A report on community perspectives and suggestions for increasing inclusion and community engagement in the Town of Manchester, CT.
Project Overview
Data Collection Methods

Three data collection methods were utilized to explore community perceptions, suggestions and priorities for increasing engagement in the Town of Manchester.

Leadership Interviews
Interviews were conducted with individuals in leadership positions in town government and community organizations. Perceptions and suggestions for increasing inclusion and community engagement were explored.

Community Focus Groups
Open discussions throughout the community were conducted to gain perceptions on what does and does not make the Town of Manchester welcoming, diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Ideas were generated for ways to make the Town of Manchester more welcoming and to increase community engagement.

Equity & Inclusion Collaborative
A committee of local organizational leaders representing diverse audiences who are committed to increasing inclusion and engagement in the community. The group reviewed interview and focus group findings and, based on this information, shared perspectives strategic priorities.

Data collected in the 2017 Town of Manchester Community Engagement Survey is referenced throughout this report.
Executive Summary
Town of Manchester Inclusion & Community Engagement Project
Leadership Interviews and Community Focus Group Findings

Executive Summary

KJR Consulting was engaged by the Town of Manchester to develop an integrated strategy, implementation framework, and action plan to enable the Town to reach its goal of increasing inclusion and community engagement among its diverse residents.

Interviews with Town and community leaders were conducted in August 2018 and community focus groups were facilitated in October and November 2018. Both explored perspectives and suggestions for increasing inclusion and community engagement among groups that were under-represented in an August 2017 survey on community engagement. Simultaneously, an Equity and Inclusion Collaborative was established to review the input collected and recommend strategic priorities for the Town to reach its inclusion and community engagement goals.

Town & Community Leadership Perceptions and Suggestions

75% of leaders interviewed have a positive perception of inclusion and community engagement in the Town of Manchester. They perceive communication, community involvement, and demonstration of respect for diverse residents as the top challenges impacting inclusion and community engagement. Leaders suggested improvements to communication and community services and programs as ways to aid the Town in achieving its inclusion and community engagement goals.

Community Perceptions and Suggestions

Over 90 individuals participated in the community focus groups. Participants were asked to share their perception of whether or not the Town of Manchester is welcoming, diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Comments were organized into positive and negative perception themes. Community services and programs, cultural diversity, school quality, and cultural events were identified as the top four themes that validated participant perceptions that the Town is welcoming, diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Communication experiences and lack of diversity validated perceptions that the Town is not welcoming, diverse, equitable, or inclusive.

Focus group participants brainstormed suggestions to increase inclusion and community engagement. Suggestions were categorized into themes. Community services and programs was the top theme and included suggestions focused on enabling community conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion, establishing community and parenting networks, and multicultural events. Communication was the second highest theme and included recommendations for a community communication campaign to increase awareness of community services and programs, and to foster community dialog on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Opportunities to improve Town leadership communication and information sharing via the town website and social media also fell within the communication theme. Suggestions were also made for increasing diversity in Town recruitment and community engagement.
Strategic Priority Recommendations

A group of community leaders representing diverse groups across the Town were gathered to review interview and focus group findings and to recommend inclusion and community engagement priorities for the Town. Two priorities were identified.

Priority # 1: Create a forum for diversity, equity, & inclusion conversations throughout the community.

- Unite and empower a team of community leaders charged with creating of a forum for diversity, equity, & inclusion conversations throughout the community.
- Create an inventory of diversity, equity, & inclusion programming throughout the community. Use this knowledge to foster connections and collaboration among the groups and individuals undertaking this work.
- Establish an on-going race-equity development program throughout the community to raise internal awareness of systemic race and equity issues.
- Establish a community communication strategy and narrative designed to change the perception of race relations in Manchester.

Priority # 2: Create best practices for disseminating information to the community-at-large.

- Complete an inventory of methods utilized to distribute information across the community, the audiences reached, and perceived effectiveness. Use this knowledge to recommend best practices for communicating with community organizations and all resident populations.
- Assess where information about community events and programs is housed and use this knowledge to make recommendations for how to best aggregate and disseminate this information to the community-at-large.
Leadership Perceptions & Suggestions
Leadership Perceptions

Leaders in town government and community organizations were asked about their perceptions of community engagement in the Town of Manchester. The degree to which their comments were positive or negative was identified.

Leadership Perception of Community Engagement in Manchester

- Somewhat Negative, 17%
- Somewhat Positive, 42%
- Strongly Positive, 33%
- Strongly Negative, 8%

Leadership Interview Data Only
Leadership Perceived Challenges

Leaders in town government and community organizations were asked to describe the community engagement challenges experienced in the Town of Manchester. The following response themes and challenges were identified.

**Communication**
- The perception of the good will of the government is not as strong as the reality.
- It’s hard to get people’s attention when they don’t use traditional media channels.

**Community Involvement**
- The broader community doesn’t reach out to get to know misunderstood groups. Their lack of understanding of the community leads to labeling, which then leads to lack of engagement.
- We need to look at how we are offering our services. Have we asked the families what they need and what is the best way to get them what they need?

