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EQUITY IN OUR COMMUNITY REPORT 2021

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**The Loveland Public Library strives to demonstrate our belief that racism has no place in our library and our community through sustained action, active listening, being accountable to historically excluded identities, making reparations when possible and having a willingness to make mistakes while working towards equity for all. The Library belongs to all members of our community and is committed to promoting racial equity and challenging all forms of dehumanization and discrimination.

We acknowledge that we are conducting this work *with* our community while also being on land stolen from the Ute, Arapaho, Sioux and Cheyenne tribes.

**Loveland
Public Library**
Where you can!

PROJECT BACKGROUND

COMMUNITY DRIVEN ACTION

This project has been community driven from the beginning, guided by data the Loveland Public Library gathered on behalf of the Loveland community through our Harwood Institute Community Conversations in 2019 and 2020. From those efforts, the Loveland Public Library gathered key feedback via 18 Community Conversations with 1500 responses. Our community identified the following common aspirations. The patterns of comments indicated that our community members want:

- to see a welcoming and connected community.
- to "see diversity in Loveland."
- the community to be inclusive for all.
- people of all backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging and connection to their neighbors.
- the City Council to be more engaged with the community.
- to see more strategic collaboration between various entities across Loveland.

The library's primary objective is to support these shared community aspirations by co-creating and implementing an equity, diversity, and inclusivity "toolkit" geared at supporting Loveland and similar communities. Our intention is to begin to collaboratively support inclusivity and equity in our community in a way that invites people to engage and take action without creating further division.

ULAB- MIT'S PRESENCING INSITUTE

COLLABORATIVE PROTOTYPING

In late 2020, the Loveland Public Library helped gather a small group of community partners who are committed to making positive changes for our community to begin a prototyping process. Our small, experienced, and passionate coalition and our proposed project were accepted to be a part of a multi-month systems transformation prototyping experience with Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Presencing Institute uLab 2x. Groups from all over the globe learn how to implement transformative solutions at the institutional and systemic level. Our group in particular is in the first few steps of collaboratively developing a prototype/action plan that will effectively support our community with integrating inclusivity and equity on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. Over the years, Loveland's strengths and shared aspirations have stood out more often than not. The Loveland Public Library, via the uLab committee and it's EDI Committee, are leveraging our varied assets and experiences to ensure that we effectively support all members of our community no matter their background or identities.

This report describes the data that was gathered after conducting 15 stakeholder interviews. The coalition interviewed a wide range of community organizations, with a particular focus on organizations who work within the field of equity, diversity and inclusion and also includes interviews with more "traditional" organizations. Some of the organizations interviewed were the Loveland Rotary Club, Heart & Sol, the Youth Advisory Commission, and Thompson School District Equity Taskforce.
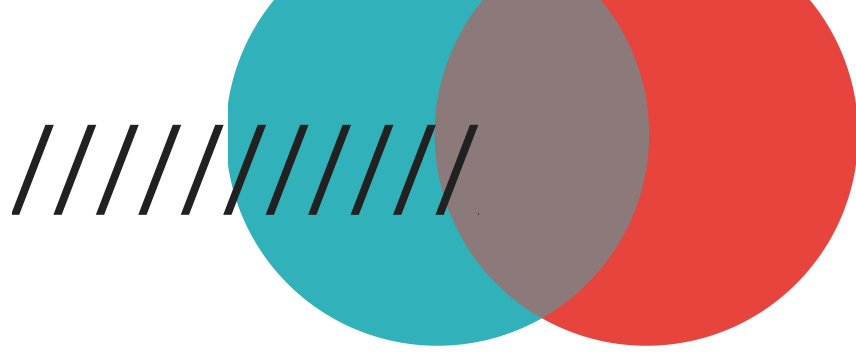
CURRENT REALITY
A GROWING COMMUNITY, WITH SHIFTING NEEDS

Stakeholders identified the following patterns in the community:

