

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Conversations with community members are a key part of planning for recovery. A central element of the vision for recovery involves recognizing that the negative impacts of the pandemic were and are not evenly distributed. Numerous studies and reports have shown that COVID-19 has had disparate impacts on different socioeconomic and demographic groups, including workers in low-wage positions, caregivers, and people of color.

Grounded in this knowledge and guided by the desire to center equity in creating a vision for recovery, the City of Fort Collins engaged with thousands of community members through events, paid partnerships with community organizations, surveys and other methods.

The primary objectives of Recovery Plan Engagement include:

- Gather community input and needs to inform creation of recovery plan.
- Connect with and gather feedback from underrepresented groups, focus on inclusive engagement and language access.
- Incorporate feedback from other recent and ongoing engagement processes to help inform recovery (data from City Plan, Our Climate Future etc. and include recovery as a topic in Community Survey, East Mulberry and Budget engagement).
- Gather ideas for recovery programs, identify community needs for recovery and a future that is resilient, vibrant and inclusive.
- Develop clear recovery plan and recommendations to achieve vision based on community feedback.

Process and Methods

Engagement began in spring of 2021, ramping up in summer and fall. Phase 1 of engagement focused on understanding ongoing challenges and impacts of the pandemic, while also asking what long-term recovery looks like to the community.

Engagement was designed to meet the needs of different audiences in the community, and to center hard-hit and historically underserved residents. This included online and mailed surveys in English and Spanish, digital, print and radio ads, stakeholder meetings, and paid partnerships with community connectors and organizations, among other methods. Final participation numbers include:

- 2,200+ online survey responses
- 220+ responses from OurCity Platform
- Approx. 25 paper survey responses
- 50+ stakeholder meetings

After the creation of the draft Recovery Plan, additional public engagement (Phase 3) will occur to gauge if community priorities for recovery are accurately reflected in the plan. Multiple tools will be used for this engagement, including online surveying and additional stakeholder conversations.

Public engagement does not stop with plan adoption. Future conversations with the community will be needed to help uncover the specific programs and mechanisms needed to support residents' unique paths towards recovery. Throughout plan implementation additional engagement and outreach will be conducted to ensure continued alignment between community needs and offered programs and services. Ongoing engagement will also allow nimbleness to respond to emerging challenges and impacts of the pandemic.

Results

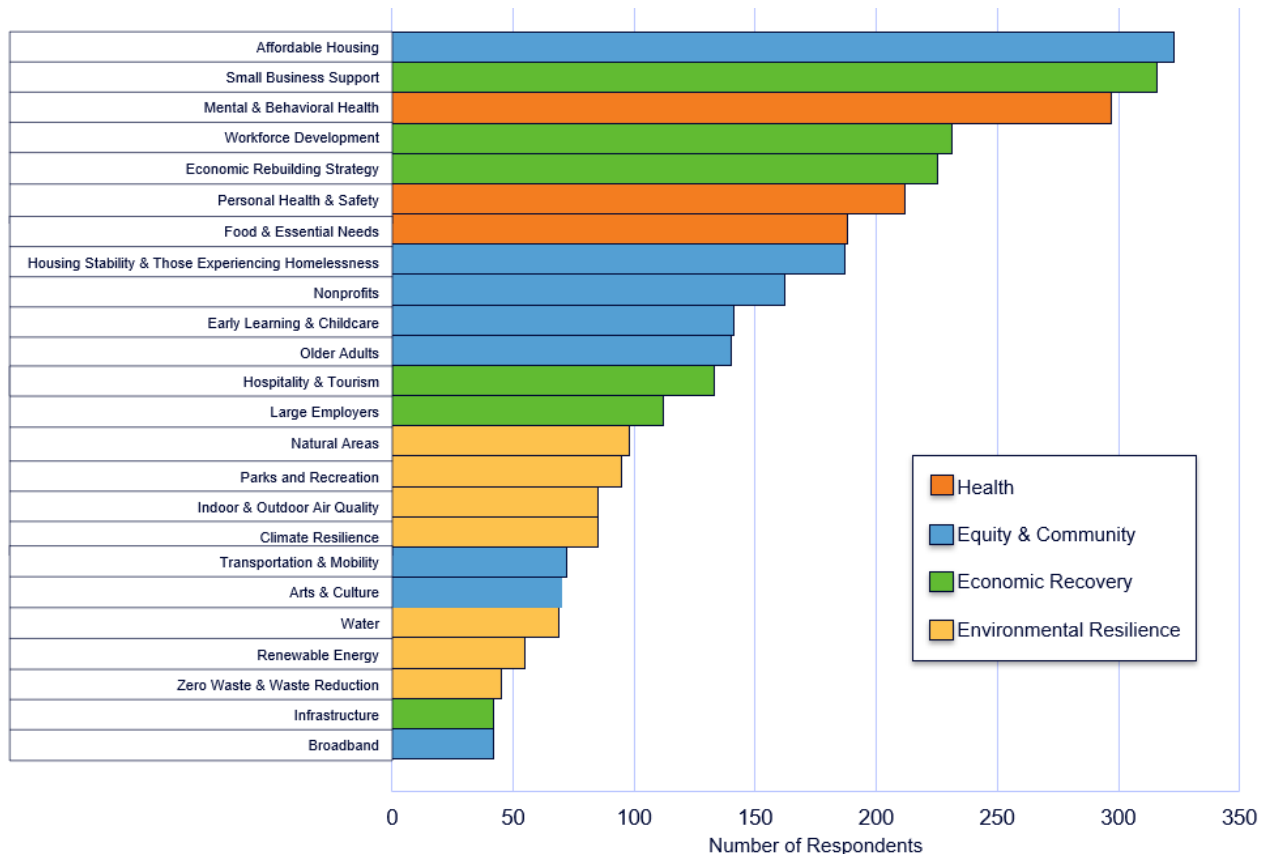
Analysis of open-ended responses yielded four key themes for recovery:

