

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF
HOWARD COUNTY

Conversations
WITH OUR COMMUNITY



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
of Howard County

September 2019



Executive Summary

As the Community Foundation of Howard County looks toward a process of developing more intentional and focused investment strategies for the future goals of Howard County, it embarked on a process of engaging in Community Conversations through the services of Project Matters, LLC. These conversations were based upon the *Harwood Public Innovation and Turning Outward Model*. This endeavor allowed the Foundation to conduct community conversations representing 16 different demographic segments of Howard County. The information gathered into this report will allow the Foundation to continue its mission of connecting people, resources and causes to produce a positive and sustainable change in the communities it serves.

These community conversations focused on ascertaining the aspirations, concerns, and actions the citizens of Howard County feel are important to the future well-being and growth of their community. This report shares the results of those conversations; revealing the top four emergent aspirations, key quotes and statements relative to residents' concerns, suggested actions the community could engage in to address those concerns, and the people and organizations the participants would trust to ensure those actions were taken.

A secondary endeavor in this process was the compilation of major community assessments throughout Howard County, as well as strategic and community plans that were conducted within the last three years. The objective was to ascertain what these community partners have determined are important issues to address, and where these may intersect with residents' top concerns and aspirations. This intersecting data, or in some cases, the lack of any such related data, is noted in the report relative to its corresponding aspiration.

This report contains the list of participating demographic groups and specifies that these groups were comprised of a representative sample of that particular demographic sector. Detailed demographic information gathered from the post-conversation participant surveys was also included; however, not every participant responded to every question. **It is also important to note that all comments within the participant aspiration pages are in their words and any needed clarity of context was provided within parenthetical reference.**

The results of the community conversations reveal that of the four emergent aspirations (participants wanted a safe, mentally healthy/drug-free, culturally diverse and economically healthy community), the substance-abuse issue is a factor that impacts all themes. For a community to be vibrant and safe, its population must be healthy enough to be productive and contributing to a constructive income growth. When people have their basic needs met, their choices are more productive resulting in positive community impact.

It is our sincere hope that all Howard County residents and leaders will consider this report their go-to tool in becoming engaged with intentional positive actions and the development of leaders and resources to achieve the identified collective goals for the good of Howard County.

We Listened

The community conversations were comprised of a representative sample of individuals from each of the demographic groups listed below:

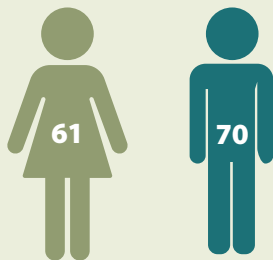
1. Business Leaders
2. Community Foundation of Howard County Board
3. Educators
4. Elected Officials
5. Faith-based Organization Leaders
6. Greentown Elected Officials
7. Healthcare Professionals
8. Housing Authority Clients and Low-Income Households
9. Law Enforcement/Fire/Emergency Personnel
10. Minorities
11. Non-Profits
12. Probation Clients
13. Russiaville Elected Officials
14. Senior Citizens
15. Veterans
16. Young Adults



Conversation Demographics

The following statistics share the demographic diversity within the conversations we held with **131** different members of the community.

