

THE FLAGSTAFF COMMUNITY POLICY TRUST
Flagstaff, Arizona

Discussion Topic

Inclusivity, Race, Culture, and Identity



April 5th, 2017
Meeting #2

INTRODUCTION

The Flagstaff Community Policy Trust (the Trust) is a group of former elected officials and community leaders that come together to analyze a community issue or topic. Individuals are selected to participate in periodic Trust meetings based on knowledge and expertise in the topic of interest.

Organized by Mayor Coral Evans, the Trust is designed to build a foundation of expertise and experience to benefit present and future Flagstaff leaders, as well as other communities.

The Trust also serves as an opportunity to provide continuity about the history and purpose of long-term policy goals from those no longer in office, and, with each meeting pertaining to a specific topic, it provides valuable insight regarding effective policy solutions to ongoing issues.

BACKGROUND

The Trust held its second meeting on April 5th, 2017 in the basement meeting room of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, an historic symbol of Inclusivity in Flagstaff. It is located at the corner of Benton Avenue and Kendrick in downtown Flagstaff.



The Church was built through 1925 and 1926. It was intended to serve as a retreat for Spanish-speaking church members. The land was donated by Philomena Babbitt and building construction was overseen by Reverend Edward Albous, who served as pastor for nearly three decades. Father Albous was also responsible for directing construction of Flagstaff’s Nativity Church in 1929.

When financial issues halted church construction, Latino community members contributed their personal time and effort to finish it and the first Mass was held December 12, 1926. The name “Our Lady of Guadalupe” was selected as homage to residents who completed construction of the Church and work was completed close to the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Today, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church remains a hub of unity and worship in the community.

COMMUNITY POLICY TRUST MEMBERS

Robert Breunig served as Director of the Museum of Northern Arizona for 11 years before retiring in 2015. During his tenure, the Museum was accredited by the American Alliance of Museums for its unique work as a repository for Native American artifacts and Colorado Plateau natural history specimens. In 2015, the Museum was awarded the National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

Sheriff Jim Driscoll has been a Flagstaff resident since the late 1950s. Prior to being elected Coconino County Sheriff, he was involved in working with various non-profit organizations, primarily focused on underserved populations. He credits these experiences as the “backbone” for his effective work in law enforcement.

Mayor Coral Evans currently serves as Mayor of Flagstaff, previously as City Council Vice Mayor, and is a former City Councilmember. Throughout her time in office, she has advocated for greater opportunities in civic engagement, civil discourse, community revitalization, and sustainability. She is the city’s first African American Mayor and the state’s first female African American mayor. She is also the founder of the Trust.

Reverend Kevin Lawson, a new resident of Flagstaff, currently serves as minister of the Beacon Unitarian Universalist Congregation. He is actively engaged in promoting social justice and is a member of the Coconino County United Religious Leaders Association, an interfaith and inter-spiritual organization comprised of diverse religious groups.

Bernadine Lewis is Director of Undergraduate Programs at W.A. Franke College of Business at Northern Arizona University (NAU). She views on-campus inclusion and diversity as vital components of higher education and welcomes opportunities to build greater diversity and inclusiveness in the Flagstaff community.

Judge Mark Moran is Presiding Judge of Coconino County Superior Court, Division III. A Flagstaff resident since 1986, Judge Moran became a Coconino County Superior Court Judge in 2005 and Presiding Judge in 2010. From 1995 to 2002 he served as a City of Flagstaff Magistrate.

Lina Wallen is a community leader who concentrates primarily on child development and education. She serves as Chair of the Foster Care Review Board, an organization that advises Juvenile Court on the well-being of children in its care, especially permanent home placement.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Steve Peru is President and CEO of United Way, an organization that brings together public, private and non-profit sectors to address community issues. Prior to coming to United Way, he served as Coconino County Manager.

Jamie Whelan is Vice Mayor of the City of Flagstaff. Additionally, Vice-Mayor Whelan formerly served as Senior Lecturer in Special Education in the College of Education at NAU. Vice-Mayor Whelan has served on the Coconino County Fatality Review Board and was President of the Victim Witness Board.

COMMUNITY POLICY TRUST STAFF

Kerry Blume is the Trust Facilitator. Ms. Blume has served as a non-profit leader throughout her work career. From 1998 to 2013, as United Way of Northern Arizona CEO, Kerry worked to improve the quality of education, income and health for those in need. She currently consults with community and public organizations in Northern Arizona.

Sam Cullen is a Northern Arizona University Political Science graduate who served as the Trust recorder.

