

# Listening Campaign 2011 Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

**Overview:** To further its connection to the community and to drive its new strategic plan, The Denver Foundation recently engaged in a four-month **Listening Campaign** throughout the Denver metropolitan area. The purpose of the Listening Campaign was to gather insights from community leaders and stakeholders about the community's vision for what contributes to a high quality of life and meeting community needs.

As part of the 2011 Listening Campaign, the study team from BBC Research and Consulting used interviews, focus groups, public forums, and surveys to engage nearly 800 community leaders and stakeholders — including business and civic leaders, community residents, current and former Foundation volunteers, At every stage of the Listening Campaign, BBC asked participants to set aside their personal and organizational interests and think about the needs of the entire metropolitan community. Consensus emerged regarding the future for which Metro Denver should strive:

- An **educational system** that produces high achievement regardless of income, race, disability, or gender
- A **diverse economy** of large and small businesses that provides abundant employment opportunities
- Human services that meet **basic needs** so that all Metro Denver residents can experience the community's richness
- Access to high quality, **affordable healthcare** that takes a preventative, holistic approach
- **Housing development** that is sensitive to new and existing residents and that promotes diverse communities
- Thriving **familial networks** that support families in need
- **Transportation** that is accessible and affordable to all Denver residents
- **Civic engagement**, supported by strong, effective leaders, to address difficult community issues
- A community that is **welcoming** to newcomers and immigrants in which nobody lives in the shadows
- A **collaborative philanthropic community** that works to identify and fill gaps that government is challenged to address



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# Key Issue Areas

Respondents noted specific concerns regarding each key area. **These areas are deeply intertwined and the outcomes in each affect the other.**

**Education:** Forty-four percent of survey respondents most commonly identified “lack of high-quality K-12 education” as the number one 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 rate
- Relatively low funding for Metro Denver’s educational system
- Lack of 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 affordable housing (34.5%) and hunger (16.6%). These indicators were cited as the signs of that need:

- Poverty-stricken neighborhoods
- Childhood hunger
- Relatively high rate of homelessness
- Lack of sufficient amount of affordable housing

**Economic Opportunity:** Respondents also identified economic opportunity and employment as a major 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 include:

- High unemployment
- Disparities in economic opportunity based on socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity
- Growing financial gaps between rich and poor
- Inability to attract new industries and large companies to relocate in Denver
- A 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, closely linked to those described above.

- Transportation
- Family Support
- Immigration
- Gentrification and Segregation

**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:

- Fill gaps in basic needs and human services
- Identify community issues and provide funding 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

**For more information:** Please visit the website [www.denverfoundation.org/listening](http://www.denverfoundation.org/listening) to view the full results of the Listening Campaign. The Denver Foundation also invites ongoing feedback at [listening@denverfoundation.org](mailto:listening@denverfoundation.org) or through Facebook or Twitter (@TDFCommunity).