

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Greater Tucson Leadership Virtual Community Town Hall

May 26, 2021 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Tucson is a community that has several strong elements that foster vibrant community. Social and cultural cohesion, which includes Tucson's strong attitude toward helping one another, is a widely agreed upon element of our community as its strength. A community that has cultural cohesion can leverage this strength for a lot of things, in an effort to increase the strength of areas where we might be deficient. It can be used to create opportunity across the board and to create strengths where we might have weakness.

An additional strength of the community are the outdoor recreational opportunities. Parks and recreation assets assist in creating additional connection among the community, which naturally enhances cultural and social cohesion among groups that may traditionally be disconnected. The outdoor elements can also be leveraged to increase economic opportunity for many groups, specifically within tourism. Having a strong tourism industry within the community could be an asset that we can leverage in order to create more economic opportunity for those who may not have access to it.

Outdoor recreation and connectivity opportunities, including assets like The Loop, Tumamoc Hill, and Reid Park, can be used to connect groups to other services. This highlights elements of community design, which tackles the overall organization and design of a community including access to physical transportation to important services like job centers, affordable food, healthcare opportunities, etc. Transportation assets, as well as parks and recreation assets related to transportation, can be used to connect disconnected groups, assist in place making, and increase access to various elements of quality of life for our community.

Lastly, a significant strength that exists within our community is the network of nonprofits and the services they offer. If we can leverage this strength, including innovative practices like outbound healthcare services coupled with existing assets related to transportation and outdoor recreation, we can better facilitate community design. This will increase opportunities for all groups within our community, invariably increasing social and cultural cohesion, building and supporting a vibrant community.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare many inequities across our community. One issue that was explicitly demonstrated to us is the concept of access to technology and digital equity. Lack of technology, including access to internet as well as equipment, severely limited some groups' access to essential services. In a world that is consistently becoming more and more digital, additional investment in this specific area is going to be key in the fight to minimize inequity. This lack of access has further implications, including lack of access to both general and specialized healthcare services, including access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines. This divide will only increase without investment in technology in disadvantaged communities.

Access to food became a significant issue during the pandemic, especially for those already at a disadvantage. Those who rely on public transportation faced a greater challenge in having access to food in general, let alone affordable food. At the intersection of access to school, food, and technology, we see the fact that schools, which are already underfunded, become the sole access point to food for disadvantaged communities.

Further related to access, we saw an increase in the disconnect to essential services including childcare, mental health services, and others. Lack of access to these essential services can further widen the gap and significantly impacts additional opportunities for economic growth and health, especially to already disadvantaged groups. General mental health has been identified as a key

component of physical health, and the pandemic exacerbated an already difficult focus of healthcare that has not been given adequate attention.

Public safety on the national level has added to discord and ire involving minority groups. The concept of public safety is already a sensitive subject. The pandemic shined a spotlight on challenges around public safety and abuse of power.

The combination of preexisting racial inequities and the pandemic, exponentially increased challenges in the areas of the digital divide, access to healthcare (both mental and physical), childcare, access to food (especially affordable food), education, safety, justice, transportation, and more.

TAKING ACTION

Nonprofits are critical to the vibrancy of our community, and they can provide the expertise and leadership needed to make our communities healthier and more vibrant. The work of nonprofits should be done in balance with local and state governments and others. It is important for us to look at solutions that allow for effective collaboration between all of these groups. It is also important for us to ensure that nonprofits have the resources needed to do their work.

We need to address climate resiliency—addressing the warming of the earth, how to ensure we have enough water, and how to take care of those who are most vulnerable to climate change. Related to this is the need for clean, available water to our communities. The lack of clean water impacts community education and health. These are community-wide issues that require collaborations with nonprofits, businesses, governments, and individuals.

Addressing the difference in housing costs and wages and exploring how to turn Tucson into a living wage community is also necessary. Half the wages in Pima County are low wage jobs.

Virtual or digital town halls have allowed us to engage more diverse people and to come up with solutions that allow for better discussions and solutions. We should continue to utilize digital town halls as part of our efforts to engage a broader and more diverse community. We also need to be sensitive to community members who may not be able to be a part of these discussions. There are opportunities with faith-based and other organizations for partnerships in this area. Collecting data that allows us to see the impact on marginalized communities is essential as we move forward. The pandemic highlighted significant work that needs to be done in all these areas.