

Reflections on the Community Foundation's 2017 countywide listening tour

"Sitting and being present with someone, and asking them important questions is something that doesn't happen that often during the course of day-to-day life, and is one of the most profound and powerful ways we have to tell someone else how much we love them."

~David Isay, Founder of StoryCorps, recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" Award

We can't say it better. That's why, as spring turned to summer in 2017, your Community Foundation embarked on a journey across Boulder County to listen to you and your neighbors. We asked your thoughts and feelings about our community, what issues are most important to you, and what you would do to make a positive difference in the place we call home.

From Longmont, Lafayette and Louisville to Nederland and Boulder, we facilitated 42 conversations with some 240 community members in churches, schools, and rec centers. Along the way, as part of our continual process of catalyzing community, here's what we learned:

Community concerns

Making ends meet in Boulder County – affordable housing, in particular – was the most dominant topic of our conversations, followed by concerns about inequalities with respect to racial and ethnic minorities. Indeed, a lack of sufficient affordability and representative inclusivity were often brought up in tandem.

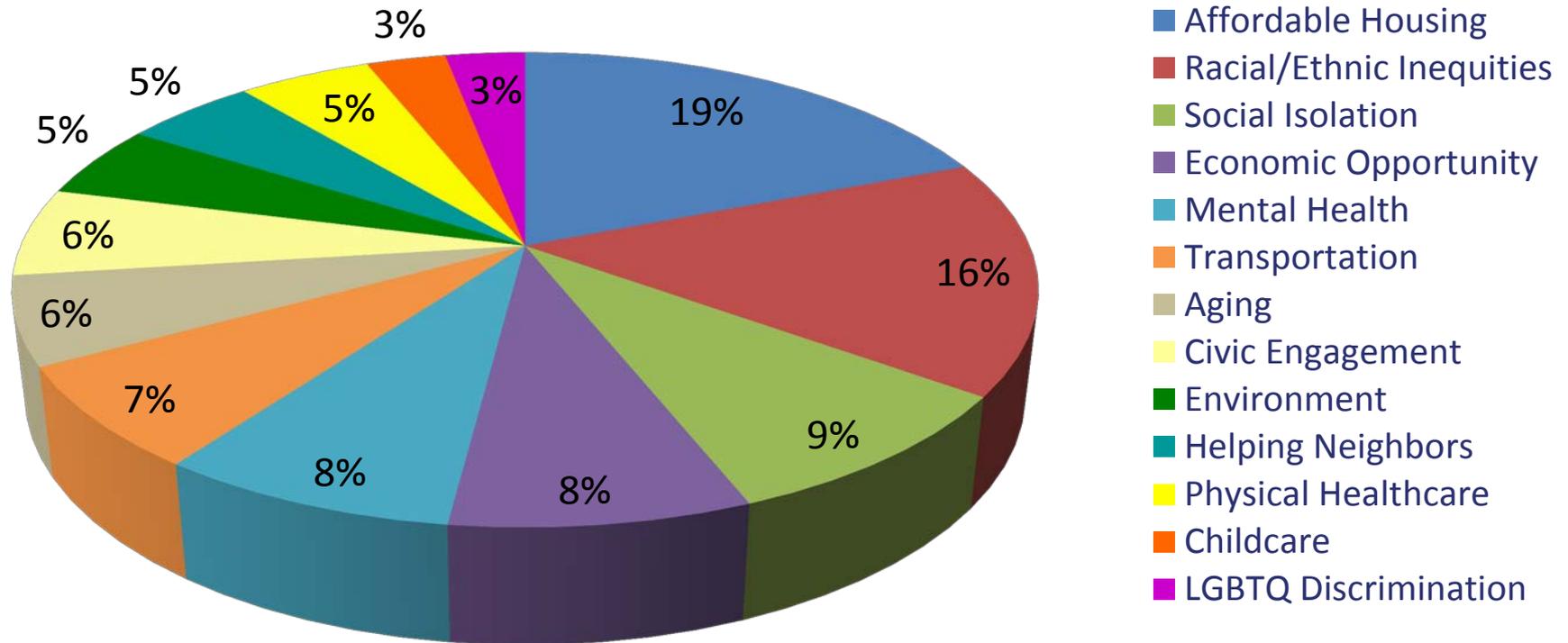
While affordable housing has been the tense subject of local policymaking for the last couple decades, the Community Foundation has helped bring other urgent community issues to the forefront, including growing inequities – from social segregations to outright racism. But it's clear that we need to do more.

Social isolation and mental health, along with overall economic opportunity, were the next most frequently mentioned concerns on our Listening Tour.

“What would you like to raise up?”

When asked this question, many participants shared their experiences about losing connection to others, how our community is becoming too expensive, and the many people they know who struggle with mental health issues. We listened to stories about the stigma attached to mental illnesses, and insufficient access to appropriate services. We also heard about concerns for our youths, and the lack of capacity in schools to adequately support students who face loneliness, depression, and despair.

