



THE  
LANDSCAPE



# 2020 LANDSCAPE LISTENING REPORT

PRODUCED BY:



Omaha Community  
Foundation

# INTRODUCTION - ENGAGING WITH RESIDENTS

This report highlights what we learned from engaging with over 1,700 residents during Fall 2019, to better understand their lived experiences in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region. Through both individual and small group conversations we heard from 733 residents as a result of partnership with six local nonprofit organizations: Boys & Girls Club of the Midlands, The Intercultural Senior Center, Urban League of Nebraska, 100 Black Men of Omaha, The Micah House, and Heartland Family Services' Ready in 5 Program. The Foundation also relaunched an online listening campaign, Voices of The Landscape, where we collected an additional 999 responses from local community members at [www.thelandscapeomaha.org/yourvoice](http://www.thelandscapeomaha.org/yourvoice).

In the process of sharing their stories and views, key themes emerged that broadly tell a story of how our residents are experiencing life in our region, both areas where there are opportunities for improvement, as well as areas where we have existing strengths and assets that provide pathways for residents to thrive. While many individuals talked about the pride they feel within their neighborhoods, and support they receive from friends, neighbors, or family, there was a longing for more community-wide programs and services that can lead to a better quality of life and expand access to more opportunities for themselves or their children. Diversity, equity, and power also emerged as strong themes for community stakeholders to prioritize as we consider how to create a welcoming, equitable city that reflects, respects, and celebrates the differences of our residents.

**6**  
NONPROFITS

**5**  
MONTHS

**733**  
RESIDENTS  
engaged via in-person  
conversations

**999**  
RESPONSES  
collected online

**5**  
THEMES  
emerged

# DATA ANALYSIS + POLICY REVIEW + RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Our purpose is to learn from both data and residents, and to understand the systems that prevent people from accessing the many opportunities in our community. Ultimately, The Landscape is an approach for knowing the community—both its assets and opportunities—and for understanding how to invest in its future. Our goal is to build a community investment strategy that allows OCF to affect change within our community and to invite donors, funders, and nonprofits to join us in this pursuit.

## PRINCIPLES OF THE LANDSCAPE

- **RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT:** To ensure that people most affected by the issues outlined in The Landscape have a voice in determining priorities and designing solutions.
- **EQUITY & OPPORTUNITY:** To address systemic inequities that prevent people from accessing opportunities that allow them to thrive.
- **INVESTMENT:** To provide a framework for donors and other partners to understand the community, and make informed decisions to guide their philanthropic investments.

Understanding both the assets and opportunities helps us understand pathways where we can work to improve the quality of life and expand access and opportunity for all residents in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region.

This report details the findings from the Foundation’s listening campaign.



OMAHA • CARTER LAKE • COUNCIL BLUFFS



# TOP 10 COMMUNITY LISTENING WORDS

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- 1 PRIDE
- 2 SCHOOLS
- 3 MENTAL HEALTH
- 4 SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS
- 5 AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- 6 SEGREGATION
- 7 REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP
- 8 TRANSPORTATION
- 9 SUPPORT
- 10 YOUTH AND CHILDCARE

# DIVERSITY, CULTURE, AND POWER

*Despite being a diverse city, the community often feels segregated, and those who hold power or leadership positions are not necessarily representative of all residents.*

## CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SEGREGATION

- Some individuals shared stories illustrating a lack of general cultural competency within the broader community that can contribute to feelings of isolation or segregation for some. There is a need for the community to better embrace and celebrate the different cultures of residents living in the metro area.
- A common theme was a desire to bring more people together from different cultures and backgrounds.
- Residents expressed that there is a sentiment of being afraid for people to come together which weakens the community overall and prevents collaboration amongst and between residents.

