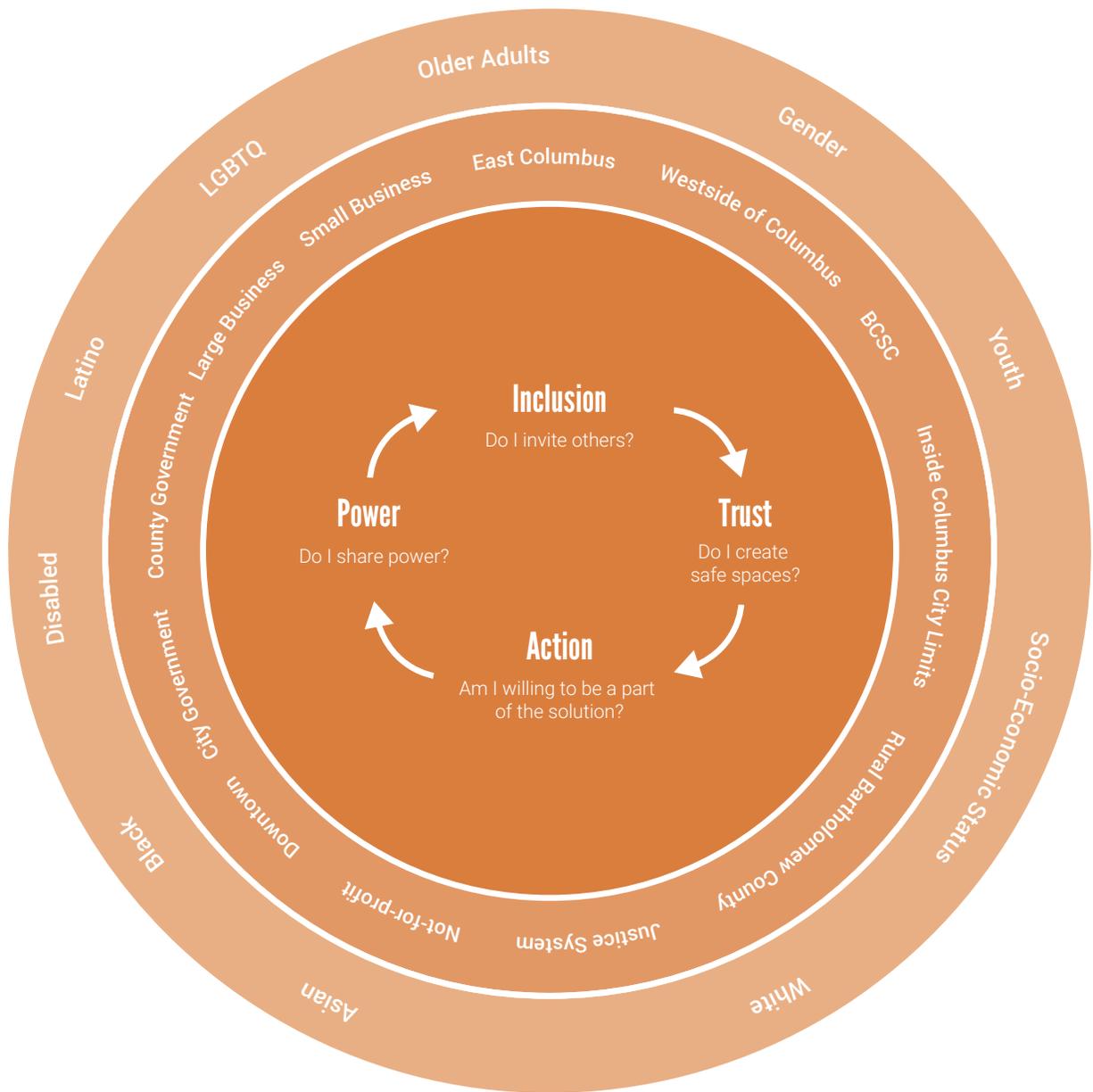
Four main issues that emerged consistently above the voices and themes were: inclusion, trust, action, and power. These high-level issues are important to all people. However, these issues look and feel different depending on the setting, access to opportunities and the experience of the individual.



Inclusion, Trust, Action, and Power

ACTIONS

The four main actions that emerged from the conversations which could move toward a more inclusive community are: inviting others, creating safe spaces, willing to take part in the solution, and sharing power.



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The goal of these community conversations is to elevate those voices that often go unheard. Many of the themes that emerged may be difficult for some people to hear, understand or accept. However these themes realistically represent the viewpoints of many people in our community.

We believe this document is an honest and accurate assessment of the state of race relations in Bartholomew County. Further, we hope this assessment serves as a starting point for our broader community to come together to engage in respectful and constructive conversations to more deeply understand each other and to find common ground so we may ALL move forward together.

Next steps will be determined by a series of community input sessions and a survey. Throughout the process of determining next steps, Imagine Columbus will seek the authentic voices from the four corners of our community.