Frequency of Topics Across Listening Tour Sessions



“If you could wave magic wand...”

When we posed the what-if, magic-wand question, the prevailing theme we heard throughout our Listening Tour was a desire for greater empathy, compassion, and civility – especially when faced with lifestyles, experiences, and viewpoints other than our own.

“There will always be an issue in the community, so building a resilient community helps to handle the bigger issues.”

“Examine white privilege and racial disparity[...]and quantifiable consequences.”

“I would love to see everyone in our community feel supported and valued when asking for help.”

“Have everyone step into the shoes of someone else and really feel what it’s like[...]sit in someone else’s pain.”

“Increase leadership [on boards, commissions, elected offices, businesses, nonprofits, and more] that truly reflects the community. Involve people affected by the issues...”

“If you could wave magic wand...” cont’d.

“I would like to see more affordable mental health. People in the middle are falling through the cracks...”

“How can I better understand where others are coming from?”

“I wish we could be more tolerant of one another.”

“Provide more opportunities for one-on-one conversations between people who are different.”

“People are looking for connection, relationship, and meaning. Create ways for people to connect, including newcomers and those who have been here for 20 years.”

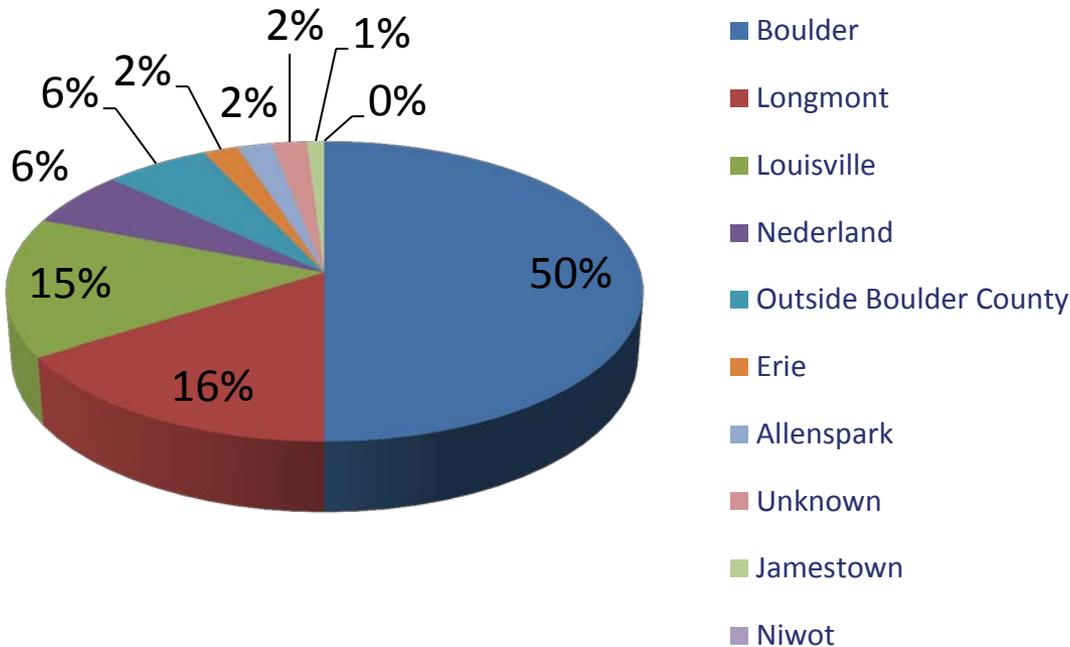
“No child should live in poverty in Boulder County.”

Who attended the tour?

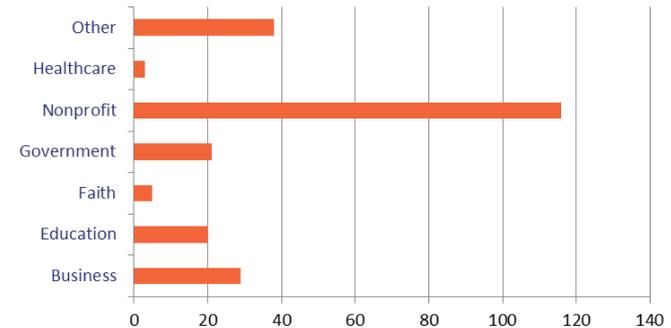
We aim to represent the inspiring diversity of our community in our programs, initiatives, and everything we do – across age groups and genders, sexual preferences, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and political persuasions.

Yet – with tremendous gratitude for their engagement – most participants were white women representing the nonprofit sector; as with any self-selected group, the demographics of the Community Foundation’s first Listening Tour were therefore skewed, and missed key people in our county. We achieved, some geographic diversity – but not as much as we’d like. This and the next page show the demographics we collected during the tour.

