

# Welcoming Communities

## Discussion Summary for Session 1

### Initial Exploration of “community”

When you think of the term “community,” what does that mean to you? What different kinds of communities are you—or have you been—a part of, and why? What communities have you left or joined and why? And what are some of the key features or dimensions of “community?” These questions were the focus of the initial class session of “Welcoming Communities: Re-imagining Our Communities,” an online course of exploratory discussion with residents of Leisure World in Silver Spring, Maryland. Below you’ll find a summary of the key ideas that emerged from their discussions.

### Different kinds of community?

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- **Communities of place**
  - including your building, your city block, or neighborhood, your city, town, or region.
  - Other examples include where you say you’re from or call your “hometown,” as well as communities that you’ve since chosen to call “home.”
  - May or may not have been formative and/or reflect your current priorities or values.
- **Faith communities**
  - Shared core beliefs or goals—including goals for fostering “community” and addressing community concerns
  - Seeking diversity and growth
- **Cultural, ethnic, and race-related communities**
  - The bonds of shared heritage and tradition
  - Segregation and involuntary forms of separate community identities
  - Includes formal associations, like clubs or cultural organizations, to informal affiliations
- **Communities around work, profession, or vocation**
  - Professional associations, unions, trade group or informal networks of your work colleagues and office mates (even after you retire)
  - Who you may spend, or have spent, a lot of time with
- **Family and Extended Family as community**
  - A foundation, a launching pad to entering a wider community
  - A source of ongoing support, or to which you return to provide support
  - Something you need to break away from, an impediment
- **Civic and political communities and associations**
  - including the numerous and different governing councils, committees, associations, organizations, political parties, and advocacy groups

- provide opportunities for engagement, relevance, problem-solving, to be heard; and opportunities for leadership as well as followership
- **Educational communities**, including classmates, friends, other parents, and teachers, mentors, and coaches
  - may also be formative, foundational; and/or something to move on from
  - often transitory
- **Communities of other shared interests & activities**, including the **arts** (e.g., music, dance, painting, film), **recreation** (e.g. exercise/fitness, golf, yoga, hiking, other specific sports, etc.), **hobbies, crafting, and other shared interests/activities** (e.g., book clubs, technology, foreign policy, philosophy).
- **Online communities** – any of the above and more brought together online and including people from outside our immediate geography.

### **The meanings of different kinds of community?**

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- Support - emotional, physical, practical
- Acceptance, openness, acknowledgement, validation
- Inclusion, a feeling that no one is left out or left behind
- Exclusion, a sense of being an outsider to a community and of being seen as unworthy
- Comfort, ease, a group in which you can “be yourself.”
- Discomfort—being challenged to grow; or being judged for “not fitting in”
- Friendship
- Learning new things; a community that challenges me, engages me, and provides opportunities to both learn from and share knowledge with others
- A sense of connection or connectedness with others, with a place, with an era
- Shared core beliefs
- Respect, civility, kindness, appreciation for each individual, for each other.
- Shared cultural heritage
- Diversity—a community with multiple cultures and opportunities to interact
- Significance, accomplishment, and meaning; a way to contribute; and a feeling of being part of and contributing to goods, goals, and causes that are bigger than yourself; a way to give back, pay it forward, to help others
- An opportunity to expand my horizons, learn about other people, other cultures, to engage in a broader, more diverse and interesting world.
- Shared interests, activities; things to do
- A safe and supportive environment to try out and explore new interests, ideas, activities; and to meet new people
- A way to assimilate to a new continent, country, and culture
- A way to address or solve problems; to help others

- A safe environment; a sense of security, a relative absence of threat or danger.
- A way to contribute; to use my skills and life/work experience
- Random chance; not a choice; I was born into a community or my parents moved us there
- Opportunities to get to know and share with others at a very deep and personal level
- Access to and/or information about basic goods and needs – schools, jobs, transportation, shopping, health care, recreation, childcare, other

### **Reflecting on experiences of leaving a community?**

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- Rejection, exclusion, feeling left out, not feeling welcomed by or included in the community; not being invited to meet others
- Life transitions—growing up, graduating, and moving on to new opportunities and new communities; kids leaving home; job changes, retirement; also transitions brought on by aging, disability, or death
- Other life or compulsory transitions; moves to provide support (e.g. childcare) to family, or to get more support yourself
- A feeling of not being valued or needed any longer
- Always being treated as the exception, the “other”, not treated equally or fairly
- Too many rules, procedures, and barriers that worked or seemed to work to keep people out or disengaged; inflexible
- Not knowing anyone; not being invited to get to know others
- Not feeling like there is anyone like you or with similar core values or culture that you can relate to
- Feeling like everyone is too much the same; not enough diversity of cultures, viewpoints
- Not being respected, not treated with civility and kindness
- Just not enough time to remain fully engaged with a community; too many other obligations
- Boredom—nothing new; not being challenged; just time to move on; changing priorities
- Feeling limited, controlled, and/or judged by a community rather than appreciated and supported
- Just felt a need to “start over”, to re-invent your life, yourself
- Irrelevance; not accomplishing enough
- Job stress; time to retire, restart, and renew
- Not feeling safe
- Not enough support