

Community Engagement Meeting Summary

Meeting Schedule

Urban Mission – March 1

Community Action – March 7

Meadowbrook / East Hills – March 13

Midtown Towers – March 14

Jeff-Lewis Workplace – March 23 & 30 (3 groups)

JCC – March 27

Centennial Apartments – April 12

A total of nine engagement sessions were conducted at seven different locations with nearly 100 participants. Following is a list of barriers discussed as part of engagement sessions; those highlighted in bold were discussed in multiple sessions.

Barriers Specific to Housing

- **Affordability**
 - Waiting list for subsidized housing (HUD) is 2 ½ years
 - Available housing geared toward military
 - Lack of mid-level rentals
 - Unable to afford first and last month rent and security deposit
 - High rents force individuals to live in rural communities
- **Quality of affordable housing**
 - Repairs
 - Unethical and unsupportive landlords
- **Rent increases disproportionately with increases in income / Benefit Cliff**
- **Awareness of support services for low income housing**
- Lack of housing for homeless – poor base to hunt for job
- Public housing – institutional
- Not enough transitional housing / supports for individuals recovering from addiction

Barriers Specific to Education

- **Managing job requirements and parenting**
- **Cost of education**
 - Perception that education is not affordable
 - Difficulty understanding financial aid / completing applications
- **Child care**
 - Affordability
 - Availability (no weekend or evening care)
 - Managing child care
 - Child care subsidies for limited coursework
 - Child care subsidies sometimes delayed
- **Lack of awareness of available resources**
- **Lack of vocational job training**

- Lack of support / resources for higher level education
- Bus schedules don't meet education needs (last bus leaves JCC at 5:20 PM)
- Food Stamps – hours required for courses take you out of eligibility
- Lack vision to recognize strengths
- Lack of education holding people back from reaching their potential
- Lack of educational opportunities for people with disabilities
- Lack of supports for families with children with special needs
- Limited flexibility for class schedules (few courses offered on weekends)
- Lack of high school education
- Need more guidance at the high school level
- Lack of technology / computer skills
- Limited access to technology / Internet – poorly prepared for higher education
- Training support restricted to certain courses
- Youth quit school
 - To work
 - To escape bullying
 - Because they lack understanding of the value of education
- GED classes – should be closer to the need
- Financial management education
 - Current finances (month to month) for the family
 - Future finances (saving for college) for the kids
- Education is not a priority for some

Barriers Specific to Workforce Development

- **Lack of experience / marketable skills**
- **Cost of education or training**
- **Quality of available jobs**
 - Lack of full-time positions with benefits
 - Lack of higher paying jobs
 - Stagnant economy (no new jobs)
- **Child care**
 - Affordability
 - Availability (particularly for non-traditional work hours)
- **Lack of opportunities to learn trade skills / gain experience**
- **Trouble keeping a job**
 - Difficulties understanding / meeting employer expectations
 - Crises at home take focus away from gaining / maintaining employment
 - Employers are inflexible / lack understanding of chaos
 - Employers do not adequately communicate expectations
 - Difficulties relating to supervisors
 - Transportation issues
- **Lack of awareness of and marketing of available workforce-related resources**
- Lack of training / education – filling out applications can be a challenge for some

- Lack of information to make decisions regarding education / career (youth)
- Benefit cliff – benefits lost outweigh pay
- Finances impact ability to be regular at work
- Jobs available in the area but many lack transportation to get to and from employment
- Unable to afford work attire, tools, testing or fingerprinting necessary for specific jobs
- Lack of good work ethic
- Disability precludes any level of employment
- Criminal background makes it difficult to get a job
- Feelings of hopelessness / dread
- Lack of resources for entrepreneurs / small business development
- Mental health issues preclude some from steady employment

Barriers Specific to Transportation

- **Public transportation**
 - Bus routes are limited
 - Schedules don't meet needs
 - Takes too long to get from point A to point B
 - Child care subsidy limitations on transport to and from work (1/2 hour)
 - No public transportation to and from rural communities
 - Bus stops not adequately sheltered
 - Bus stops not easily identifiable – lack signage
 - Buses in poor repair
- **Cost prohibitive to maintain / repair vehicle**
- Lack of incentives for car-pooling
- Lack of bike lanes & unsafe sidewalks – prevent those who rely on biking / walking to get to work
- Taxi service is expensive
 - Taxis are slow to respond, especially in some neighborhoods

Common Themes

- Transportation and child care discussed at every session. Identified as barriers to education and workforce development.
- Benefit cliff discussed at every session.
 - Get a job, report income and lose benefits before getting on feet (reporting required within 10 days of first pay check)
 - Increases in pay are disproportional to the loss of benefits
 - Individuals sometimes forced to not accept pay increases
 - Fear of losing subsidized rent
- Lack of awareness of available resources (even among providers)
- Should be more support / safety net for “motivated” individuals
- Not all agencies are helpful and welcoming
- Stigma of living in poverty