- empower individuals and businesses through strong pandemic response programs;
- bolster community organizations, networks, and spaces that provide direct assistance, and center those most impacted;

- remove barriers to resilience; and
- invest in infrastructure and amenities to support a vibrant future.

The following graph displays Priority Areas for recovery as identified by survey respondents. Respondents chose their top 5 priorities for recovery based on the list below.

Affordable housing, small business support, mental & behavioral health, workforce development and economic rebuilding strategy ranked highest; however, it is important to note that not all parts of the Fort Collins community have the same top priorities. For example, mixed-methods analysis highlighted that for many, essential needs and health and safety ranked highest. For others, recovery didn't even resonate – it felt too soon to talk about recovery when the crisis is ongoing.



In many ways, the community's responses align with existing priorities and plans. Specifically, many responses highlighted the need for community mental health services, affordable housing, higher wages, and access to childcare.

Participants recognized that recovery will not be a straightforward or linear journey. Rather than understanding the four themes as "steps" in the process of recovery, the City should focus on pairing centralized policy and investment with decentralized programs and access points for the community. This will remove barriers to success and allow residents to access the programs and resources they need for healing and resilience.

Full Qualitative Engagement Report

The following is the report of the qualitative mixed methods analysis completed for Phase One public engagement for the recovery plan.

Community Guidance for Recovery Planning

Prepared by Cactus Consulting, LLC in partnership with the City of Fort Collins Recovery Plan Team

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people work, attend school, receive healthcare, and socialize. Nearly two years after the first public health orders, the City of Fort Collins (“the City”) and its residents continue to grapple with high transmission rates and significant uncertainty related to the virus and its variants. In the midst of this uncertainty, the City is set to receive \$28.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to address the pandemic and its negative impacts on the community.

Conversations with community members are a key part of planning for recovery. As the community continues to heal, the City’s vision for recovery is that all Fort Collins residents and businesses can participate in a resilient, vibrant and inclusive future. A central element of this vision involves recognizing that the negative impacts of the pandemic were and are not evenly distributed. Numerous studies and reports have shown that COVID-19 has had disparate impacts on different socioeconomic and demographic groups, including workers in low-wage positions, caregivers, and people of color.

Grounded in this knowledge and guided by the desire to center equity in creating a vision for recovery, the City of Fort Collins engaged with thousands of community members through events, paid partnerships with community organizations, and surveys. This report reviews the open-ended responses gathered from these engagement methods.

Analysis of open-ended responses yielded four key themes for recovery:

- empower individuals and businesses through strong pandemic response programs;
- bolster community organizations, networks, and spaces that provide direct assistance, and center those most impacted;
- remove barriers to resilience; and
- invest in infrastructure and amenities to support a vibrant future

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Participants recognized that recovery will not be a straightforward or linear journey. Rather than understanding the four themes as “steps” in the process of recovery, the City should focus on pairing centralized policy and investment with decentralized programs and access points for the community. This will remove barriers to success and allow residents to access the programs and resources they need for healing and resilience. Future conversations with the community will be needed to help uncover the specific programs and mechanisms needed to support residents’ unique paths towards recovery.

The Process

The City of Fort Collins began engagement in spring of 2021 in preparation for developing a Recovery Plan. This engagement has focused on understanding ongoing challenges and impacts of the pandemic, while also asking what long-term recovery looks like to our community.