GENDER



ETHNICITY

79%

WHITE, CAUCASIAN
OR OF EUROPEAN
DESCENT

15%

BLACK, AFRICAN
AMERICAN OR OF
AFRICAN DESCENT

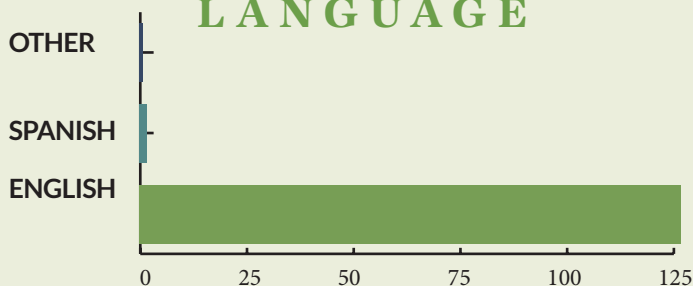
4%

LATINO OR
HISPANIC

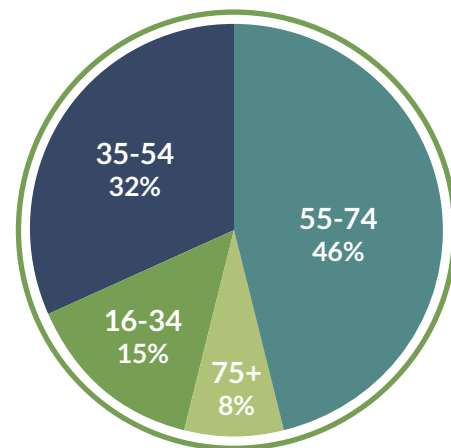
2%

AMERICAN INDIAN,
ALEUT, NATIVE
AMERICAN OR
ALASKAN NATIVE

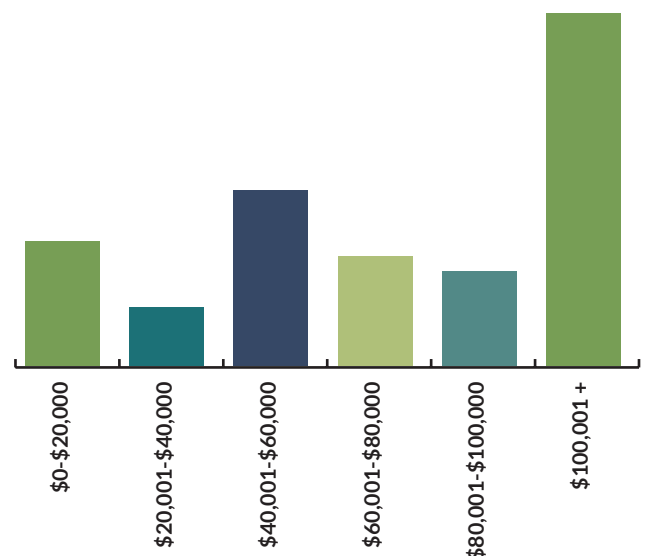
PRIMARY LANGUAGE



AGE RANGE



INCOME



Leading Aspirations

The following are the leading community aspirations which emerged for Howard County.



Safe

*Mentally
Healthy &
Drug-Free*

*Economically
Healthy*

*Culturally
Diverse*

PLEASE NOTE that in keeping with the Harwood Model, all concerns, actions and other comments are listed in the words of the participants. Where clarity of context was needed, comments were placed in parenthesis.

ASPIRATION 1

“We want a safe community.”

While people want a SAFE community, they are CONCERNED about:

- Crime
- Drug abuse
- Mental health issues
- Poverty
- Lack of adequate numbers of police

As people talk about those CONCERNS, they talk more specifically about:

- Break-ins and robberies
- Too many guns
- Jail overcrowding
- Drug addiction
- Chronic homelessness

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Funding for a larger and more diverse police presence
- Getting more ambulances
- Having more mental health facilities
- Revamping the justice system because it is not effective – criminals get a slap on the hand then they are back out committing crimes
- Establishing a reintegration process for those who have been incarcerated
- Better collaboration between law enforcement and mental health providers
- Clean up vacant houses

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those ACTIONS:

- Churches
- Community Foundation of Howard County
- Law Enforcement
- Pastors
- United Way of Howard and Tipton Counties

“What becomes acceptable is the culture of the community.”

“I have a sign that says, ‘Neighborhood Watch’, but I don’t know about it.”

“My house was shot up with BB guns.”

“My mom has been jumped at the gas station.”

“We don’t feel safe; two shootings in Kokomo yesterday.”

“I used to unlock my house, now I can’t even leave without locking my doors.”



Existing Comprehensive or Strategic Plans specifically addressing SAFETY:

2017 Russiaville Comprehensive Plan

"The Russiaville Police Department will continue to expand community policing and its presence in the community. The Town will continue to work with the Russiaville Volunteer Fire Department to ensure future funding and staffing."

2018 Howard County Comprehensive Plan

"Protect and improve the health, safety and welfare within Howard County."

"Ensure residential land uses are designed to be safe, accessible, sanitary and aesthetically pleasing."

ASPIRATION 2

“We want a mentally healthy & drug-free community.”