- People feel supportive of diversity and equality but don't know how to incorporate that into their daily actions or how to operationalize this in their organizations. There is more interest in working on racial justice than there ever has been in Loveland's history.
- There are some people who are surprised to hear that some community members don't feel included or seem to be fearful. Loveland still demonstrates a lack of understanding about the Black, Indigenous and people of color (B.I.POC.) communities in the area.
- We have a long way to go towards having a community where all people are empowered and have a sense of belonging, in part because Loveland still feels like an enclave that is resisting changes. There is a hesitancy around engaging with a variety of cultures and people's experiences in present day and acknowledging Loveland's history of racism.
- The emerging momentum towards inclusivity is often done with high emotions and lacks introspection and professional guidance. Even within organizations who already partner with B.I.POC. community members there may be a tendency to disregard B.I.POC. expertise and stories.
- There is unaddressed (and mostly unintentional) institutional racism in our educational system.
- A number of diverse community members and allies are uncomfortable in speaking out because they feel misunderstood, and sometimes unsafe, to share their stories and/or identities in Loveland.
- Many organizations and groups are looking for ways to collaborate with each other in order to be more effective in reaching more of the community.
- There is a small and growing portion of community leadership that supports EDI endeavors.
- Stories are seen as key tools to engage with diversity issues in the community; they build more empathy and understanding across divisions if facilitated effectively.
- There is a need to do more outreach to diverse populations as the community grows more diverse.
- Most who were interviewed identified the need to have true, local statistics around diversity and equity centralized and widely shared.
- Stakeholders believe that relationship building and active listening being practiced by all will help rebuild trust and remove barriers between community members.

NON-EDI FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS SAID THEY HOPE THIS COALITION WILL...

- Work to advocate for and/or create resources that will help organizations in collaborating more.
- Nurture long-term collaboration across organizations by finding ways to connect people to resources to prevent duplication of services, provide face-to-face opportunities where people could share information, and bring together groups with diverse interests to solve community problems.
- Support community data-gathering so all community organizations have better access to relevant and timely research, perhaps, one centralized location for this information.
- Focus energy and support on existing or new initiatives that support equity and diversity through community education as well as supporting learning for local youth.

UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

A central challenge identified across interests and backgrounds is that there is a continued attitude of prejudice and (overt and implicit) discrimination, amongst Loveland's institutions. There are still people who refuse to be open to listening and collaboration, people whose defensiveness creates hostility and perpetuates lack of trust in the community. This can all be seen in:

- Lack of people seeking to look outside of their experiences.
- People being "surprised" when people don't feel included or seem to be fearful.
- People not appreciating the vulnerability that comes through sharing lived experiences.
- Not acknowledging the feelings of lack of safety within Loveland for more diverse community members.
- Some in leading local institutions not acknowledging issues around race.
- Limited funding for community based programs.
- Organizations working in isolation and B.I.POC. community groups working in silos.
- Significant broken trust, and the need to support people in not feeling defensive while still bringing up equity issues.

OVERALL, OUR COMMUNITY WANTS EVERYONE TO FEEL WELCOME, CONNECTED AND THAT THEY BELONG.

WHAT ENERGIZES OUR COMMUNITY IN THIS WORK?

- There's a small and growing portion of community leadership that seems to support EDI endeavors.
- Slow progress is being made when we support each other in sharing stories.
- The ability to share our knowledge and life experience to assist people.
- Community organizations seeing from the individuals that they work with the positive impacts of their work.
- People expressing appreciation of stories they hear of B.I.POC. community members' experiences in Loveland.
- Slowly building community connections and providing pathways for understanding and potential healing.
- Seeing people gain confidence in expressing their different identities.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

- Black, indigenous and people of color to be treated as equals.
- Provide equitable opportunities for success across the community.
- Stronger support from community leadership.
- Safe places to have critical (and frequently personal) conversations.
- A shared understanding of *why* the community needs to work explicitly on equity and diversity.
- A community that acknowledges that racism exists in our community and that we must all work to change it.
- Eradicate partisan politics and focus on outcomes and solutions.
- Increase leadership skills across ages and institutions, we will continue to need high quality community leaders in the future.
- Increase represenation, participation and empowerment in local decision making, ensuring the community's perspective is accurately reflected in our decisions.
- Create a culture where people are willing to talk about uncomfortable subjects.
- More funding for programs, grants, and institutional action and support.

