

"CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES" COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS SUMMARY

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Many areas enjoy economic prosperity, though it is not as robust, diverse, or universal in a manner necessary to ensure vibrant communities.
- Simply being employed, especially if that means working two or three jobs to live, cannot be considered economic prosperity.
- Small, rural communities face challenges in developing good jobs, particularly jobs that are suitable for multiple worker families.
- While there are multiple pathways to education and workforce training, access to high-quality resources is not universal, especially for rural and marginalized communities.
- Many communities are diverse, safe, and socially cohesive, yet areas that are physically isolated and socially excluded, have disparate access to resources. This has become more visible and pronounced during the pandemic.
- Public transportation options, including paratransit for the disabled and the elderly, is inconsistent and insufficient in many communities, even within larger urban areas.
- We can leverage the use of excellent parks and recreation facilities, libraries, and educational resources from pre-K through college where those assets are available. However, some facilities closed because of the pandemic.
- Build on the social cohesion, collaboration, and spirit of volunteerism that exist within our communities. At the same time, recognize that some of the bonds that tether our civil society have frayed.
- Identify common goals between and among sub-communities and establish ongoing activities to engage everyone in an authentic, transparent manner.
- There are strong regional organizations across Arizona that build civic engagement and utilize civil discourse.
- Quality healthcare services are available across Arizona, even in non-metropolitan areas. However, affordable access to these services presents a significant opportunity for improvement in many communities.
- There are cross-border activities between the U.S. and Mexico that are mutually beneficial to both countries.
- Communities define themselves by their shared, lived experiences rather than by zip code, which presents greater opportunities to address the issues of equity and diversity.

LOCATIONS AND COLLABORATION

American Planning Association

AzAEC

Gila Valley

Greater Tucson Leadership

Mohave County

Pima County

Prescott

SEAGO

Sierra Vista

Southwest Arizona Town Hall

Sun Health

Verde Valley

THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

- COVID-19 has highlighted how interrelated our communities are and shined a light on certain disparities and needs that we may not have been aware of before.
- Infection, hospitalization, and death rates for COVID-19 within poor, isolated, vulnerable communities and in communities of color have exposed gaps in our public health and public service systems.
- Not all members of the community have access to all the elements of the Healthy Communities wheel.
- COVID-19 has caused a dramatic reduction in the number of volunteers available, particularly among retirees, who provide direct services through nonprofits.
- Mental health services have always been in short supply and with the increase in domestic violence and child abuse due to the pandemic, the situation has escalated into a crisis.
- By treating mental health problems rather than criminalizing the actions of those who suffer from them, we can improve outcomes, protect our most vulnerable populations, and save substantial sums in the healthcare and criminal justice systems.
- The most vulnerable are at the highest risk for not having or losing access to the basic human necessities such as access to healthy food, safe housing, steady employment, and medical and mental health services.
- Many vulnerable individuals and communities remain isolated because they do not have reliable broadband internet service. There are issues with access, affordability, experience, and comfort level with technology.
- The shift to online education and telehealth has impacted the most isolated and vulnerable populations.
- All border communities suffered from a significant decline in trade and tourism during the pandemic and are only beginning to recover.
- There is a shortage of healthcare workers statewide. At the same time, the pandemic has made clear the need for more social services professionals. Training in trauma-informed care has now become a requirement. As wages rise in a tight market, it has become even more difficult to compete for qualified staff.
- The lack of potable water for drinking and personal care has negatively impacted rural and indigenous communities.
- The availability of affordable housing directly impacts employment and workforce development.
- Homelessness, especially first-time and family homelessness, has increased in all communities. During the pandemic, housing people in hotels fostered a sense of dignity for the homeless by giving them personal space.
- COVID-19 has increased community focus on dealing with basic health issues such as food deserts, nutrition, exercise, weight management, diabetes, and heart disease to improve community health, and reduce healthcare expenses.
- Due to the lack of in-person schooling, there have been serious consequences for vulnerable communities and populations. The absence of a connection with school counselors to identify potential child abuse, reduced access to free, healthy food, limited social interaction, and limited special needs services have impacted at-risk individuals and families. Department of Child Safety referrals are down 90%.
- The pandemic further highlighted the need for high-quality childcare.
- It is estimated that 30-50% of the nonprofits that provide services to the most vulnerable populations will close over the next six months.

- During the pandemic, communities have learned the importance of caring for each other, helping neighbors, and checking on those who need extra help like the disabled, elderly, and unemployed. Better planning for death and addressing social isolation are also necessary.
- Teachers have been stretched thin at all educational levels of responsibility, yet there have also been silver linings. Educators have identified new ways to deliver instruction, created new models for reaching marginalized populations, and discovered opportunities to partner with outside organizations.
- Local news and media sources are under threat at a time when they are needed more than ever to promote civil discourse and maintain social cohesion among citizens.
- The killings of African Americans have raised the level of discussion of racism nationwide and created opportunities for more people to understand and help those who look different from them. Investigate the impact of COVID-19 on county jail inmates, look at police conduct, and consider the need for reforms to address institutional racism. Establish a new and improved diversity, equity, and inclusion commission.
- COVID-19 brought many people to our communities from other parts of the state and country. We can capitalize on this exposure to convince people to stay, return, or relocate.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