While people want a **MENTALLY HEALTHY** and **DRUG-FREE** community, they are **CONCERNED** about:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance abuse
- Crime

As people talk about those **CONCERNS**, they talk more specifically about:

- Mental health issues among students
- Drugs are in every part of our community
- Using jails as mental health institutions
- The lack of a system for reintegration into the community
- Barriers to getting into the schools to talk about substance abuse prevention
- Lack of support structure for addicts after they leave the hospital
- There is no cohesive plan to address the drug/substance abuse problem

They say we need to focus on the following **ACTIONS**:

- Having a long-term, inpatient clinic to treat substance abuse
- Breaking the stigma of substance abuse
- Getting mental health education into the schools
- Increasing public awareness of prevention and education
- Better collaboration among organizations that address these issues

And they **TRUST** the following people or organizations to play a part in those **ACTIONS**:

- Churches
- Community Foundation of Howard County
- Law Enforcement
- Other community stakeholders
- Paul Wyman
- Turning Point

“We look past the ‘why’ people are on drugs.”

“There are a lot of drug dealers from Chicago feeling welcome.”

“Mental health/drugs are worse issue than 6 – 10 years ago.”

“There are needles at the school play yard.”

“Kokomo is focused on immediate needs; we can’t ever get in front of it. There is no prevention.”

“My son went to go get the mail and a guy approached him to see if he sold drugs.”

“Kokomo is a little town with big city issues.”

Existing Comprehensive or Strategic Plans specifically addressing MENTAL HEALTH/DRUG-FREE:

2019 Howard County Health & Human Services Needs Assessment (Johns Hopkins Medicine, Howard County General Hospital Strategic Planning and Population Health Departments and the Howard County Health Department's Policy and Planning Division.) *"Increase timely access to behavioral health services for residents of all ages."*

Respectively, in their **2018 and 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment**, Community Health Network and St. Vincent Kokomo Hospital identified these as community concerns, but those documents did not reveal their subsequent actionable goals.

In the **2017 Regional Economic Development Plan** by the North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council, drug abuse was specifically mentioned as a concern, but there was no specific actionable goal for dealing with this issue.

ASPIRATION 3

*“We want a **culturally diverse** community that is friendly, welcoming, open-minded, and accepting.”*

While people talk about wanting a CULTURALLY DIVERSE community, they are CONCERNED about:

- Demographic trends – (Low cost housing attracting a population bringing undesirable qualities – drugs, poverty, crime)
- Resistance to change
- Cultural and generational differences
- Discrimination

As people talk about those CONCERNS, they talk more specifically about:

- Stereotypes
- Tribalism
- Cliques
- Lack of compassion and respect for others
- Barriers to employment opportunities for minorities (especially in highly skilled positions)

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Interaction (among diverse groups)
- Integration and inclusiveness
- More intentional conversations and connections through impactful events that showcase a variety of cultures such as a diversity conference, festivals or First Friday events
- Create diversity statements, policies, goals and hiring events
- Start an initiative to create cultural understanding among our leaders
- Buy local from minority businesses
- Make efforts to really understand each other's cultures and lifestyles.

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those ACTIONS:

- Community Foundation of Howard County
- Diversity Board (Human Rights Commission)
- Kokomo City Council
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Schools and Universities (especially IU Kokomo)

“Segments of the community are invisible.”

“Some people ask, ‘Am I going to be all right if I come to Kokomo?’ We were worried our history of discrimination would prevent others from wanting to come.”

“People feel threatened by people who are different.”

“We are teetering. We don’t know what a true diversity project looks like.”

“The future is a diverse population. The white population is decreasing; how do we invite them and nurture them?”

“Everyone should have the experience of being a minority.”

Existing Comprehensive or Strategic Plans specifically addressing CULTURAL DIVERSITY:

2017 Kokomo Comprehensive Plan

"Create a genuine, urbanized, and unique identity for Downtown Kokomo that attracts visitors and residents with walkability, density, and diversity."

"Ensure that there are recreational opportunities for residents of all ages, abilities and incomes."

2018 Comprehensive Plan for Howard County

While one of the top findings was "Quality of Life: Improving the appearance of communities and lack of cultural activities/opportunities," there was no action stated for addressing this issue.

2016-2019 Kokomo-Howard County Public Library Strategic Plan

"Additional cultural opportunities" was listed in a top finding/concern, but no action was listed relative to this concern.

ASPIRATION 4

“We want an economically healthy community.”