**50%** of people who participated in the Voices of The Landscape listening said that they had **experienced discrimination**

## LEADERSHIP AND POWER

- There was a strong desire shared by many listening participants to shift power and ensure that people from many different backgrounds were able to have their voices heard and have the ability to make change within the region. One resident remarked that “we should not make others change their culture in order to be heard....those in power must solicit and accept their input.
- Residents expressed that they would like to see their culture or background more reflected in positions of power, and certain professions (i.e. doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, etc)
- Individuals shared a sense of pride for living in a diverse community. A welcome community that celebrated different cultures was seen as a point of pride for many participants.

“More events that bring people of all kinds together, that embraces different cultures.”

“We should not make others change their culture in order to be heard. Our community has dreams and ideas. We (those in “power”) must solicit and accept their input.”

## → WHAT WE LEARNED ←

- More diverse representation in community leadership to guide our city is needed. It’s important to ensure leadership and power are reflective of the community’s make-up so that decisions affecting the community reflect multiple lived experiences.
- Residents desire opportunities to create a more connected community and are looking to create public spaces where people of different cultures and backgrounds can come together, as a way of seeking understanding and learning more about our community members as a whole.

# BASIC NEEDS

***A living wage, strong benefits, and affordable housing options are critical for our community’s residents to gain economic independence.***

## HIGHER WAGES, BENEFITS, AND CHILDCARE

- Participants shared that they are grateful to be employed, however often their wages do not provide enough to meet their basic needs. Many individuals spoke about the desire for economic independence and said that higher wages or better employment benefits would help them achieve this.
- Several residents cited the importance of childcare options or after-school programming as a necessity for them being able to work the hours necessary to earn enough and support their families.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- People also frequently talked about housing—but with different viewpoints. Some listening participants expressed gratitude to simply have a roof over their heads. However many residents talk about how there is not enough affordable housing within our community.
- Residents also frequently identified homelessness as an issue. However, it was not in the context of their own experience, but rather a perception of what they thought others were experiencing.

## TRANSPORTATION

- Participants shared that they are seeking more public transit options for themselves and their families.
- People often talked about the need for more bus lines that are accessible to more parts of the city. They also highlighted that public transit is often not effective or safe during winter months, especially if people must wait at bus stops that are not enclosed.
- Residents also shared that there is an added difficulty in accessing or understanding public transit if English is not their first language.

“The (after school program) works very well! It provides a safe place for my son to build life skills, while I work and provide for my family.”

“(I want to) be able to have more access to transportation to get to farther places.”

“Much more affordable housing is needed.”

## WHAT WE LEARNED

- While having stable employment is important, earning a living wage and having access to strong benefits are critical to creating stability and gaining economic independence.
- Quality, affordable, safe housing options remain a strong need within our community.

# HEALTH & SAFETY

*Leading a healthy, safe life is a foundational element to an individual's quality of life.*

## ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE HEALTH SERVICES

- Participants talked about needing more access to both basic health services, and specialized services like mental health or addiction support services.
- There was feedback from residents that the cost of health services can often be a barrier to getting the medical care they need.

## NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

- A common theme that emerged was the importance of clean, safe neighborhoods. Many individuals shared that they desired safer, cleaner sidewalks and roads, as well as working streetlights within their neighborhood.
- Residents often tied drug use to their safety and brought up the presence of gangs in their communities. They identified a strong need for increased youth programming as alternatives to drug use or other criminal activity.



“I [also] think that young adults ages 19-26 and those in high school with mental health issues lack affordable and appropriate options for housing and services.”

“One of the things that need to be improved is that we should create more activities for the young people...”

## → WHAT WE LEARNED ←

- While access to physical health services are a necessity, mental health (including addiction) services is an increasingly important need in our community because of its connection to overall safety and health.
- Increasing opportunities for youth to connect with others and create support systems are important components of a healthy neighborhood and community.
- Often the simple things like clean streets, fixed sidewalks, and streetlights can make a significant difference in creating safe, secure neighborhoods.