Engagement was designed to meet the needs of different audiences in the community, and to center hard-hit and historically underserved residents. This included online and mailed surveys in English and Spanish, digital, print and radio ads, stakeholder meetings, and paid partnerships with community connectors and organizations, among other methods. Final participation numbers include:

- 2,200+ online survey responses
- 220+ responses from OurCity
- Approx. 25 paper survey responses
- 50+ stakeholder meetings

Though this includes some individual responses from small business owners, there was also separate engagement of small businesses. Information on that engagement will be available in Economic Recovery reports.

Engagement questions included:

- What impacts of the pandemic are you still seeing or experiencing?
- What would help?
- What would make our community stronger?

Though some demographic and rating questions were included in surveys, this report focuses on analyzing the responses to open-ended questions for key themes. Quantitative analysis can be incredibly powerful for answering specific questions. However, qualitative analysis that focuses on stories rather than numbers is often more effective for exploratory questions like the ones above. It emphasizes leaving space for community inspiration and direction, and finding commonalities across responses rather than ranking ideas against each other.

More information about the analysis is available as an appendix to this report. Some community partners developed their own reports with additional qualitative analysis of the responses they gathered. These reports are also included as an appendix.

Community Guidance for Recovery Planning

The following sections attempt to tell a story about the values, priorities, and ideas the Fort Collins community envisions as part of recovery efforts. The first section provides a response to the City's Recovery Vision to test its alignment with community sentiment. The next section highlights key themes for recovery that move from more specific and immediate needs to longer-term, more structural changes needed to improve community resilience, along with potential actions suggested by participants to help the community recovery.

Community Vision for Recovery

The City's Recovery Executive Team outlined a Recovery Vision—that **all Fort Collins residents and businesses can participate in a resilient, vibrant and inclusive future**—along with four “vision words”—**healing, inclusion, resilience, and vibrancy**. While participants were not asked specifically to respond to these ideas, responses indicate alignment between community values and the vision laid out by the City. The following section outlines the ways that the community understands and discusses each vision area.

HEALING

the process of making or becoming sound or healthy again

Participants shared many types of losses experienced during the pandemic, including lost loved ones, lost income, and lost trust in other members of the community. In addition, some mourned the loss of learning and social opportunities for youth. Participants identified the importance of recognizing losses and restoring a sense of safety and stability as key steps in the healing process. The concept of reestablishing community trust through forums or events was also proposed.

INCLUSION

an intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Inclusion requires removing barriers so all can thrive

Participants recognized that not all residents experienced the same level of impact or needed the same level of support to recover from the effects of the pandemic. Many highlighted that underlying issues like housing affordability were made worse for many over the course of the pandemic. Some participants requested additional focus on recovery for immigrant communities, low-income residents, and people experiencing homelessness. In addition, participants strongly identified with the goal of removing barriers to success. Specifically, they noted the importance of removing barriers for small businesses, workers in the creative sector, parents, Spanish-speaking residents, people experiencing homelessness, and LGBTQIA+ residents. For many historically underserved populations, including Latinx residents and LGBTQIA+ residents, there was a strong desire for more representation in future decision-making to demonstrate “follow-through” from the City on their stated goal of inclusion.

RESILIENCE

the ability to better avoid, withstand, or recover from difficult conditions of various scales

Participants recognized the important work of nonprofit organizations and City-sponsored programs in connecting community members with resources to help them weather tough times. Latinx community members also cited their families as sources of resilience and hope during times of adversity. The idea of resilience was frequently intertwined with discussion of removing barriers. Specifically, many participants recognized low wages and high cost-of-living as a significant barrier to financial resilience.

VIBRANCY

sense of place and belonging for all, full of energy and enthusiasm

Respondents envisioned a future, with strong, sustainable transportation networks, well-maintained community amenities like parks, pools, and natural areas, affordable housing, and a strong arts and culture sector. For many, a vibrant future was closely intertwined with meeting the goals of existing City plans, including the Our Climate Future Plan and the Housing Strategic Plan. While many responses suggested leveraging the Recovery Plan efforts to make progress on existing goals and initiatives, it is important to note that some respondents were in favor of utilizing a strict interpretation of recovery that focused on direct and immediate impacts and excluded any support for housing or sustainability.

Community Priorities for Recovery

The following key themes begin with more immediate and specific needs for healing, and ripple out towards broader initiatives that support resilience and vibrancy in our community. Each key theme includes information on the role that the City can play, and some potential actions suggested by respondents. It is important to note that the potential actions suggested are not an exhaustive list, and should not be considered a mandate from the community. Responses varied widely in their specificity. For example, some responses just noted “affordable housing” was needed, while others detailed specific policies related to changing zoning laws or creating supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness. An important part of future recovery efforts will be ongoing opportunities for community idea generation, feedback, and leadership.

Empower individuals and businesses through strong pandemic response programs.

Responses indicate that it is vital to provide ongoing pandemic response in addition to planning for and investing in community recovery. This includes sharing clear public health guidance and providing supplies to support safe and stable workplaces, public transportation, childcare facilities, schools, and community events.