While people talk about wanting an ECONOMICALLY HEALTHY community, they are CONCERNED about:

- Resistance to change
- Holding onto our manufacturing history (not diversifying our base)
- Stagnant population growth

As people talk about those CONCERNS, they talk more specifically about:

- Looking ahead at our culture 10-20 years from now
- Focusing on (building a skilled) workforce and work ethics
- Valuing vocational opportunities
- Getting young people to stay

They say we need to focus on the following ACTIONS:

- Put more emphasis on education; especially focus both on college and trade schools
- Develop strong workforce partnerships between schools and businesses
- Keeping existing businesses alive
- Attracting high wage, high skilled jobs
- Creating an innovative and diverse business environment
- Developing the amenities that appeal to young people, so they'll come back here to live
- Communicating our message consistently and collaboratively

And they TRUST the following people or organizations to play a part in those ACTIONS:

- Community Foundation of Howard County
- Greater Kokomo Economic Development Alliance
- Local business leaders
- Media
- Schools
- United Way and other nonprofits

“My eyes have really been opened with Kokomo and Economic Development. They don't always work together, and it would be nice if they worked together better.”

“I watch awesome kids grow up, go to college, and have families, and they don't want to come back. It's like you have succeeded by not coming back to this community.”

“We have to welcome art, change, diversification; if we don't offer these things, people will leave.”

“We have to show students there's a path to move forward to a career. We have lots of good things going on in education, but we're not coordinated, not everyone has bought in.”

“This community resists change - we do better than some communities, but we are comfortable.”

Existing Comprehensive or Strategic Plans specifically addressing ECONOMIC HEALTH:

2017 Kokomo Comprehensive Plan

Goal: ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Support and encourage the success and growth of the existing business base and the attraction of new, high quality business and development opportunities that strengthen and diversify the economy and create jobs and generate wealth for residents of the community.

Action: ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Strengthen & diversify existing business by adapting to demands of the local industries; allow for new businesses and industries that strengthen the local supply chains, promote sites with significant investment and job creation opportunities; remove barriers that impact local businesses; collaborate with local and regional planning organizations to align efforts; support efforts to integrate graduates into the local workforce.

Action: COMMUNITY IDENTITY: Strengthen online presence by providing a single source for local news, events, and opportunities to all things Kokomo; expand and enforce local codes to provide a visually appealing community.

2017 Regional Economic Development Plan by the North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council

Increase opportunities for ag education by connecting industry demands and needs with local educational institutions by 3rd quarter 2019 (this included marketing/reaching urban schools, etc.)

- Accelerate the growth, placement, connectivity, and innovation of potential new businesses to the region by increasing business survival rates to 50% by 2023 - this included start-up, attraction, resource development and other key actions.
- Develop a regional promotional campaign to showcase advanced manufacturing by 2018.

The 2018 Comprehensive Plan for Howard County, IN

- Actively promote Howard County as a great place to live, especially to incoming commuters.
- Encourage the preparation and regular maintenance of a strategic economic development plan; identify quality of life factors and strongly encourage improvement/expansion of those qualities.

Russiaville Comprehensive Plan 2017

The Town will work with local businesses to foster downtown business development and the promotion of its local businesses; and it will make improvements to and maintain downtown infrastructure as well as work to address the rental apartments in the downtown area.

Kokomo-Howard County Public Library Strategic Plan 2016-2019

- Play a positive role in our community's economic vitality.
 - Expand the number and types of technology-focused learning opportunities we offer.
 - Offer at least one new form of education and/or support to local businesses/employers.
 - Offer new forms of education and/or support to local individuals, including job seekers.
-



Conversation Insights

We hope the community will be able to use the findings in this report to respond to the community's desire for more collaborative actions in reaching their aspirations. Their insights let those in roles of leadership create opportunities and actions for positive impact.

Community listening always provides opportunities to learn. As community leaders, we are responsible for helping establish an environment for healthy, prosperous communities where people can feel welcome, thrive and grow; just as Howard County residents have the responsibility of becoming engaged in those actions which allow for positive community impact for the collective good.

Overall, people were very happy to have been given a chance to express their aspirations for the communities in which they live. Below are just a few of the comments they added to the post-conversation surveys:

- "Thank you! Community conversations are always worthwhile."
- "It's hard to drill down to just one issue."
- "Amy did a great job leading the discussion and keeping conversations going."
- "Great ideas! Need to keep the conversations going!"
- "I really appreciate your care for our perspective. I look forward to seeing more (conversations) like this in our community."
- "The big issue will be follow through!"

We at Project Matters, LLC were honored to be entrusted with this important endeavor for the Community Foundation of Howard County. May you and the community reap many benefits from this process.

Project
Matters_{LLC}

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HOWARD COUNTY COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS NOTES PAGE



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