



THE DENVER FOUNDATION

Metro Denver talks...The Denver Foundation Listens

Listening Campaign reveals Metro Denver visions for and concerns about the future

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(Denver, CO) The Denver Foundation released today the results of its four-month Listening Campaign that asked hundreds of Metro Denver residents what they envision for the community's future. In sharp contrast to the tenor of the contentious national dialogue, the Listening Campaign discovered that a widely diverse range of Metro Denver residents share a unified vision for the future, and an understanding of the challenges that the community faces.

The Future We Envision

The Listening Campaign interviewed and surveyed nearly 800 members of the Metro Denver community, including neighborhood groups, nonprofit professionals, business owners, and political leaders. "Our focus groups, interviews, and surveys reached residents across the spectrum of income. We reached people from every racial and ethnic group, across the range of ages and abilities and political backgrounds, and from a wide range of geographic areas," says Kenzo Kawanabe, Chair of The Denver Foundation's Board of Trustees. "What we learned debunks the notion that we're a divided society."

Among the elements of the **shared vision for the community's future**:

- An educational system that produces high achievement regardless of income, race, geography, ability, or gender
- Human services that meet basic needs so that all Denver residents can experience the community's richness
- A diverse economy comprised of large and small businesses that provide abundant employment opportunities
- Affordable housing development that is sensitive to new and existing residents and that promotes diverse communities
- Access to high-quality, affordable healthcare that takes a preventative, holistic approach

Challenges the Community Faces

As they shared similar visions of the community, respondents' comments about community challenges focused on three areas of need:

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Education:

Forty-four percent of survey respondents most commonly identified “lack of high-quality K-12 education” as the key barrier to a high quality of life for all Metro residents. Among the challenges they identified in this area:

- Disparities in access to high-quality education, based on income and race/ethnicity
- High drop-out rates among many populations
- Low funding for Metro Denver’s educational system
- Need for more emphasis on early childhood and after-school programs

Basic Needs:

A large proportion of Listening Campaign respondents noted that Metro Denver residents have difficulty meeting basic human needs. Respondents noted a number of barriers to a high quality of life in this area, including access to health care (identified as a key barrier by 36.3% of respondents), lack of enough affordable housing (34.5%) and hunger (16.6%). These indicators were cited as the signs of that need:

- Poverty-stricken neighborhoods
- Childhood hunger
- High rate of homeless
- Need for more affordable housing

Economic Opportunity:

Respondents also identified economic opportunity and employment as an essential barrier to a high quality of life. Fully 1/3 of respondents (33.2%) noted that lack of high-quality jobs is an area of concern. Challenges related to economic opportunity in Metro Denver:

- High unemployment
- Disparities in economic opportunity based on socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity
- Growing financial gaps between rich and poor
- Need to attract more new industries and large companies to relocate in Denver
- Workforce that is educated, but largely imported rather than homegrown

Other key areas of concern:

Community members also identified a number of other, related areas of concern. In fact, respondents often noted that these elements and those above are deeply intertwined; one cannot be solved without looking at the others.

- Need for a more robust mass transit system
- Challenges to family stability
- Difficulties related to incorporating new immigrants into the community
- Patterns of gentrification and segregation by income and race in Metro Denver neighborhoods

How Philanthropy Can Make a Difference

The survey asked members of the community to consider how the philanthropic sector – foundations, nonprofit organizations, corporations, and other donors who give to help meet community needs – could best take action. Among their suggestions:

- Help to fill gaps in basic needs and human services
- Identify community issues and provide funding as possible to address those issues
- Advocate for community needs and particular population segments
- Act as conveners of different community groups to encourage collaboration
- Take risks to support innovative solutions to community problems

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“We hear the community clearly asking for action in the areas of education, economic opportunity, and meeting basic human needs,” says David Miller of The Denver Foundation. “Many leaders in all sectors are working on these issues. Our Board will now look at where The Denver Foundation and its resources can be of most assistance, and we are continuing our conversation with the community on how best to do this.”

Methodology and More Information

The Denver Foundation and BBC Research & Consulting worked together to develop a comprehensive research plan for the 2011 Listening Campaign that engaged 793 members of the Denver metropolitan community. The research sample was diverse in as many ways as possible, representing community members that varied by geography, culture, gender, race/ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status.

The study team gathered insights about needs of Denver from each of the groups involved with the Listening Campaign. To do so, BBC used the following data collection efforts:

- In-depth, in-person interviews (102 participants);
- Focus/listening groups (209 participants);
- Public forums (25 participants); and
- Surveys (457 participants).

The Board of Trustees of The Denver Foundation is currently using the results of the 2011 Listening Campaign to inform the development of the Foundation’s 2011-2021 Strategic Plan. Please visit the Foundation’s website at www.denverfoundation.org for more information on the strategic planning process.

The Foundation invites the public to share reflections on the report and the needs of the community through listening@denverfoundation.org and on-line at www.denverfoundation.org/listening

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About The Denver Foundation

The Denver Foundation is a community foundation that inspires people and mobilizes resources to improve life in Metro Denver. The Denver Foundation has three roles: stewarding an endowment to meet current and future needs for Metro Denver, working with community leaders to address the core challenges that face the community, and managing more than 900 charitable funds on behalf of individuals, families, and businesses. For more information, visit www.denverfoundation.org.