Participants reported experiencing significant fear, frustration, and uncertainty related to how to safely navigate work and everyday activities as the effects of the pandemic linger. As one person shared,

I am still very worried about my health and the health of those I love, even with some people getting vaccinated.

For many, this manifested as fear and uncertainty related to being in public places. Others worried that employers were not taking the necessary precautions to keep them safe, and felt that they were being forced to choose between financial stability and their health.

While some businesses reported seeing rebounds to pre-pandemic levels, others, including members of the creative sector and employees of nonprofits and childcare centers shared a very different story. According to one participant,

We are experiencing greatly reduced audience support related to closed/reduced venues, mixed messages about safety, reduced employment for musicians. This pandemic is far from over- so we are looking for new ways to move forward.

La Cocina’s ethnographic report noted that their participants said it was “too soon to talk recovery.” Their participants expressed a desire for the community to find solidarity in this moment, noting that a huge first step would be for the City to affirm that the organization is here for its residents, particularly those who have been historically underserved, during these difficult times.

Mental health was also a large part of this conversation. For many, the uncertainty around public health remains a source of significant anxiety, adding to the feelings of social isolation and loss that have accumulated since the beginning of the pandemic. As one person shared,

There needs to be expanded access to mental health services...Providers are overwhelmed and spaces are limited, especially for those who offer services outside of traditional work hours. There has to be some relief...None of us are doing okay.

Responses gathered from Spanish-speaking residents, particularly parents with school-aged children, also highlighted the need for more mental health services in Spanish.

Participants also shared their struggles with consistent childcare, noting that COVID guidelines and frequent exposures were causing their children to miss school or daycare and impacting their ability to work. As one person stated,

[We need] more security around childcare and in-person schooling - it feels like the bottom will drop out at any moment and that makes it impossible to grow in our careers, business decisions, etc.

Finally, some noted that the continued reduction in Transfort service was a source of stress and instability, and requested that the City restore service, particularly for later evening hours, to assist with reliable transportation to appointments and workplaces.

While most community members who mentioned public health in their responses were in favor of additional measures related to combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to note that some community members were opposed and expressed a desire for a more “hands-off” approach to public health. Vaccination mandates were particularly controversial, with some participants requesting additional mandates for workplaces and large events, and others opposing any mandates. Participants were more supportive of the City amplifying public health messages than creating policies.

Recommended City Role: Communication, leadership, connection, service provision

Potential Actions: Coordinate with Larimer County Health Department to amplify public health messages ♦ Provide masks, rapid tests, and other public health supplies to individuals and businesses, especially parents and childcare providers ♦ Communicate to community members, especially Latinx residents, that the City stands with them in solidarity ♦ Support opportunities for increased mental health services, including virtual and in-person services, and Spanish-language services ♦ Reinstate Transfort service to provide reliable transportation services to the community, and provide masks onboard for those who need them.

Bolster community organizations, networks, and spaces that provide direct assistance, and center those most impacted

Participants recognized that not everyone was affected equally by the pandemic, and prioritized support for hard-hit groups, including youth, immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, low-wage workers, small business owners, freelancers, and people working in the arts industry. As one person shared,

The need for affordable housing, food, and taking care of our community members that need help because they may not have family or friends to help them has become a much

more obvious issue to me. The economy and health risks have hurt these people that were already hurting before the pandemic. This is an emergency now.

Because each person's experience of the pandemic was unique, respondents recognized that each person's path to recovery would be unique. Rather than requesting specific programs or types of assistance from the City, many requested additional support for nonprofits that provide direct aid to those hardest hit by the pandemic. Suggested recipients of support included organizations that:

- serve people experiencing homelessness,
- provide low-cost childcare and educational and social programs for youth,
- provide emergency assistance for rent, food, and other basic needs, and
- support freelancers, small businesses, and workers in the "arts economy."

For many residents, those in historically underserved groups in particular, the City has not been a central resource or access point in the past. Community organizations and family members have filled those gaps, and are seen as best positioned to bolster recovery efforts.

Community members also expressed a need for healing spaces and events to restore community trust and cohesion. For many in the community, including some Latinx respondents, it was important for the City to acknowledge community contributions during the pandemic, and recognize the physical, emotional, and financial losses experienced. The ethnographic report from La Cocina also highlighted the need for "generative spaces" that provide safety, honor identity, and promote connection with family and friends. Others also identified community events as an important opportunity for connection, and requested the revival or addition of new events. As one participant shared:

Fort Collins could definitely be more of a community. There is not a lot of pull together. I would like to see the community have community days and neighbor events

Some highlighted the opportunity for arts events and creative spaces or "hubs" to be an important element of this healing. As one participant suggested,

Some unifying experiences will help alleviate the divides and fears. Art can be that experience. Art can unite us.