# CONNECTIVITY

*Residents take pride in their neighborhoods, and often rely on neighbors for support and connection.*

## PRIDE OF PLACE

- Pride was a strong theme amongst listening participants: pride in their neighborhood, their city, or the part of town where they live. Many individuals highlighted their neighborhoods and shared gratitude about where they came from. Residents were eager to share neighborhood pride, while also cautioning that some are quick to make assumptions—especially related to safety—about certain parts of Omaha.

**90%** of people who participated in our online Voices of the Landscape listening said they are proud of their neighborhood



## STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS

- The importance of strong neighborhoods also emerged as a theme in the listening sessions. Residents often shared that feeling safe within their community was important to feel better connected. Additionally, many individuals highlighted the importance of their neighbors as a support system and how strong local neighborhood ties were critical to feeling like they are happy, healthy, and fulfilled.

“So I’m not saying that Omaha doesn’t have its problems, but I think we should be really careful about building this narrative in our heads that we don’t live in a safe place.”

“I love living on Florence Boulevard. I have lived there six years and have witnessed major positive changes in my time there. The pride of home ownership is showing!!”

## → WHAT WE LEARNED ←

- Residents feeling a sense of pride in their neighborhood is an important foundation to feeling solid community connections overall.
- People are seeking more community events or public places that offer opportunities for socialization, especially more affordable youth programs and activities.



# SUPPORT NETWORKS

*Many residents rely heavily on friends and family for basic supports.*

## FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Listening session participants overwhelmingly shared that support networks were critical, and that these networks could take many forms. Sometimes assistance came through emotional or social support, and often it was financial or domestic support such as childcare. For example, one resident spoke of having their nephews mow their lawn; others spoke of having their children do small paid tasks to earn money for the family, like cleaning a neighbor's home. Support for listening participants comes through family, friends, neighborhood, faith organizations, schools or nonprofits. One resident shared that the first place they ask for help is at their children's school, and how that has been not only a resource, but a network of individuals who care deeply about this individual and her family.

93%

of people who participated in our online  
Voices of the Landscape listening said they  
have someone they can depend on



## GANGS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Gangs were frequently identified by listening session participants as a challenge within the community. Many residents often brought up gangs in the context of safety and how the presence of gangs and the violence that stems from gang activity hurts the overall image and perception of safety in a community. Many also cited that gang association can be a result of insufficient support systems and broader systemic issues within a community, and that there should be more resources to create positive support networks to stem the number of youth affiliating with gangs.

“My community is great and I know the people here have my back. I have lived here my whole life and knowing that this small community comes together at times for the right things makes me happy.”

“So, why do you think some young individuals try to associate themselves with gangs? They think that's all they have.”

## → WHAT WE LEARNED ←

- The opportunity to give and receive help amongst friends, family, and neighbors helps establish strong support systems.
- The local school system and nonprofit organizations often serve as the strongest or most present systems of support for many low-income residents.

# CONCLUSION

Where we live and who we interact with on a daily basis is instrumental in determining how we experience a community. We heard this loud and clear from the 1,700-plus residents who participated in this listening campaign.

Connections and support networks continue to be two the strongest themes that emerged. While the support networks can take many forms—there was also universal concern for those who lack a strong support network, and the challenges that can stem from feeling disconnected to a community. Gangs were explicitly mentioned by many listening participants as a community challenge that stems from lack of support systems.

Many residents also felt that as a community we are not addressing basic needs for all people. While there are some positive changes in terms of employment, there is still an opportunity to grow wages and benefits to put people on a path to economic independence and provide greater access to other basic services like healthcare or transportation.

We also heard a resounding feeling of pride around community—whether it was pride for their neighborhood, or the region overall. The pride often translated into feelings of optimism and gratitude for residents, even in the face of hardship.

Considering how to channel this pride into an opportunity to engage residents in thinking about the future of the region, in celebrating the region’s diversity, and in growing an engaged, inclusive community are critical for the Omaha Community Foundation to consider as we use these findings to drive our work.

\*The quotes appearing throughout this report represent the perspectives shared by residents through listening, and don’t necessarily reflect the views of the Omaha Community Foundation.