

Connecting the Dots In Our Community...



Welcoming Community II *building a community for all*

As a follow-up to the original Welcoming Community Study conducted in 2004, the *Welcoming Community II* project was designed by the Heritage Fund's Outreach Committee to measure changes in perceptions regarding the community's welcoming factor. The original study conducted by the Committee in 2004 brought an understanding of the importance of technology, talent and tolerance (inclusiveness) as critical to creating a living environment which leads to the growth and vitality of the community. The term *Welcoming Community* is now widely used.

A quality community is a necessary component of an attractive business climate. The ability to attract and retain educated workers is vital for area businesses and our local economy. Both the original and the follow up *Welcoming Community* projects were designed 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.

Survey Design

In 2004, the Outreach Committee worked with Dr. Fredricka Joyner to develop a series of statements and questions based on a list of attributes identified by the Heritage Fund Board as important to a welcoming culture.

Attributes

- Access to Information
- Openness to Differences
- Friendliness and Ability to Get Involved
- Access to Arts and Cultural Activities

Information was gathered through focus groups and written questionnaires. Survey responders were asked to consider each question and rate the community on a scale from one to four. A score of one meant the person strongly disagreed with the statement, a score of four points that the person strongly agreed with the statement.

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Finding from the Original Survey

The 2004 study found that Columbus has many positive attributes: however, the Columbus area 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

Welcoming Community II - Did the Welcoming Factor Improve?

As a prelude to the actual **2011 Welcoming Community II** survey, the Outreach Committee examined the activities and work that had transpired as a result of the *Welcoming Community* study conducted in 2004. A review of some of those activities and work was eye-opening. The committee found that there have been many significant changes within the community.

- The downtown has become a gathering place for the community,
- Columbus now has a strong brand of **Unexpected Unforgettable**,
- It has become easier to access information and new organizations such as CAMEO, (Columbus Area Multi-Ethnic Organization), Columbus Young Professionals (CYP) and the Inclusive Community Coalition have been established. These organizations have brought like-minded people together to develop and participate in community programs and activities.



As the Outreach Committee reviewed changes that occurred as a result of the first *Welcoming Community* study, the changes prompted this question:

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Does *the community* think the welcoming factor of Columbus has improved, and in particular, what are the views of those groups identified in the original survey as feeling disenfranchised?

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The Survey Process:

To ensure the continuity and integrity of the project, Dr. Fredricka Joyner, who served as project consultant for the first study was again retained. *Welcoming Community II* targeted the same demographic groups as the original survey. Questions were based on the attributes and questions asked in 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. More than 1,400 people shared their thoughts, perspectives and ideas; this compared to 300 individuals in 2004.

Key Highlights of the Welcoming Community II Survey Findings:

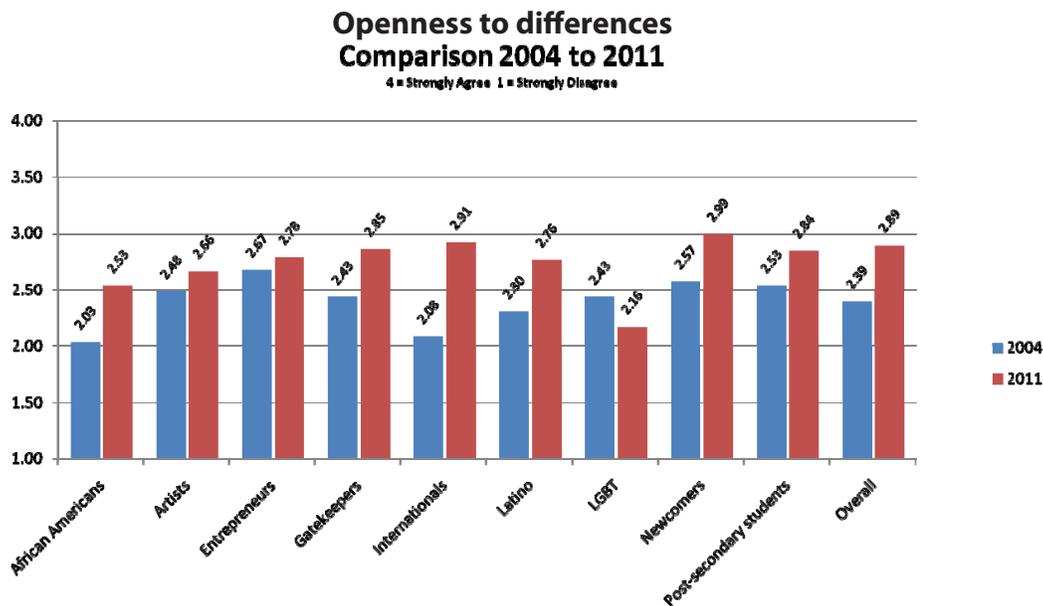
- While the perception of improvement and positive change was seen across all of the question categories and demographic groups (with the most substantial gains in the groups that were most disenfranchised in the 2004 study), both strong positive *and* strong opposing opinions were expressed.
- There 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.
- The 2011 responses identified areas for continued work and some emerging areas of focus.