Overall, respondents envisioned the City strengthening the networks and spaces in the community that provide support, healing, and resilience. While relationships between the City and the community are an important part of trust and future resilience, participants did not see them as a precursor to recovery efforts. Rather, through recognition and support of community organizations and spaces, the City can expedite recovery, build community capacity, and enhance its relationships with community members.

Recommended City Role: Support, capacity-building, connection

Potential Actions: Assist local organizations providing support for immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, and low-wage workers ♦ Provide support for organizations and spaces serving youth,

such as Boys & Girls Clubs ♦ Support local organizations serving small businesses and freelancers, including coworking spaces, creative hubs, makers spaces and shared digital marketplaces ♦ Identify key leverage points where skills and resources could spread throughout the community and reach historically underserved populations ♦ Consider opportunities to support generative spaces that provide opportunities for healing and connection. ♦ Consider opportunities to support additional communitywide events ♦ Utilize local artists and arts organization as cornerstone of healing

Remove barriers to resilience

As participants considered the move from immediate recovery to longer-term resilience, many focused on the ways the City could remove barriers, especially barriers to economic resilience. For many, childcare presents a significant barrier to employment and financial stability. Even more frequently, low wages were identified as a barrier to resilience and stability. Participants mentioned the high cost of living and noted that wages, even for many full-time jobs, were not keeping pace. As one person stated,

[Fort Collins] is a great place to live for individuals who are middle class to upper class, but things are getting more and more expensive and a lot of minority groups are getting left behind/cannot afford to be here.

Responses in Spanish, which were received later in 2021, also mentioned the impact of inflation on the cost of living, and the need for increased wages to keep up with increasing costs.

Responses also suggested a mismatch between the jobs available, and the skills and needs of those looking for work. Some individuals and business owners lamented the difficulties of staffing and the feeling that individuals are choosing not to work in available jobs. Alternately, many individuals stated that they wanted additional work and/or hours, but could not find work to meet their skills and needs. As one person shared,

[I need] better pay and more hours. Workforce development would be HUGE! I want to better myself but cannot afford to get more education.

This disconnect between employers and residents suggests a need for a community-wide understanding of the economy to understand what skills businesses need, what skills individuals have, and how best to match these together. This information could drive targeted workforce development programs, as well as identify opportunities to incentivize new industries that draw on community skills.

Recommended City Role: Policy, connection, program development

Potential Actions: Explore policies to increase wages ♦ Expand community childcare capacity ♦ Understand and address the mismatch between worker skills and open positions ♦ Emphasize skill development and capacity-building for individuals, businesses, and nonprofits

Invest in infrastructure and amenities to support a vibrant future

Participants expressed a desire for improved roads and intersections, enhanced bike trails, high-quality community recreation (including parks, pools, and natural areas), and expanded public transportation. As one participant shared,

The pandemic showed us how valuable open space is to our mental as well as physical health. I would like to see Fort Collins focus on maintaining clean and safe open space areas. While obtaining new open space would be great, a lot of the existing spaces are getting loved to death and could use some help.

While the above comment highlights the need for maintenance of community amenities, some responses also requested new open spaces, parks, pools, or venues (both indoors and outdoors) for community events and performances.

Schools and affordable housing were also mentioned as areas for additional investment. One participant described the importance of investment in affordable housing by saying,

Our city will face many more challenges in the future if we don't use ARPA funding to build infrastructure to address the needs [of people experiencing homelessness].

Finally, while sustainability was cited less frequently than affordable housing as an important priority, some participants also saw this as an opportunity to advance towards Our Climate Future goals, and called for using sustainability as a “lens” or reference point as decisions are being made for recovery.

Recommended City Role: Strategic investment, leadership

Potential Actions: Explore opportunities for targeted investment in housing, transportation, community recreation with affordability, equity, and sustainability in mind.

Conclusion

As the City continues to balance the need for immediate response with a plan for healing and recovery, conversations that recognize and honor diverse lived experience and provide opportunities for community leadership will be vital. **Just as the pandemic has affected residents differently, recovery has been and will continue to be a different journey for everyone.** A focus on pairing centralized policy and investment with decentralized programs and access points for the community will allow each resident to receive what they need for healing, inclusion, resilience, and vibrancy.

Positionality Statement

Though we hope that the community priorities identified accurately represent the collective engagement of thousands of community members, we recognize that data collection and analysis is inherently influenced by our personal experiences and biases. In this case, the coding for this report was grounded in the researcher's experience as an able-bodied white woman.

BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPEDITION

"RECUPERACION IS RECOVERING OUR IDENTITY"

A small n' mighty data set collected in partnership with The City of Fort Collins

Authors: Janina E. Fariñas, Alejandra Magaña, Claudia Perez & Karen Sandoval

Fort Collins, Colorado

November 8, 2021

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an onset of new and challenging hardships to communities throughout the globe and to our very own hometown of Fort Collins, Colorado. To date, COVID-19 related hardships remain stacked in excess of preexisting upstream factors heightened by the stresses of the pandemic. Recognizing that many Fort Collins residents report feeling as though they are still amidst a crisis, the City of Fort Collins began paving the road to recovery by engaging community-based organizations (CBO's) to listen to community members' experiences during the pandemic. To this end, La Cocina conducted one-on-one interviews with Latinx persons who live, work, and/or play in Fort Collins. Referred to as a Brief Ethnographic Expedition, this report presents findings from a short-term series of engagements that highlight Latinxs lived experiences of recovery, and which honor Latinxs' community members' stories illustrative of both large and small pathways leading to healing, and critical to codesigning recovery with those most impacted by the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. SCOPE & PURPOSE

The City of Fort Collins is set to receive \$28.1 million of the nearly \$6 billion American Rescue Plan Act funds received by the State of Colorado and other communities. These funds will be spent over the course of the next three and a half years to aid in recovery efforts. The City recognizes recovery as a multi-faceted, multi-year process, and seeks to build a comprehensive plan that will center under-resourced communities' needs. As well, as the City considers long-term recovery plans, the Economic Health Department has identified a need for public-private partnerships that better represent the interests and cultural values of historically under-resourced communities. Intentional and culturally responsive community outreach and engagement is a crucial step in the City's efforts to build back stronger with an equity-first mindset. The City of Fort Collins partnered with La Cocina to learn about the agency's unique codesign and participatory methodologies employed in better n' deeper listening, and in order to glean from these activities core codesign elements mostly available in "small and smaller data sets" (Krause, H., 2021) which center the experiences of those most impacted by the wicked-problems seeking to be solved.

Goals established as part of this partnership:

1. To employ La Cocina's community participatory action methodologies as a way to listen "better and more deeply," (WeAllCount, 2021) in the interest of centering under-represented community voices expert at guiding equitable decision-making.

2. To bridge relationships between the City of Fort Collins and residents self-identified as Latinxs who live, play and/or work in Fort Collins.
3. To increase the City's understanding of what is needed to begin the recovery codesign process.
4. To introduce the City of Fort Collins to L'Ancla's and La Cocina's empathic interviewing and inquiry process focused on highlighting stories that introduce hopefulness as the community's North Star, and that orient the City to critical and foundational frameworks for how to intentionally codesign equitable recovery activities.
5. To make preliminary recommendations accordingly.

III. METHODS

La Cocina employed semi-structured ethnographic interviews to learn about Latinx community members' lived experiences of recovery. Interviewers' protocols were aimed at deepening empathic learning of experiences which community members describe as generative of hopefulness. Please note that participants direct quotes/words have been placed in quotations.

a. What is Ethnography?

Utilized broadly by social scientists, ethnography is a qualitative research method that involves deep immersion into a particular community, organization, and/or culture. While limited in scope due to deadlines related to the City's efforts, La Cocina was able to conduct a total of seven individual interviews, and one group ethnographic interview.

b. Participants and Sample

- Individual interviews with seven Latinx Fort Collins community members conducted in both English and Spanish
- Group interview with five City of Fort Collins community members conducted in Spanish
- **Total number of individual contacts = 7, including:**
 - 1 Latinx male-identified individual
 - 6 Latinx female-identified individuals
 - Zip codes represented: 80521 and 80524
- **Total number of group contacts = 1 x 5 residents per group, including:**
 - 5 Latinx female-identified individuals
 - 5 Spanish-speaking
 - Zip code represented: 80524
- **Interest and Participation**
 - Total number of participants interviewed = 12
 - Total number of no-shows and/or cancellations = 1
 - Total number of additional interested participants requesting interview(s)/on waiting list = 7

IV. FINDINGS

Community based participatory action methods (CBPAR) include a collaborative approach that involves generating empathy throughout the inquiry process. In

addition to CBPAR innovations, La Cocina strongly recommends a Human Centered Design Framework as a way to build generative outcomes throughout the recovery plan development process. Together these key methodologies help uncover important leverage points that may be cultivated in the interest of gathering a more robust data set in the future, and for building a strong community codesign infrastructure for the City of Fort Collins' now and into the future.