"WE BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE TO CREATE RESULTS THAT SERVE THE WELL-BEING OF ALL"
-ULAB

EMERGING ACTION STEPS

BUILD SHARED UNDERSTANDING

In response to the dynamic that many people within our community lack awareness of basic concepts like implicit bias, microaggressions, inclusivity, and that diversity isn't just about race but is about ALL identities including ability, sexuality, gender, religious affiliation etc., we must build a foundation of shared understanding through:

- Building more cultural competency in our institutions, school district, and among professionals and community members through resource sharing, collaboration, and increasing visibility of these shared aspirations more widely in the community.
- Creating and sustaining strategic, reflective spaces where our community can engage in civil discourse.
- Ensuring community members have access to high quality, engaging equity training, especially to those who are new to key equity, diversity, and inclusivity concepts.
- Co-creating a cohesive, community wide advocate training to ensure long-term engagement and accountability.
- Documenting and telling stories to promote greater understanding and provide paths for inclusivity.

LEVERAGE EXISTING INITIATIVES & BUILD ALLY SUPPORT

- Collaboratively work to build spaces where community members feel physically and emotionally safe to be their authentic selves and share their stories if they desire.
- Ensure that local organizations aren't just checking a box by tokenizing B.I.POC., and then thinking they organization is "done" with demonstrating their commitment to inclusivity in our community.
- Create some sort of visible indicator for individuals and organizations to display indicating to the public that these are "inclusive spaces" and expressing that the organization takes ongoing steps to support equity in the community.
- Offer more "community-partner centered" offerings, therefore providing authentic community driven content. As an example, the library acts as a space and conduit, would not direct content, but the community organization takes the lead.
- Build both stronger partnerships and more cross county organizational collaboration.
- Endeavor to support each other's work by taking strategic and united actions, for example using united language (for example the term "bias" instead "racist") and sharing gathered data.

ENSURE ACCESS TO RESOURCES & DATA

- Improve and sustain funding and support for community infrastructure like the healthcare facilities, childcare centers, and library services so that services can be offered more widely across the community (example: book mobile with full services to neighborhoods).

- Assess how current resources are or are not being used, potentially asking and then taking action on the question of, *"Why aren't diverse community members using these services or resources to the fullest?"*

- Continue the work of increasing public awareness around community resources that are available, for example, "Did you know the library does_____?"

- Expand and coordinate local EDI data gathering efforts, perhaps have an institution act as a third party compiler. By centralizing information community organizations are helped by being competitive writing grants, and it also helps disseminate critical information to the wider community.

- Work to bridge the communication gap around EDI issues and opportunities between the wider community and our local institutions.

OPERATIONALIZE EQUITY MINDED FEEDBACK & ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURES

- The city as an institution (and one of the community's largest employers) should take steps to becoming a leader in addressing EDI issues within its walls and the community.

- Institutions like the library must be vocal about the value of racial equity work because of their privileged positionality. Engaged organizations and institutions like the library must work to share the burden of the B.I.POC. community in formally acknowledging things like "racism IS a real thing and it happens in our community."

- Organize reflective spaces for "advocates" and new people to deeply engage long-term with this work.

UPCOMING STEPS FOR THIS COALITION

- The uLab committee will provide an update to stakeholders organizations, describing both the results of the research and the community generated list of possible solutions.
- Stakeholder organizations will provide feedback and clarification on the possible solutions that were raised, collaboratively refining the primary tactics of the prototype toolkit.
- Project priorities and corresponding action steps will then be collaboratively decided on and delegated.
- Community organizations can utilize this report further to inspire future collaborations and actions for their specific mission.