

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Pima County Virtual Community Town Hall

May 13, 2021 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In Pima County, we have a strong focus on relationships, collaboration, connecting, and communicating with each other. We can build on this strength by ensuring that we are being mindful of blind spots to diverse and marginalized communities (such as communities of color, LGBTQ+, etc.) and by continuing to actively collaborate in areas where different organizations are working on the same issue to reduce duplication of services. We may want to explore teams of organizations and people who are working on similar topics, perhaps using the Town Hall method, at local or grassroots community levels to have a greater direct impact on neighborhoods.

Pima County also has some strong educational resources such as charter, private, and public schools, community and tribal colleges, and access to Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona. There are a significant educational resources and programs such as the Joint Technical Education District (JTED), Promise of Preschool, STEAM, and JobPath to name a few. We can use these to expand opportunities for future workforce needs by utilizing and expanding existing relationships between private and public organizations to build and support the talent pool for our future workforce needs. We should strive for better integration with the court system to deal with mental health issues. Pima County has rich public lands that surround and inhabit our communities. These assets provide opportunities for activity and improved health.

One of the strengths of our community is our ability to meet the needs of those with food insecurities. We can capitalize on this strength by making these gatherings a resource opportunity to meet other needs such as financial planning, job services, housing, and other services that may help those in need. We should develop, in conjunction with AARP, a housing plan for older adults, particularly the availability of more affordable housing. We should build on the successes of collaboration such as the Elder Alliance and the City of Tucson working to develop elder friendly community by looking across the elements of a healthy community and minimizing duplication of services.

Pima County adopted a plan based on the elements of a healthy community, which has helped to break down the silos within and between government, agencies and other organizations. The Tucson/Pima County Community Investment Partnership, created as a result of the pandemic, provides a single portal for information on housing assistance disbursement to reduce evictions.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

The pandemic has exacerbated challenges with mental illness and housing. We can address these challenges better if we can come together more and collaborate to support those neighborhoods most in need. We need to increase/improve staffing at our agencies because we are also facing burnout of staff. The pandemic taught us that housing people in hotels helps people by giving them a sense of dignity by having a personal space. The need for more people working in social services became obvious in the pandemic and it's not limited to that, especially as other businesses raise wages. Despite constant fundraising, it is still difficult to compete for staff.

The pandemic brought to the surface what people have seen or experienced for a long time. Specifically, it brought to light issues of racial injustice, social inequities, ageism, the isolation experienced by many older people, and issues surrounding dying. We need to better plan for death and address social isolation. The digital divide became more obvious as a result of the pandemic, impacting the ability to access services, participate in telehealth visits, and other opportunities. We acknowledge that the digital

divide also applies to teachers, not just students, because there is both an access and an affordability issue.

With respect to racism, COVID-19 and other events raised awareness of the continuing presence of racism and created opportunities for more people to go outside of their comfort zone to help people who might look different from them. It was an opportunity (for those who took it) to see how they could be a part of the solution. We also need to use this opportunity to address institutional racism.

The pandemic further highlighted the need for high-quality childcare and the need for broadband internet availability to all communities. It also highlighted inequities in our healthcare system, especially frontline workers who had to continue to go to work to pay the bills and did not always have the educational resources to know how to respond to the risks of COVID-19.

The delivery system for healthcare, which separates public health from individual providers, exacerbated the problems with COVID-19. We need a better system to support direct healthcare workers. While Pima County is blessed with good leadership in the public health arena, the pandemic clearly demonstrated that we need to invest a lot more in our public health infrastructure to avoid future problems like those we experienced because of COVID-19.

The pandemic also exacerbated issues with access to housing. Those who were housing challenged prior to the pandemic were even more so. Stable housing is critical for healthy communities.

TAKING ACTION

Nonprofits are critical to the vibrancy of our community, and they can provide the expertise, collaboration 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 and how to ensure we have enough water and can 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 community 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.

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Pima County Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Look for ways to have the faith communities I work with continue to expand their involvement in the issues we have discussed today (housing, outreach to vulnerable communities, etc.).

- Continue my professional contributions to and advocacy for public education.
- Continue to serve on community boards addressing homelessness.
- Be kind.
- Continue collaborating for constructive disruption with members of our community supporting STEAM education in particular.
- Advocate immediate action that can be taken on a "camper's camp" in Pima County. A low-impact spot where people can live outside but get services. A place where outreach workers can FIND their clients when housing does become available.
- Continue to work both in a professional and personal sense to ensure an equitable community.
- Continue to work with the Y helping young women get good employment.
- Push for the adoption of the Legatum Index of Prosperity as a unifying measurement system to show progress over the 32 variables which underlie prosperity.
- Continue to organize at a grassroots level in our barrio and use our nonprofit to reach out to possible partnership to bring in resources to our multi-generational families.
- Continue our mission to prevent homelessness, working with our community partners.
- Continue to strategically connect the dots throughout the community and professionally disrupt the status quo.
- Look at everything I am engaged in (social service agency, faith community, etc.) to think about them not in an isolated way but as aspects of a vibrant community.
- Starting my own "network" of community change agents and look for opportunities for this "network" to effect change.
- Continue to work on a strategic plan for broadband infrastructure in Pima County.
- Share the factors needed for a vibrant community with Juvenile Court and encourage taking these factors into account when dealing with juveniles and their families who enter the Juvenile Justice System.
- Work to identify new leaders in each of our PCI faith communities and help them get trained to organize their communities to use their voices to advocate for their needs.
- Commit towards the effort of increasing affordable housing, both rental and homeownership, collaborating with community leaders, developers and state and federal agencies.