The Outreach Committee along with community thinkers from various spheres of the community met and poured over the data and pulled out themes which were evident in the perspectives shared in the survey. With the help of Dr. Joyner, several recommended strategies and possible areas of work on those strategies were formulated.

Key Themes

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

- › Some respondents see the lack of a Human Rights Ordinance that includes Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender (LGBT) individuals as a symbol of not being welcoming.
- › Approaches to addressing the needs of Latino residents continue to be a contentious issue, with strongly felt opinions expressed from several perspectives. While some respondents are concerned that Latino residents are discriminated against and treated unfairly others are concerned by what they describe as preferential treatment.
- › There is a presumption that the community has a process to address discrimination issues but an uncertainty as to what the process might be.
- › There is a widely recognized gap between the strong culture of acceptance of differences within Cummins and a more limited acceptance of differences in the community as a whole.



Memorable Quotes

"With energy and commitment it is of course quite possible to become involved in community issues. However, for many Columbus remains exclusive. We still have social/ethnic/cultural groups which naturally cling to each other and remain apart from the others. Suspicion, ignorance, even bigotry, still exists here, although cloaked beneath a veneer of tolerance. The LGBT community is a glaring example of our failure to become inclusive and welcoming."

"I do see that CAMEO, the Inclusive Communities Coalition, the Interfaith Forum, the Columbus Peace Fellowship, and PRIDE Alliance have worked hard to promote appreciation of diversity in Columbus. There are so few people involved in those organizations, however, and there is much that needs to be done. It is, however, much better than in previous decades."

"Due to the economy there is a lot of resentment towards certain ethnic groups."

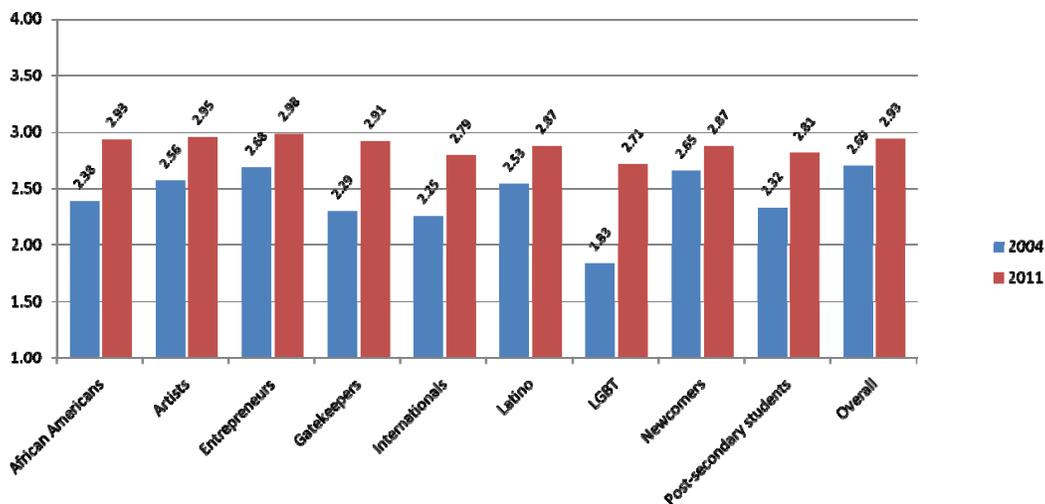
"Columbus has finally embedded the idea of welcoming community into institutional policies, procedures, etc. Huge leap over the last five years."