Utilizing a Grounded Theory approach which seeks to distinguish emerging patterns of experience in data sets, La Cocina identified a series of areas of opportunity for the City of Fort Collins. As such, La Cocina introduces the following as priority focus areas worthy of additional exploration and follow-up:

1. TOO SOON TO TALK RECOVERY

Both individual and group participants shared stories that suggest the impacts of the pandemic are actively moving through our Latinx communities, and which support a step-wise approach to recovery efforts. Jointly participants presented a picture of recovery beyond the pandemic and included examples of ways they have partially recovered in spite significant barriers and at times, unsurmountable suffering and loss, both now and long before the pandemic. While some might interpret this as resilience, interviews more closely resemble laments—passionate expressions of sorrow and grief which when “heard” in unison bind participants in a single story of dignified courage, and a succinct set of instructions for how to use dignity and courageous action as a way to aspire to respite and healing.

What follows are ways for the City of Fort Collins to first hear and join in their lament, and to build on the light each shines on our shared paths to recovery.

2. BEGIN BY SAYING, “ESTOY AQUI, I AM HERE”

Group participants expressed a strong sense of resonance and identification with one participant's story about how hearing the words, “Estoy aqui, *I am here*,” from a friend helped her get through the pandemic. Group participants made meaning of their peer's story, adding that hearing these words “means everything! It makes the load lighter;” “It means we're here with you”, and “It makes us feel cared for.”

When interviewers asked, “what would change if the City of Fort Collins said to you, “*estoy aqui, I am here*?” Respondents said they would feel:

- Included
- Important
- Valued
- Safe
- Free
- And, one participant said, “the identity of the City would be recovered.”

While the City of Fort Collins saying, “Estoy aqui; *I am here*” to the Latinx community may appear like a small, perhaps insignificant first step, this gesture of inclusion is identified by interviewees as significant. When genuine narratives identified by

community members as meaningful are centered above dominant narratives, the community feels assured that their City leaders have their backs--a basic need not fully met throughout the pandemic, and consequently identified herein as a salient community need, and an integral codesign choice point oriented to recovery efforts.

An individual interviewee also centered the idea of “estoy aqui, *I am here*,” expressing her desire to be fully seen and recognized, she said, “I’ve heard people say ‘there’s no Latinos in Fort Collins’ and that’s not true. We are here. *I am here* (¡estoy aqui!).” A variation on the group’s use of the phrase, this participant’s use of, “estoy aqui, *I am here*” also expresses the basic human need to be seen. Again, we wondered what meaningful recognition would look like for this participant, who responded saying, “leadership would understand what is happening on the front lines and there would be recognition of the contributions (of Latinxs on the frontlines).” In both of these instances, the sentiment of “estoy aqui, *I am here*” comes down to feeling valued, seen, and recognized by the City.

A word of warning and a recommendation: saying “Estoy aqui, *I am here*” to community members who have long felt undervalued, and unseen should be coupled with substantive listening action(s) by city leadership, and particularly those interested in codesigning recovery efforts. These actions can build empathy between city leadership and under-represented communities, and per community members’ requests, are best supported by meaningful dialogues that allow community members to create ways and spaces to be seen, valued and recognized.

3. WATCH OUR FEAR TRANSFORM TO POWER!” ¡MIRA! NUESTRO MIEDO SE VOLVIÓ PODER”

Despite the overwhelming and disproportionate hardships described by our Latinx interviewees, stories of courage and empowerment shine through. All participants used the word “*empoderadx*” or “*empowered*” after sharing a story of transformation amidst hardships brought on by the pandemic. Several stories were about having the courage to learn a new skillset such as learning to use online technologies that would facilitate navigating the pandemic; others were about accessing YouTube videos to learn how to do online activities with their children. Central to these stories was the feeling of “*empoderadx*” which resulted when in turn they taught these skills to other Latinx friends, families, and neighbors. These stories of how Latinxs are giving-back to their communities by sharing knowledge and information previously inaccessible to them is considered a significant codesign strength that communicates to the City of Fort Collins the critical Latinx value of “*Juntos: collective community stewardship*” (Bordas, J., 2019). Building codesign efforts in collaboration with proximate leaders is essential to activating a city-wide network of “*empoderadorxs*” that can use the city’s community-led codesign to mentor and to “*alentar*” (build up) fellow Latinx friends, family and *vecinos*/neighbors.

4. “LA FUERZA QUE ES CUANDO UNO ESTÁ UNIDO A LA FAMILIA”

“THE STRENGTH ONE HAS WHEN UNITED WITH FAMILY”

Time and time again, interviewees stressed the importance and strength they acquired from being with family and community. Stories of hopefulness were centered on feeling supported by either a family member or a caring friend. Often recognized as Latinxs’ most salient cultural value, *Familismo* is perhaps the single source of hopefulness expressed by interviewees who reported feeling traumatized by the pandemic. For these individuals, if fear and terror marked their stories and lives in ways that still haunt them, then *familismo* is the antidote they name as what will surely see them through. One interviewee spoke of her family’s strength by saying, “when we’re together, everything is possible.” Another interviewee reported that feeling part of his family or community “*aligera la carga*,” or “*lightens the load*” when living through experiences of worry and pain.