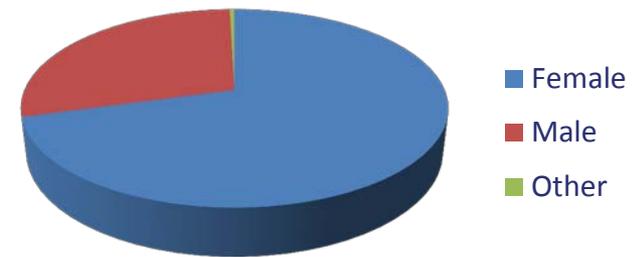
Participant Residence (% of Total Participants)



Sector of Work

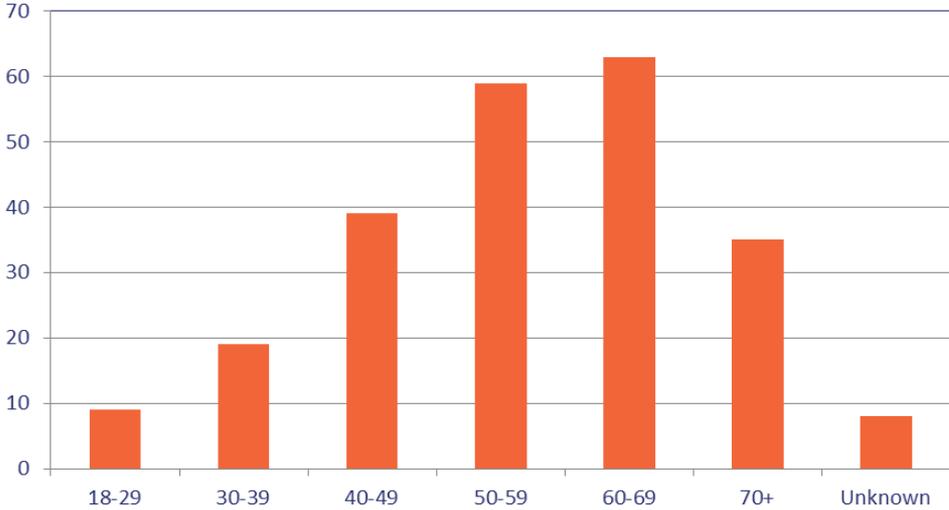


Participant Self-identified Gender

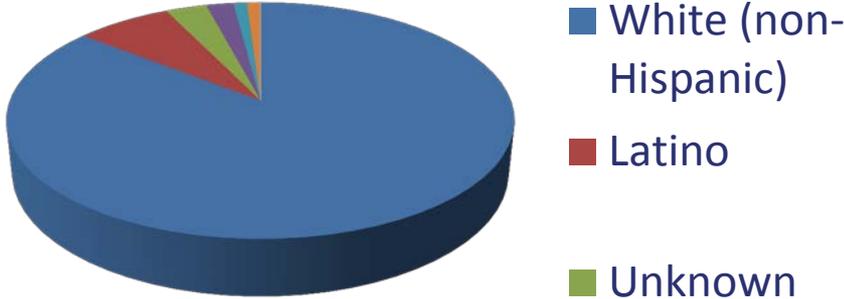


Who attended the tour?

Participant Age



Participant Self-identified Race/Ethnicity



What's next?

First, we'll continue to listen...and seek additional voices and perspectives that inclusively represent who we are. We'll do more to bring diverse members of our community together with cultural brokers and interpreters – after all, we're significantly more diverse than we were 20 years ago, and we aim to ensure that every voice is welcome and heard. To that end, during our next listening tour, we will seek out existing meetings and groups, where people already gather.

We'll also continue to track and share the 150 community indicators in our biennial [TRENDS Report](#), to inform and continually hone [our grantmaking](#); to help our local community leaders make informed decisions; and to keep all of us aware, attuned, and engaged in the ever-shifting landscape of our community.

Through our grantmaking, we'll also continue our support and capacity building of organizations, and collaborators who ignite action around greater affordability, authentic inclusivity, and improved behavioral health.

Lastly, our board of trustees will use this report, and lessons from future listening sessions, to inform our 2018 strategic planning process.

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At your Community Foundation, we're working to identify new ways to reach *all* local residents, and to more meaningfully connect and engage with one another. From our mountain communities to our plains neighborhoods, we want to hear from you. Because the way we see it, our community needs the input and ideas of everyone who calls Boulder County home. And by working together across sectors, and other real or perceived divisions, we'll accomplish more to solve our community's concerns than we do alone.

Stay tuned for more about Listening Tour 2018, and THANK YOU for sharing your time and insights.



Community presentations covering information in TRENDS are open and free to the public.

Check for upcoming live presentations or watch our webinar: commfound.org/trends.