- More local control is necessary as one size does not fit all.
- Eliminate state-imposed mandates that are unfunded.
- Our education system needs to receive full funding to ensure better outcomes for our children, which includes raising teacher salaries.
- Embrace data-driven decisions, cross the aisle, and move away from politicizing social issues. Lead with values and focus on the common good.
- Find common ground by listening to all people and groups, thereby engaging more of the community in discussions about the elements of a vibrant community and how they are interrelated.
- Diversify our leadership and encourage youth and people of color to participate in government. Be outspoken against racism, sexism, ageism, and ALL forms of discrimination and disparate treatment.
- Increase efforts to educate high school students and voters on civics, current events, and significant issues, encouraging the importance of civic engagement.
- Make it a top priority to ensure that reliable, affordable access to broadband is available statewide, especially in rural areas.
- Create a single point of contact where people can go to get the help they need.
- Nonprofits provide the expertise, commitment, and leadership needed to make our communities vibrant and healthy. Partnerships among various levels of government, non-governmental organizations and nonprofits can help create broader and more effective solutions to issues and promote opportunities for growth.
- Promote volunteerism, increased funding, and other resources for nonprofits that address vital public needs.
- Convene regional focus groups to build connections, share information, and provide elected leaders with specific guidance for community investment.

- Expand the resources and incentives for affordable housing. Invest in housing with wraparound services, similar to United Healthcare’s Housing for Health program, that comprehensively address the interrelationship of housing and health.
- Restore the previous level of funding to the Arizona State Parks Heritage Fund (\$10 million per year).
- Reprioritize funding for staff education and training at the state level so all communities have the tools they need to create economic opportunity and self-sufficiency.
- Support a strong public education system that provides science-based, fact-based, and life-long learning opportunities that are available for all people at all levels.
- Address issues of childhood poverty through the lens of the Healthy Communities wheel.
- Represent your whole community, not just those who voted for you or contributed to your campaign. Be role models for the entire community by fostering inclusion, collaboration, and a sense of caring for all residents, regardless of party lines.
- Use what we have learned from the pandemic, negative AND positive, to prepare for future crises and challenges.
- Get out in the community, get a broader perspective, collect more input, and see how people live before you make decisions about critical issues that affect their lives. “Walk a mile in my shoes.”
- Stop cutting taxes and fully fund the basic services needed to promote vibrant communities.
- Engage in and promote long-term strategic planning to ensure that our parks, roads, water and sewer systems, and the equipment needed to support public safety and other core services meet the needs of local businesses and residents.
- Local governments must become stronger advocates at the federal level for greater investment in our communities.
- Address climate change and community resiliency to ensure we have a sufficient water supply and can promote environmental justice.

TAKING ACTION

- Provide a “safe space” for community members to speak out on issues affecting the health of their communities.
- Emphasize communities’ interdependence and the social imperative to support each other.
- Become aware of our own implicit biases and promote awareness of these issues for others by encouraging open, nonjudgmental dialogue within family, faith, and community groups.
- Enhance our data collection and analytics systems to better equip ourselves to improve all the elements of vibrant communities. Collect data that reflects the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities and points us toward needed reforms.
- Engage and capitalize on the curiosity, energy, and enthusiasm of our youth.
- Educate ourselves and speak out about issues such as systemic racism, social injustice, economic inequality, and other barriers to creating and nurturing vibrant communities.
- Fight the cycle of poverty by focusing on outreach programs in our own communities to ensure resources reach all our residents.

- Use community design to remove "pockets" of income inequality, high crime, and isolation to provide equal opportunities for all residents.
- Combat violence and hatred and foster peace and inspire hope by encouraging people to take simple actions (e.g., picking up trash, delivering meals to a neighbor, speaking up about something that needs to be corrected) to demonstrate the impact one person can have.
- Vote, run for office, get involved in civic organizations, engage in civil discourse, and promote diversity in organizations to which we belong.
- Create a directory of organizations with comparable missions to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Assess the jobs available in the community to identify the skill requirements and narrow the workforce training and education programs that need to be expanded or developed.
- Provide scholarships for financially challenged students to attend college and encourage pathways to become healthcare workers, teachers, and other professionals that are in short supply.
- Expose students to different occupational opportunities to enable them to expand their career aspirations. Incorporate hands-on experiences through local employers in the curriculum.
- Ensure that publications, social media, news reports, and all public service communications are readily available in both English and Spanish.
- Continue to use virtual town halls as tools to engage a broader and more diverse community. Consider the perspective of community members who may not be able to be a part of these discussions.
- Schools and libraries are community hubs that already provide resources and can be leveraged to do even more with appropriate funding and support.
- Focus on infrastructure and industry-ready development to attract future industries that will create local employment opportunities and contribute to economic prosperity.
- Showcase the beauty of all parts of our state, preserve open spaces, and care for our natural environment.
- Provide a well thought out and cohesive story that depicts our mission and goals such that others, including our children, can understand community issues clearly.
- Identify more opportunities for mixed-use development to meet the demand for live/work/play communities.
- Showcase role models from underrepresented populations to encourage people to take active leadership and become fully engaged in developing the future vision for their communities.
- To be a vibrant community, we must provide the following:
 - Diverse local boards, committees, and organizational leadership to ensure all voices are heard.
 - Community town halls and open dialogue at local schools.
 - Broader opportunities for participation for underserved populations in nonprofits and civic organizations.
 - Engagement with influencers from marginalized communities.
 - Spaces for underserved and isolated populations to come together to share experiences.
 - Assistance so parents can create a home environment that fosters open and caring conversations.