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

- › Interest remains in a comprehensive community information portal that would provide easy and immediate access to a variety of information.
- › The local newspaper is reported to be a vital source of information for respondents (80% were aged 30+).
- › Residents seek information about three areas: community events and activities; how to become involved in the community; and, as a newcomer how to access businesses and services.
- › Many people report problems accessing information or receiving it in a timely manner.

**Access to Information
Comparison 2004 to 2011**

4 = Strongly Agree 1 = Strongly Disagree



Memorable Quotes

"It would be helpful if there was an online community calendar where people could click on a day to see what was going on that day."

"We have been here now 6 months and don't really know anyone. Even at work people pass by without even making eye contact. This is new coming from the warm south."

"I have seen various events to participate in, but the signs or advertisements seem to come out right before the event when plans have been already made."

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

- › There is a perception by some that, while community leaders are actively working toward a vision for the future, there is a lack of connection to the general public. This lack of connection and information is perceived by some as a lack of transparency and inclusion in decision making.
- › More than 80% of respondents reported that they would like to be actively involved in efforts to improve the quality of life in the community but, in the comments, many reported that they lack knowledge of the role they might play.
- › Traditional media (print news and radio) is the main source of information in regard to community projects and activities yet some respondents reported a lack of valuable updates and information.
- › Those who have moved into the community express more difficulty in finding ways to become involved in the community than do long-time residents.
- › There is a need to engage a new generation of leaders while keeping current leaders engaged and active.

Memorable Quotes

"Although I believe community leaders have a vision for the future. I don't think it is always presented openly."

"The most powerful way to influence civic life in our society is to vote."

"Create a forum for young professionals to shadow or participate with community leaders in their activities."

"It would be good if we could develop a convenient methodology/process for getting a broader (statistically significant) voice of citizens on community issues. People in this community want to be heard and have input, but the open council and committee meetings don't seem to provide the level of convenience for people to get a good cross section of the citizens' concern."

"The leadership provided by community leaders and government officials over the next 4-5 years will be critical in determining if Columbus will continue growth and prosper, or if it will face the fate of so many other towns where leadership has been unenlightened and regresses to the comfort zone of "doing nothing risky and playing it safe"."



"There is still a widespread sentiment that a small circle of influential people set the direction for the whole community. While this may or may not be true, how do we bridge this gap to include a true representation of the community in planning and development?"

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4. 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.

- › The Commons is eagerly anticipated and is expected to offer additional program and socialization opportunities.
- › It can be difficult to meet new people and settle into the community. There is an interest in additional activities that would provide opportunities to meet and get to know fellow residents.
- › Socialization opportunities are less than desired for young professionals and single individuals of all ages.
- › Activities and socialization opportunities are less than desired for teens.
- › There is particular interest in low cost activities and ethnic restaurants in the downtown area.

Memorable Quotes

"There is a lot to do in Columbus for families. It would be great if there were more activities for younger people – either single or married. There are not enough arts and entertainment opportunities for young, single people. A lot of stuff for older people and families. Us young people are forced to go to Indy or Cincy for music, arts and other activities. I have many friends who live in Greenwood and Indy's southside because of this. They will work in Columbus but leave every night at 5:00 p.m."

"I am not sure on an individual basis that Columbus is an easy place to make friends. Many of the residents keep to their own cliques."

"Continue to improve dining, gathering and retail options in core downtown. We have the opportunity to have what few American cities have: a thriving city center."

5. There are concerns that low income people feel disenfranchised.

- › Some respondents perceive a "have/have not" culture in Columbus, with the "haves" making the decisions.
- › The need for low cost (or free) entertainment and activities for families in Columbus was identified.
- › The need for affordable and safe living options for low income individuals and families was identified.
- › The importance of finding ways to break the cycle of poverty was identified.

"We need to guard against becoming an economically divided community. The past few years have really hurt the middle and lower economic segments of the community and I fear they may become disenfranchised."

Memorable Quotes

"Poverty is at the most basic level the root of most community problems."

