

Waterloo Community Needs Assessment

Background

John Deere asked Global Communities, an international development and humanitarian organization with headquarters in Silver Spring, MD, to conduct a participatory community needs assessment in Waterloo, IA to develop an in-depth understanding of the assets, opportunities, and gaps existing in the Waterloo community in order to inform and strengthen the community projects led by John Deere and other stakeholder organizations to lead to greater impact.

High-level Findings

- Residents expressed a genuine love for the community, characterized by deep roots and welcoming and close-knit neighborhoods, and reflected that Waterloo is a great place to raise a family with many opportunities.
- Many shared increasing concerns over a growing sense of dividedness and disconnect, indicating a deterioration of social fabric at various levels – family, neighborhood and the larger community. Lack of communication and coordination persist and contribute to feelings of isolation and hopelessness.
- Violence and crime generate feelings of insecurity in neighborhoods and are of particular concern among youth.
- Racial discrimination continues to permeate the community, hindering advancement opportunities and compounding feelings of disillusion both socially and economically.
- Residents, both young and old, are frustrated over the lack of development in the East Side, describing neighborhoods suffering from blight and lacking decent grocery, retail and recreation options.
- While job opportunities exist, many feel there are not enough and that there are still many barriers to employment.

Process Snapshot

June – November 2020

Initial Phase:

- **Needs Assessment and Feedback Survey:** 48 Community and Institutional Stakeholders ranked a range of needs and priorities
- **Key Informant Interviews:** 25 Community and Institutional Stakeholders discussed in-depth community assets, needs and priorities
- **Desk Research:** review of existing resources

Second Phase:

- **Community Meeting and Dialogue Sessions:** four focus groups with East Side residents to explore issues and identify solutions (30 youth, 36 adults).
- **Validation Sessions:** two sessions to present findings and recommendations to seek feedback (8 youth, 17 adults).
- **Limited Data Review:** analysis of datasets on high school demographics and behavior of youth

Community Solutions to Addressing Priorities

(Re)building Social Cohesion

- Address growing discord through whole-of-community, inclusive efforts that bring everyone together to build unity and plan a collective future.
- Better communication is critical to address deteriorating social fabric and to foster support among one another.
- The extent to which community members become engaged and active participants ensures their voices in the community's future direction.

Service Provisions and Economic Development

- Better coordination between stakeholders is critical to advancing development:
- Among service providers to ensure services meet community needs and intended beneficiaries have access.
- Among public and private sector to build relationships to further economic growth and improve communications about opportunities.
- Efforts to improve information sharing are necessary to increase communication and coordination.
- Economic growth in the East Side should compliment existing businesses and leverage momentum around small, local business start-ups.

Youth Development and Engagement

- Create more opportunities for positive youth development so they (re)gain a sense of purpose:
- Expand mentorship programs and offer more internship opportunities.
- Ensure youth are active participants in community rebuilding efforts and part of the solutions.
- Bridge the divide between youth and adults by working to understand youth motivation and experiences.

Recommendations Based on Findings and Community Solutions

- Continue to support community-based organizations and programming that serve under-privileged youth and communities in areas of positive youth development, workforce development and community service.
- Promote community-centric social and economic revitalization efforts.
- Develop mobilization and civic engagement initiatives with both youth and adults that rebuild social fabric and elevate their voices.
- Convene service providers and public sector to develop a platform to improve coordination and better align resources, ensuring open communication with target communities and accessibility to services.
- Increase coordination among the private sector to advocate for and support initiatives that reduce

employment barriers for low-income and historically marginalized groups by:

- Expanding positive youth development programming, including mentoring, coaching, and summer work programs/internships.
- Developing more inclusive workforce development and recruitment strategies for minority groups
- Fostering growth of minority-owned small businesses in the East Side
- Continue and strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives that foster dialogue and social cohesion city-wide.

*For the full report please visit:
www.globalcommunities.org/Waterloo-Community-Needs-Assessment*

Contact: Mary Liz Mann mmann@globalcommunities.org
Mindy Schmidt MindyJ@JohnDeere.com