**Respect**
- We need to start showing people who are different than us some respect.
- A lot of people in town government and the education system have lived here all their lives. They see the demographics changing but they don’t want or know how to adjust, react, change, or handle it.
Leadership Suggestions

Leaders in town government and community organizations were asked what the Town of Manchester can do to strengthen and expand inclusion and engagement across the community. The following response themes and suggestions were identified.

Communication Suggestions

- Create a resource to manage and coordinate town communications. This includes social media and press releases.
- Get to the micro-level to communicate and get people involved.
- There is a need for consolidated messaging and communication vehicles.
- Challenge the trolls on social media and offer opposing viewpoints.
- Create a central location for information about volunteering.
- Ask who is respected in each of the diverse communities and who they talk with to get information about what is happening in the community.

Community Services & Programs Suggestions

- Create a clear mission and goals for community engagement.
- Provide inclusion training across the community.
- Create social support programs.
- Create more accessible opportunities for youth.
Comparative Demographics
Participant Gender

The 2017 community engagement survey and the 2018 focus groups had the same percentage of male and female participation.

**2017 Community Engagement Survey Responses**
- 859 Resident Respondents
- 27% Male
- 71% Female
- 2% Prefer Not to Disclose

**2018 Focus Group Participants**
- 93 Participants
- 27% Male
- 71% Female
- 2% Prefer Not to Disclose

This data represents respondents that voluntarily shared demographic data.
Participant Age Groups

An increased percentage of youth participated in the 2018 focus groups (10%). More focus group participants preferred not to disclose their age (25%).
Participant Ethnicity

An increased percentage of focus group participants had an ethnicity other than white (54%). The greatest increase in participation by ethnicity were individuals of Hispanic, Latino, Spanish Origin (19%) and Black or African American decent (14%).
Participation by Neighborhood

An increased percentage of focus group participants were from the Spencer (17%) and Westside (10%) neighborhoods.
Community Perceptions
Positive Community Perceptions

Participants were asked what made them proud to live in the Town of Manchester. Responses were categorized into the following themes and compared to data from the 2017 community engagement survey.

What makes you proud to live in Manchester?

- School Quality: 3% 2017 Survey, 18% 2018 Focus Groups
- Housing Choices: 13% 2017 Survey, 6% 2018 Focus Groups
- Safe Neighborhoods: 6% 2017 Survey, 30% 2018 Focus Groups
- Transit Options: 5% 2017 Survey, 0% 2018 Focus Groups
- Living Wage Jobs: 5% 2017 Survey, 6% 2018 Focus Groups
- Shopping Options: 48% 2017 Survey, 34% 2018 Focus Groups
- Community Events: 32% 2017 Survey, 34% 2018 Focus Groups
- Community Engagement: 36% 2017 Survey, 36% 2018 Focus Groups
- Cultural Diversity: 37% 2017 Survey, 39% 2018 Focus Groups
- Access to Recreational Facilities: 4% 2017 Survey, 4% 2018 Focus Groups
- Technology Resources: 0% 2017 Survey, 0% 2018 Focus Groups
- Other: 76% 2017 Survey, 84% 2018 Focus Groups
Positive Community Perceptions – Other

Participants were asked what made them proud to live in the Town of Manchester. 84% of responses were categorized as “Other”. The following three subcategories were identified.

Responsive Town Leadership 8%
Community Services & Programs, 83%
Convenience, 9%

What makes you proud to live in Manchester?

2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Negative Community Perceptions

Participants were asked to share experiences that validated perspectives that the Town of Manchester is not welcoming, diverse, equitable, or inclusive. Responses were categorized into the following themes.

What experiences have you had that have validated your perspective that Manchester is not welcoming, diverse, equitable, or inclusive?

- Communications: 39%
- Community Services & Programs: 8%
- Lack of Diversity: 17%
- Safety: 10%
- Schools: 5%
- Town Investments: 8%
- Harassment: 8%
- Other: 8%

2018 Focus Groups
Negative Perception - Communication

39% of the experiences that led participants to perceive Manchester as not welcoming, diverse, equitable, or inclusive were in the Communication theme. Comments in this theme are organized into the following four categories.

- **Community Conversations**
  - 58%
  - Comments on public forums about youth & race.
  - People have negative views of certain parts of town.
  - Clash of old school vs new school.
  - Frightening comments about bikes on Spruce St.
  - When NHE closed it was very nasty & people didn’t want the “NHE kids”.

- **Town Leadership Communication**
  - 19%
  - Board member devaluing community feedback (“I don’t believe you are disenfranchised”)
  - Lack of understanding of “Dog Whistle” comments.
  - Hardly ever hear anything positive about Manchester and the good things are going on in this town.
  - Not inclusive – comments made by town officials.

- **Community Services & Programs Communication**
  - 17%
  - There are a lot of services, but people don’t know about them.
  - Was turned away from community events because I am a homeschooler.
  - People don’t know how to access services.
  - Need to be better at including all residents, ethnicities, etc.

- **School Communication**
  - 6%
  - Most of [the] school notices, messages, etc. offered in English only.
  - Translation of school information.