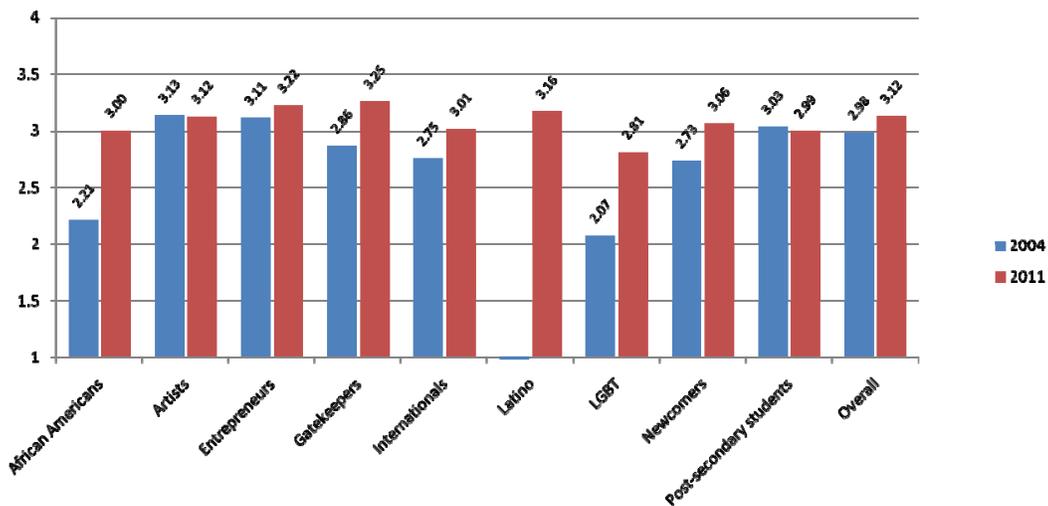
"The City needs to listen to the needs of the elderly and poor. Cost of living is pushing the elderly and poor to the breaking point."

6. Despite deeply felt concerns about some specific community issues, there is a strongly expressed feeling of *pride* in the community.

- Over 80% of the respondents feel proud to live in the community and believe that others in Columbus share that feeling.
- Almost 80% of the respondents agreed that they are likely to recommend this community to others.

**Pride & Community Leadership
Comparison 2004 to 2011**

4 = Strongly Agree 1 = Strongly Disagree



Memorable Quotes

"We have great schools, great art, great architecture, great business and great people in Columbus. Too many people (especially ones that grew up here) don't appreciate how unique and special Columbus is. After moving to other communities many folks return with a new appreciation of our wonderful town."

"I think the way we responded to the flood lent a great sense of pride and community that was uplifting."

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

- › An interest in healthy lifestyles was expressed, including: the expansion of facilities for recreational activities (such as the People Trails), opportunities for a wider range of activities including recreational sports leagues, and a smoking ban.
- › An interest was expressed in green transportation including making Columbus more walker/biker friendly, public transportation options and downtown access to groceries.
- › An interest in community environmental sustainability was expressed, including curbside recycling and repurposing buildings.

Memorable Quotes

“Focus on the environment i.e. recycling, energy efficiency, etc. The community should partner with companies such as Cummins to work on such projects.”

“More sidewalks and people trails to make biking and walking around the community easier.”

Recommendations for Community Action Strategies

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

Community Diversity Strategy

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.
- breaking the cycle of poverty.

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**



**Communication
Strategy**

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**

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.



Entertainment/ Arts District Strategy

(Downtown Development)

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.

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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.

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Community Leadership Development Strategy

Recommendation.....

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

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Healthy Lifestyles and Environmental Sustainability

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Memorable Quotes

"If you sail and the wind comes up against you, you have to tack back and forth. You are sailing just as hard as before, just not making as much progress in the direction you planned. I think the economy has been a "huge" headwind against people's attitudes. The welcoming community work is all the more important in this climate."

"Thank you for conducting this survey! I have lived in four communities previously and this is the first time that I have had an opportunity to influence a community's future. It speaks highly to the desire of our community to be extraordinary!"

What's Next?

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

- J. Irwin Miller

What can you do to improve the welcoming factor of Columbus?

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's 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, at a house of worship or formally as a collaborative endeavor. Consider these topics:

- How can I as an individual, or 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".

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