Allegheny County
Department *of*
Human Services

Allegheny County Department of Human Services Equity and Inclusion Community Listening Sessions

Summary

Overview

- 5 Community Listening Sessions that focused on the African American, Faith, Immigrants and Refugee, Latinx, LGBTQIA+ communities
- The initial meetings were held during the weeks of April 13 and April 27th on the Microsoft Teams platform
- Invitations were sent to community leaders to join all sessions and sign up using a survey to select the sessions they would like to attend

Objectives

1. Provide an update on COVID-19 Response
2. Share our Community Engagement Strategy & provide clarity on what we can do
3. Listen to community concerns & gather feedback on ideas and plans
4. Discuss future engagement strategies & interest in creating a feedback loop

Community Concerns by Themes:
Government assistance challenges
▪ Processing assistance is also not fast enough to meet community needs
Testing site accessibility & location
▪ Individuals being discouraged when attempting to get tested
▪ Not enough testing sites and no testing sites in Black communities
▪ Individuals being told they need a PCP to get tested
▪ Vulnerable refugee community unable to get tested
▪ No testing facilities in Mon Valley, need to talk about all of Allegheny County not only the city of Pittsburgh
▪ The ability to properly quarantine
▪ Understanding access to testing sites and language services
▪ Transportation to test sites is also a challenge
▪ Guidelines to get testing are not clear
Employment
▪ Some of the community members are worried about going to work.
▪ Fear and stress on the community to continue to show up to work and lack of compliance by employers

Language Barriers
▪ Access to translation services to address language barriers
▪ The language divide is a major concern in the community. Most signs are posted namely in English by businesses like grocery stores. This is a problem when it comes to people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and go to run errands like the grocery stores and they are denied entry, then they might not understand
▪ We have heard from community members who have not been afforded language access when they called the police to report domestic violence or when they were interviewed at the station.
▪ Be mindful of language barriers within LGBT+ communities

Plans for Data by Community
▪ Concerned about low number of reported cases in Black communities because they are not being tested
▪ Race is important but so is ethnicity and the public have no access to ethnicity data that is vital to the Latinx community
▪ There is a concern about how the information on ethnicity may be used to further discriminate
▪ There is only data being collected and shared for those who identify as male and female. Other identities such as sexuality is not being shared at this time.

Accessing quarantine and housing options
▪ Unstably housed individuals accessing housing and quarantine housing
▪ Access to masks is a concern for the community. Especially accessing low-cost or free masks
▪ Rent support has been a challenge. Landlords have been mostly supportive but the long-term implications for families are concerning

Decision-making and transparency
▪ Need transparency around what they will be weighing in on and influence decision making process – holding decision makers accountable and how to make this meaningful
▪ We need to understand what enforcement looks like so that our community members don't get mistreated based on fear and misinformation.

Domestic violence
▪ Supports for individuals experiencing domestic and intimate partner violence
▪ Domestic violence issues are getting worse

Continued engagement/Advisory Board
▪ There were efforts during the SARS pandemic to build a pandemic task force. We should have something similar established on an ongoing basis
▪ Uplift and include youth voices

Technological barriers
- Internet connectivity – people who cannot access the internet and do not have a device miss out on important information   - Smaller congregations do not have internet and face more challenges when trying to move online   - At family support center we are working with families who are struggling with technology to continue homeschooling while following school guidelines. Since we are not physically there and cannot support the parent navigate technology literacy, we are unsure how to prevent kids from falling behind when parents are not able to manage the technology   - Some of the strategies that have worked to address the technology divide is setting up robo-calls for community members.   - We are relying so much on social media, but we are forgetting about people who do not have enough access to social media or traditional means of communication
Need for community-specific communication of the danger of COVID-19 to resonate
- Small prayer meetings and gatherings are not always adhering to social distancing guidance and stay-at home orders   - Non-English-speaking congregations need alternate ways to continue to practice their faith   - Having good information about safe sex during COVID-19 in a harm reduction way
Supporting individuals being released from jail
People are also being picked up from jail by immigration
Food Access
- Food access is a critical need in the community due to reduced income and ineligibility for government assistance   - Community groups are stretched thin providing food support due to limited staffing and resources.   - We are concerned about the mental health of our staff during this pandemic.   - Social isolation impacting the broader community   - Access to health care, employment, mainstream health care providers, etc.   - Mental health access, accessing services when there is a higher level of need   - There are concerns that doctors will not be able to meet the needs of the LGBTQIA+ individuals   - Access to mental health facilities   - There are concerns that trans individuals cannot access their hormone treatments and ability to work with doctors who are proficient in working with the LGBTQIA+ individuals

Messaging and communication
- Sharing information without proper context because of lack of testing in Black communities   - People being turned away from McKeesport hospital – is there a script for people to take with them when trying to get tested   - African American Strategic Partnership – working on messaging for Black communities   - We can use community organizations to spread the word about regulations and guidelines that the county announces.   - We really need this information to be disseminated since our communities are not taking this information seriously. We need the county to be doing their fair share of educating our community since we have limited capacity.   - It would be helpful if stores understand what language barriers exist in their community and post in the common language for the community outside of English.   - In UK, they are using internet radios to communicate in languages outside of English to reach LEP communities.   - We also need to work on communicating accurate timely information to our community. Translating the daily updates are helpful but it is not resonating with the Latinx community that continues to gather in large groups. Some think that isolation orders do not apply to social events like birthdays and anniversaries   - The Latinx community relies heavily on social media and smartphones. So, communications geared towards those is helpful like using Facebook and utilizing Zoom meetings that's more accessible to the larger community   - Having a lot of meetings can be challenging. I propose forming a committee that meets twice a year to address pandemic issues.
Future Engagement:
- Creating and sharing out the FAQ based on questions asked during the listening sessions   - The Office of Equity and Inclusion encourage feedback, questions and concerns that can be emailed to our email address, DHS-Equity@AlleghenyCounty.US   - Plan future community engagement meetings & advisory council.   - Uplift and include youth voices in future engagement