Kyle Davis is a Northern Arizona University student and senator for the Associated Students of NAU. He serves as intern for the Trust.

INCLUSIVITY, RACE, CULTURE & IDENTITY

CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS:

In November 2008, Flagstaff became a “Golden Rule City” modelling itself after Arizona’s own 2003 self-designation as a “Golden Rule State”. It asserts that Flagstaff will take special effort to recognize, respect, and appreciate the diversity of cultures, faiths, and languages in Flagstaff, stating that all constitute the foundation of a successful community. The goal of the Resolution is community cohesion and mutual assistance to residents in need.

In March 2009, the City Council passed an “Inclusive Community Resolution”. The City Council reinforced its commitment to Inclusivity and opposition to discrimination by resolving that all aspects of community life be open and equal to all residents, despite race, color, creed, religion,

national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, veteran's status, age, familial status, or physical characteristics including employment, education, accommodation, and living arrangements.

The Council also sought to promote understanding between groups and individuals, as well as a recognition and enforcement of civil rights. One Community Policy Trust member defined "Inclusivity" as the act of creating an environment where all diverse parts of a system thrive.

CHALLENGES TO AN ALL- INCLUSIVE CITY:

To many Trust members, successful application of these Resolutions in the form of community acceptance, programs, and policy has been questionable. Some members described personal experiences with issues of Inclusivity and discrimination, while others shared successes and failures at a community or neighborhood level.

1. DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT:

Multiple Trust members discussed Flagstaff's diversity management through the lens of a local metaphor regarding the Methodist church land, which was previously occupied by a diverse variety of tree species. Over time, ponderosa trees obstructed the growth of all the other tree species. The Ponderosas became singularly-dominant due to a lack of conscious effort to manage tree diversity in a way that allowed all species of to thrive together.

2. GENERAL EXCLUSION:

One member stated that African-Americans represent an invisible portion of Flagstaff's general population and are rarely involved in the general community. Several Caucasian members of the Trust acknowledged the difficulty white residents face in identifying, imagining, or empathizing with the daily living experiences of other races and ethnicities.

3. A CULTURE OF FEAR:

The Trust discussed a culture of fear in Flagstaff, which transcends all manner of identities and is present in economic, cultural, and legal aspects of the community. This concept was expanded upon by other participants throughout the meeting.

Trust members concluded that fear is present on both sides of discrimination, often felt by white residents toward marginalized groups and likewise felt by marginalized groups with

respect to community institutions such as police, as well as general prejudiced treatment in their daily lives.

Both Latino and Native American communities have previously experienced this “Culture of Fear” and continue to do so, which can result in alienation that erodes respect for diversity. Older City of Flagstaff Latino residents recollect not being welcome north of the railroad tracks. Similarly, Native American communities have very little engagement with the rest of Flagstaff community members despite the City neighboring the largest reservation in the United States.

Snowmaking on Humphrey Peak (Dook’o’sliid) and banning the annual Native American Powwow deprived them of expressing Native traditions and culture within the Flagstaff community. They felt it severed their communication with tribes at the national level, as well. After the discontinuation of the Pow-wow, Tribes felt either exploited or unwelcome in the community.

Efforts to bridge gaps among ethnic groups are often met with suspicion from those they wish to value, due largely to a continuing history of discrimination. Specific to the NAU campus, one member reported the level of racial tension and its resulting behavior as “wholly appalling”.

This “Culture of Fear” has its roots in prejudices that affect Americans on a much larger scale than

The City of Flagstaff. However, Flagstaff, as an inclusive community, possesses the ability to address such issues at the city-level and work to prevent discriminatory behavior.

4. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY LEADERS:

Several Trust members described personal experiences, as well as those of relatives or friends, of encountering discriminatory behavior throughout their lives, across all professions, social statuses, and levels of authority.

Trust members who are people of color described facing regular, sometimes unintentional, Discriminatory behavior. They expressed that their experience is rarely understood by residents of non-marginalized groups. They explained that a disconnect exists between those who regularly experience discriminatory interactions and those who rarely, if at all, face the same type of behavior. The personal anecdotes were consistent through all members belonging to groups identified as traditionally marginalized.

Other Trust members communicated their personal experiences of working within the system: government, non-profit organizations, education, or other institutions and/or groups. While most of the Policy Trust found Flagstaff relatively inclusive when compared to other communities, there was also consensus that this community had much further to go. One member commented that negative, discriminatory interactions have risen significantly since that individual has become a community leader.

