

# Welcoming Communities

## Discussion Summary for Session 6

### Final Discussion Session: Sorting, Choosing, & Wrapping Up

In the introduction for this final session of this 6-week course on Welcoming Communities, we briefly reviewed 4 different policy possibilities developed from ideas explored in prior sessions. In our final small group discussions, we started by asking “when I think of ‘welcoming community,’ I think of \_\_\_\_\_?” We then moved on to focusing on different aspects of the initial four possibilities. What could make them work better? How might they be revised to better capture the key concerns or to better address the core questions we had explored? How might they better describe our optimal visions for more welcoming, inclusive communities? And how we might get there from here? We focused especially on what might be missing and whether there were any new ideas to add. Finally, we wrapped up this final session with an overview of “what’s next” as well as some feedback on the course overall.

### Introductory Summary of 4 Policy Possibilities for Welcoming & Inclusive Communities

1. Focus on **Enabling Diversity & Inclusivity**: set the conditions for welcoming communities and enabling diverse people to live and interact with one another (“build it, and they will come”). Goals, features, implementations include—
  - Multi-racial, cultural, generational, and class
  - Physical, built changes to housing and more and better public spaces
  - Social/cultural changes: address legacies of exclusion, multi-cultural programming; roles for older residents; policies, rules, publicity highlight commitments.
2. Focus on **Fostering a Community Spirit of Inclusivity** that has to be continually worked on, repeated, and regularized as a community virtue. Goals, features, implementations—
  - Neighborliness (know & talk to each other); trust, engagement
  - Community service—many options/opportunities to get involved, a role for everyone
  - Generosity; looking out for each, helping out
  - Community-wide events
3. Focus on **Increasing Outreach**, Coordination, Interaction—like community relations and state departments. Goals, features, implementations—
  - Within a neighborhood: welcoming committees, “ambassadors”, home visits and follow-up visits, personal invitations, introductions, to service, to leadership roles
  - Across neighborhoods/communities: communication/coordination, creation of joint initiatives, programs, and celebrations (e.g., mentoring, assistance, cultural events)
4. Focus on creating and supporting **Community Leadership Committed to Inclusivity**. Goals, features, implementations include—
  - Explicit written commitments in mission statement, policies/rules, marketing/publicity
  - Include in planning efforts (e.g. strategic plan) and budgeting
  - Cultivating next generation of leaders: inviting, mentoring
  - Ongoing education and training; openness to change

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**What should we add to the initial policy possibilities—to clarify them or make them work?**

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**Possibility #1 – Enabling Diversity & Inclusivity—building the infrastructure**

- “Build it and they will come!”
- More shared, public spaces for group gatherings and public events. Common rooms for every building and neighborhood.
- Other built amenities that support public gathering: benches, picnic tables, etc.
- Virtual or technological infrastructure: meeting rooms with videoconferencing capabilities—microphones, cameras, etc. Virtual meetings can really help encourage gathering for people with mobility challenges.
- Governance infrastructure/capacity: consider forming some sort of advisory committee to the board of directors and/or broader community. Could research and recommend draft policy statements and best practices for both the board of directors and for individual neighborhoods to adopt.
- More informational and other meetings within neighborhoods and homeowners associations.
- Formal, legal policy or mission statements in place to educate, head off problems before they happen, and have plans in place for responding to incidents when they do happen.

