

# **Heritage Fund – the Community Foundation of Bartholomew County**

## **Welcoming Community Project**

### **Purpose of the Project**

The Heritage Fund recognizes that an attractive business climate is critical to creating and maintaining a quality community. The ability to attract and retain educated workers is vital for area businesses and our local economy. The research project was 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.

### **Process**

The Outreach Committee worked with Dr. Fredricka Joyner to develop a series of questions based on a list of attributes identified by the Heritage Fund Board as important to a welcoming culture. Data was collected through a series of focus groups and a written questionnaire. On the questionnaire, responders were asked to rate the community on a scale from one to four.

### Attributes

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

### Focus Groups

Series One- Technology and knowledge workers

Designed to explore the perceptions of professional, technology, knowledge workers, artists and craftsmen about our community.

- MBA Cohort
- Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners
- Professional/technology/knowledge workers from the gay community
- Professional/technology/knowledge workers from other countries
- Professional/technology/knowledge workers from the black community
- College students pursuing degrees in professional/technology fields
- Artists and Craftspeople

### Series Two – Newcomers

Designed to explore the perceptions of newcomers and those considering moving to the community.

- Realtors, recruiters, HR professionals
- Professional/technology/knowledge workers or family members who have lived in the community less than five years

### Series Three – Latino population

Designed to explore the perceptions of the Latino population on being a newcomer to our community. The series will consist of three focus groups:

- Individuals who provide service to Latino residents
- Latino clients at VIM
- Latino members of St. Bartholomew's parish

## **Project Findings**

### **Access to Information**

#### Memorable Quotes

- “Give a face to the community.”
- “Information about what is going on in the community is very hard to find.”
- “There is a link between access to information and friendly and inclusive - more information, widely distributed would increase inclusiveness.”
- “There is plenty of programming: the X factor that is missing is synergy. It is an information thing.”

### Improvement Opportunities

#### Internet Strategy

- Develop an organized, centralized Internet information resource that is easy to navigate and provides a feel for the community.
- Make it easy for newcomers, people not part of the traditional mainstream, to find and share information about what is happening in the community.

### **Community Diversity Strategy**

#### Memorable Quotes

- “Leadership is open to change and inclusiveness but there are many other places in the community where this is not true. There are still pockets of resistance.”
- “Columbus needs to quit fooling itself and giving itself an A for MLK Day and Ethnic Expo. They need to take time and learn.”
- “Columbus is friendly but culturally insensitive. They don't make an attempt to understand, welcome and appreciate differences.”
- “There is a forced openness to difference by corporate groups that is not embraced by the locals.”
- “Education is the bottom line. We must embrace other cultures and ideas through education - and we need to start early.”

- “Don’t think the answer is an event for gays and lesbians. Need a ‘Columbus Focus on Diversity Event’ where there are blacks, gays and others.”
- “If you are a professional or well educated, it appears to be easier to become involved and welcomed by the community. If you are a blue collar worker, the reception is quite different.”

### Improvement Opportunities

#### Education

- Columbus works well for many people, especially those who are part of the traditional mainstream. But others regularly experience both insensitive and overtly discriminatory behavior and/or language.
- There is general agreement that informal settings are not as friendly as formal organizations. 8-5 business hours are ok but after hours are not.

#### Newcomers Strategy

- “We are a town of habits. We tend to do things out of habit. This makes it difficult for new people to move into Columbus

### **Gathering Place**

#### Memorable Quotes

- “Columbus needs a village where people can move around.”
- “There is a hip factor missing in Columbus.”
- “People in their 20’s are bored senseless. Older married people are thrilled.”
- “The only reason I live here is that it is 5 minutes from work. I don’t stay on weekends.”
- “More needs to be done to welcome young professionals. These members of the community are key to the success and future of Columbus.”

### Improvement Opportunities

- Create a community gathering place, preferably downtown, where people can go for informal activities and entertainment on a non-event basis.
- A place that appeals to people regardless of their ethnicity, age, cultural background or lifestyle.
- How can we meet the needs of the 20 something population who leave town on a regular basis to seek entertainment?

### **The Columbus Brand**

#### Memorable Quotes

- “A Cosmopolitan Mayberry”
- “I am very hopeful about the increased diversity here and sometimes afraid it will fall flat on its face. This could be our unique draw. A community in Southern Indiana that has diversity and it works. We have the potential.”
- “Good place to raise kids -- moved away and moved back when I had a family. A lot of my peers have done the same thing.”

### Improvement Opportunities

- There is a strong shared sense of the key attributes of Columbus: friendly, safe, clean, family-oriented and peaceful.
- Will that branding help attract the creative class individuals or knowledge worker that we need?

### Project Summary

**Columbus has many positive attributes.**

**However, we are not perceived as a welcoming community to all people, particularly:**

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

**This perception will make it more difficult for new and existing businesses to recruit talent and hurt our economic vitality as a community.**

**We can take some steps to improve the welcoming factor 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**

**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.**

**Find owners to work on the action opportunities, with broad support from the community.**

**Revisit the study in a few years to determine progress.**

For survey data or additional information regarding the survey contact, Lyn Morgan  
376-7772 or e-mail [lmorgan@heritagefundbc.org](mailto:lmorgan@heritagefundbc.org)