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2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Negative Perception - Lack of Diversity

17% of the experiences that led participants to perceive Manchester as not welcoming, diverse, equitable, or inclusive were in the Lack of Diversity theme. Comments in this theme are organized into the following two categories.

Community Engagement

- Block Watch – East Side not all representative of the community.
- Committees don’t reflect the diversity in the community.
- Neighborhoods in town are not accepting of diversity. They want the town to stay white.
- Events may need more diversity.

Town Government

- The influx of displaced residents moving here provides diversity, but the workforce doesn’t e.g. FD, teachers, town worker’s, etc.
- Not as diverse or inclusive as can be in local politics
- Gut reaction- Lack of diverse representation in town government.
- Lack of representation in our elected officials.

2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Negative Perception - Harassment

8% of the experiences that led participants to perceive Manchester as not welcoming, diverse, equitable, or inclusive were in the Harassment theme.

- The thought that a curfew would curb car break-ins & that it would not cause more friction between police & and teens/teens of color.
- There is a perception that racial profiling is prevalent and as a result the town is identified as “Klanchester”.

2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Community Suggestions
Participant Suggestions

Focus group participants brainstormed suggestions to increase inclusion and community engagement. Responses were categorized into the following themes.

What suggestions do you have to make Manchester more welcoming?

- **Community Services & Programs.** 54%
- **Communication.** 25%
- **Increase Diversity.** 10%
- **Schools.** 6%
- **Other.** 5%

2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Suggestions – Comm. Services & Programs

54% of the suggestions to increase inclusion and community engagement were in the Community Services & Programs theme. Comments in this theme are organized into the following four categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Conversations About Diversity, Equity, &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>Suggestions focused on enabling dialogue and education to help individuals across the community and those in town government roles unpack systemic and individual racism and biases.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community &amp; Parenting Support Networks</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>Suggestions focused on social mechanisms enabling individuals and parents to become connected in the community, obtain advice to overcome challenges, and gain assistance to meet basic needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community &amp; Multicultural Events</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Suggestions focused on creation of events across the community with an intent to include diverse people and ideas. Events suggested include cultural fairs and parades, arts events, and recognition of the cultural holidays celebrated by individuals in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Programing &amp; Access to Services &amp; Programs</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Suggestions focused on creation of dedicated youth officers and programs that connect youth across the community and keep them off the streets. It was also suggested that inclusion could be improved by enabling easier access to community services and programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*2018 Focus Group Responses Only*
Suggestions - Communication

25% of the suggestions to increase inclusion and community engagement were in the Communication theme. Comments in this theme are organized into the following four categories.

- **Community Communication Campaign**
  - 43%
  - Suggestions focused on a creation of a community-wide communication campaign to increase awareness of community services and programs and foster community dialogue on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics.

- **Town Leadership Communication**
  - 37%
  - Suggestions focused on the need for town leadership to communicate with more sensitivity to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was suggested leadership meet residents where they are located in the community to provide updates on town activities.

- **Town Website**
  - 11%
  - Suggestions focused on the improvement and aggregation of information on the town website. It was also suggested that the town slogan be revised as it is perceived to not reflect the community.

- **Town Social Media Management**
  - 9%
  - Suggestions focused on adopting a more proactive approach to managing racist dialogue on community social media sites.

2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Suggestions – Increase Diversity

10% of the suggestions to increase inclusion and community engagement were in the Increase Diversity theme. Comments in this theme are organized into the following two categories.

**Town Recruitment Practices**

71%

Suggestions focused on the desire for the town to intentionally seek out and hire individuals in positions of power that reflect Manchester demographics. It was suggested to adopt a data-driven approach to diversity by establishing diversity metrics and goals for managing hiring practices.

**Community Engagement Practices**

29%

Suggestions emphasized the need to increase diversity in community events. It was recommended the Town identify leaders in each Manchester neighborhood. Working with these neighborhood leaders the Town can identify the most effective way engage diverse residents.
Suggestions – Schools & Other

The following are suggestions in the Schools (6%) and Other(5%) themes.

**Schools**

Suggestions focused on a variety of topics such as reducing school closures, addressing the achievement gap, and completing an outside independent survey of teachers. Creation of an after-school center and ensure that new families understand the difference between the roles of the Board of Education and principals. It was also suggested the school mascot (Indians) be changed.

**Other**

Other suggestions focused on town maintenance such as ensuring cleaner sidewalks and streets and added security in recreational areas to reduce drug usage within them. Enabling alternative transportation by providing bike lanes and sidewalks throughout town were also suggested.

2018 Focus Group Responses Only
Strategic Priority
Recommendations
Strategic Priority Recommendations

A group of community leaders representing diverse groups across the Town of Manchester were gathered to review interview and focus group findings. Given this information, they were asked for recommendations on inclusion and community engagement priorities for the town. They recommend the following strategic priorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Strategic Priorities</th>
<th>2nd Strategic Priorities</th>
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<td><strong>Create best practices for disseminating information to the community-at-large</strong></td>
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