**Possibility #2 – Fostering Community Spirit**

- Includes a sense of responsibility among all members for sustaining a welcoming community, not just leadership.
- Also need a concentrated group of dedicated people who want to make it work and have the energy and ideas to carry through on it.
- Will require long-term, sustained commitment, efforts, and repetition—it will take time and constant tending; need to encourage people not to give up.
- Improved communication to new and old community members that we are all in this together. Need to establish and reinforce strong norms of inclusivity, welcoming, and positivity for all community communications, especially in writing and online.
- More and new community-wide events and other opportunities for everyone to come together for positive purposes: e.g., recent gathering to support Asian Americans; also celebrations for each other’s different festivals, holidays, “spirit days” etc.
- Accommodate different levels of interest/involvement—don’t need 100% involvement; some people are not joiners (and that’s ok), and they may still support the goals of fostering a more welcoming, inclusive community spirit.
- Include a sense of “flexibility”—to meet people where they are. There are many different ways to be connected, to be involved, to participate—to match different personality types and interests.
- Possible analogies: “community ambassadors” or “activity directors.”
- Information gathering: need to know who is in the community and what their interests are. We need to listen to the different needs of different community members.
- Build on enthusiasm, positivity, trying new things.
- Establish an advisory group, or committee (etc.), like this group, to provide ongoing support, education, and awareness around these issues.

- May not be formal or governmental, but more voluntary and flexible. Could be in addition to a more formal, governmental committee.
- Could provide an open forum for exchanging ideas, best practices, etc.
- and help build “community within the community”
- Such a group could also act as a clearing house for information
- Strategize for how to respond to incidents, to show support for others, for establishing long-term, systemic change.

### **Possibility #3 – Focus on Increasing Outreach, Coordination, Interaction**

- Return to having regular, quarterly events, gatherings for newcomers.
- Be prepared to address “thornier issues,” including racist incidents, within our community so that we’re able, capable of doing outreach with a plan and with integrity.
- Start with smaller-size groups and communities of interest where people may be more comfortable at first and then build up and out from there. Communities of interest may be able to bridge out to others beyond residential neighborhoods.
- Build connections between different groups and clubs: “open houses” and mixers; include suggestions for how to mix people up, meet others.
- Be sensitive to different personality types: not everyone is a joiner or likes being pushed to do something new.
- Survey and learn from other communities: what are they doing that works.
- Create new and informal interest groups: people interested in attending an event together, having dinner after, etc.
- Include “ambassadors”—people who have personality to be outgoing and training to make connections to do the initial outreach; and who will sustain the efforts.
- Include the role of media and publicity in improving outreach: the community newspaper, social media, letters to the editor, announcements and invitations for open houses and other community-wide events.

### **Possibility #4 – Community Leadership Committed to Inclusivity**

- Form a new group to advise the board of directors and the individual homeowners associations or neighborhoods on issues of welcoming, inclusivity, and diversity.
- Work on continuing education for leadership, staff, and other community members.
- Research/survey “best practices” for inclusivity and diversity by other communities; make recommendations.
- Adopt advance plans and procedures on how to respond to any racist or other anti-social events, to give clear signals about expectations and what is and is not acceptable.

**“When you think of Welcoming Community now, you think of \_\_\_\_\_?” Or “how has that understanding changed (if it has)?”**

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- Signs of friendliness: smiles, saying hello, asking questions; other gestures like waves; acknowledging each other.
- Generosity; invitations to take part, to join, to attend.
- Organized, sustained efforts—not just reliance on accident or chance; someone(s) or some group(s) have to be responsible for making it happen.

- Senses of belonging, connectedness, wanting to be involved, and joy.
- May be different expressions or forms of welcoming for different people; not just one way of being inclusive or welcoming.
- Inclusivity and diversity as more real and valuable community assets—not just “good feelings”, but values that make the whole community a desirable place to live.
- I now visualize a “welcoming community” as having a diverse mix of different people, cultures, religious traditions, and other backgrounds within the community.
- It requires a mutually shared philosophy, a set of shared commitments that must be crystallized in writing, in planning, in marketing, and with management.
- My understanding of community is now much enlarged, more expansive. It’s not just my floor or building, I’m now thinking more about the broader community, the whole community.
- My understanding has shifted from a more individualistic view to a much more communal and systematic view. I’m thinking more about structural things that can be done and affect everyone and not just about my individual state of mind.
- I’m thinking more now not just about my personal sense of community but also my responsibility—what I’d be willing to give. I expect more of both myself and my community and am reconsidering my roles and responsibilities.
- I now think of “welcoming community” more as a “leadership” issue; previously I didn’t.
- I now think of connecting multiple different communities.