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS:

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INCLUSIVITY ISSUES:

The Trust agreed that deliberate efforts must be made to acknowledge that Inclusivity issues continue to exist within the City of Flagstaff. There was consensus that this acknowledgement can be accomplished by: 1) facilitating discussion that raises awareness of continuing issues of Inclusivity; 2) community dedication to resolving identified issues; and, 3) effective programs that promote resolution.

Trust members agreed that open acknowledgement and discussion are the building blocks of Inclusivity and are imperative elements for breaking down barriers of those who feel uncomfortable discussing the topic.

Out-reach to members of marginalized and non-marginalized groups needs to occur to ensure more comprehensive participation. Non-marginalized groups are frequently unaware of Inclusivity issues and marginalized groups may be unlikely to seek out discussion due to past discriminatory experiences.

Broad participation is viewed, by Trust members, as vitally important to any Inclusivity discussions. Several Trust participants noted a trend toward a lack of diversity in inclusion talks, which inevitably can forestall progress. Discussions can form a foundation for building awareness that instances of discrimination do exist within the community, despite assertions of undetectability by non-marginalized community members.

The Trust also discussed that open acknowledgement and focused discussions need to occur both in the City of Flagstaff and on the NAU campus.

2. REJECTION OF INTOLERABLE CIRCUMSTANCES:

A major driving force behind efforts toward Inclusivity is the need for the community to reject intolerable circumstances by condemning certain behaviors or systems that produce them. Several members discussed the successes and challenges of using this approach.

One Policy Trust member suggested, from personal community leadership experience, that one way to reject intolerable circumstances is to prevent individuals whose behavior is anti-inclusive from holding positions of authority.

Another stated that there is a societal double-standard in the community's response to any discriminatory behavior originating from marginalized groups while discriminatory behavior by non-marginalized groups is virtually ignored. Institutional reforms are needed to systematically reject intolerable behavior.

One Trust participant expressed the need for European Americans to stand with marginalized groups to achieve open acknowledgment of the lack of Inclusivity, using their societal privileges to contribute to a larger effort.

3. EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT:

The Trust concluded that Inclusivity will not come about naturally. It needs to be fostered and encouraged. One member stated that this effort is the responsibility of community leaders, especially elected officials who have been placed in office to serve all citizens in the community.

Trust members generally agreed that without solid policy and programs that give "teeth" to the Inclusive Community and Golden Rule City Resolutions, they hold little value for the community. The Trust's members then reviewed Inclusivity efforts that they, as community leaders, have experienced, describing those that yielded success and the elements that created success.

Several Trust members cited the need for Flagstaff to promote cultural and identity diversity through established commemorative events like Black History Month. These established events present opportunity for the City of Flagstaff and Northern Arizona University to cooperate in raising awareness and celebrating inclusion.

Other Trust members discussed the need for more diversity among elected officials, creating a system of leadership that includes all community perspectives. One member added that services and programs available to some residents must be available to all community residents.

Trust members compared this approach to giving all students in one school access to the same general curriculum, instead of continuing to omit those who have been historically excluded. Promoting Inclusivity best serves marginalized and non-marginalized groups simultaneously.

The Museum of Northern Arizona has hosted events aimed at honoring Latino and Native American cultures, using history to promote discussion and increase understanding. Though the marginalized groups were initially reluctant to participate due to a history of negative interactions with Flagstaff institutions, suspicions were overcome by willingness of the institution and the groups to have straight-forward conversations about historical perspectives.

The Museum also found success in creating a summer camp for Native American children that aimed to increase exposure to their original Tribal languages, thus using the Museum as a channel for increasing value of traditional culture and unity.

Several Trust members discussed the value of diversity support groups and inter-group mediation. This is an especially valuable model for children. One member commented that this type of discussion has been lost in modern conversations about Inclusivity among adults.

One suggested method for promoting increased dialogue is the “Café Conversation”, a model, that creates smaller conversations which ultimately blend into a larger discussion. This model utilizes both the intimacy of a smaller group, while allowing all opinions to be heard.

Finally, the Trust discussed how to better reach Flagstaff’s marginalized youth population. Youth engagement has experienced some success in several ways. One specific example is to create settings, possibly sports-related, that attract children and generate conversation forums without children having to consciously pursue them.

In addition, one Trust member cited the importance of creating positive relationships between young people and the justice system. This approach has been effective in counteracting the stigma of legal discrimination and reducing alienation among those who have had negative experiences with any part of the system.

Examples of these programs include members of the justice system speaking to children at schools and community centers; creating opportunities for young people to participate in mock trials, although the latter needs to be carefully structured to effectively reach marginalized groups. Another member discussed the importance of youth mentoring programs such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

MEETING ADJOURNED