To be sure, *Familismo* is a Latinx value that supports a strong “sense of connection.” Often cited as a protective factor in Latinx mental health, *familismo* (German et al., 2009), or prominent and well-aligned family values, was reported by all participants as central to their experiences of recovery, and feelings of hopefulness and strength. As such, it would benefit the City to explore ways to practice intentional codesign that invites Latinxs into spaces and places where cultivating these connections is possible. When asked how the City can plant seeds of recovery in the Latinx community, and after group participants expressed that recovery has not begun in their homes and communities, most participants requested “a space to build and/or rebuild our families.” This is a critical quote that expresses the need Latinxs feel to further cultivate, and/or to heal family connections and with one another.

5. GENERATIVE SPACES

Interviewees responded to the following prompt, “We need a space where...”, in single written statements, saying they need:

- “A space to mourn, recover and reclaim our identity.”
- “A space to heal ourselves and our families”
- “A space to flourish as a person, student, and parent.”
- “A space where we can feel peace.”
- “A space to destress.”
- “A space to recover safety.”
- “A space to be with family.”
- “A space to feel heard and without criticism.”

V. CONCLUSION, RECS & HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Human centered design (HCD) is both a framework and a process for solving wicked and complex human problems. L’Ancla’s and La Cocina’s approach to human centered community-led codesign involves returning to human-centered experiences like those listed above as the center from which to invite community members to participatory action codesign, equitable data collection, and democratizing data in an iterative process that

centers community voice and power. As a whole, this process takes time and a solid commitment to social systems change, and because this model of engagement seeks to be generative in cultivating what community members identify as “already working,” La Cocina suggests the City follows this brief engagement with the following activities:

1. **Ensure that other participants who want to share their stories, and who want to collaborate with the city are invited to do so.** La Cocina turned away many Latinx community members who wanted to share their stories, and who wish to participate in both individual and community dialogues. Additionally, interviewees reported that interviews in and of themselves were healing. When asked what healing spaces should look like, one interviewee responded, *“like this! Just like this!”* Interviewers understood this as validation for the power of deep listening, respectful dialogue and feeling witnessed.
2. La Cocina recommends that the City **follow these first interviews with a facilitated codesign session** where interviewees will have the opportunity to learn about the outcomes shared in this report and will consequently have the opportunity to participate in a series of codesign activities with key City of Fort Collins representatives. L’Ancla and La Cocina are committed to this process and will thus provide the needed facilitation for this follow-up codesign session at no cost to the City.
3. Community dialogues that support storytelling facilitated by elders and proximate leaders has long been known to support recovery from multigenerational and community-wide traumas (Onwuachi-Saunders, 2007). Interviewees referred to the impacts of the pandemic as terrifying, traumatic, ongoing, and as what needs healing before any recovery is possible. They also identified **caring dialogues, Charlas, and listening sessions with each other and with the City as foundational to the recovery process.** Latinxs interviewed throughout this process stressed this over and over again: (paraphrased) *“in order to begin our recovery, we first need to hear and say to each other, “¡Aquí estoy!, I am here...”* From a human centered design perspective, this type of community-assertion is a ripe codesign fruition that allows the City to transform engagement into an iterative process that democratizes community participatory listening → to community-codesign → to community-inclusive action and buy in → to shared learning → to shared power.
4. This model of engagement seeks to be generative in cultivating what is already working, and by centering and illuminating pathways already endorsed by community members as having cultural resonance and heartfelt value. Viewed as the fulcrums of innovation and creativity, **these pathways offer City leaders our communities reclaimed “seeds of recovery” as identified by those most impacted by systemic inequities**, and amidst the disproportionate impacts felt by Latinx residents both now and prior to the pandemic. To this end, let our team walk you through these reflections, but first...let’s go codesign!

5. Please contact Claudia Perez at Claudia@lacocinahome.org, or Karen Sandoval at Karen@lacocinahome.org with your questions and comments.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve our community. We loved hearing our fellow Latinxs' stories of courage and hopefulness.

Claudia Perez & Karen Sandoval

For La Cocina

November 8, 2021

Date

Alejandra Magaña

For L'Ancla

November 8, 2021

Date



Approval by Janina E. Fariñas, Ph.D., Psy., LPC
Founder & CEO

November 8, 2021

Date

###

Overall Summary Report and Takeaways

Fort Collins Recovery Plan Discussions

Artists, Venues and Creative Business

By: Peggy Lyle Due: 11-5-2021

- Primary focuses include:
 - Acknowledgment of, commitment to and investment in the Creative sector as a viable economic driver and legitimate business group in Fort Collins
 - Access to, investment in, maximizing and creation of affordable spaces for living and working, i.e. for lessons, rehearsals, creation (studios) and performances
 - Equity as it pertains to not only race, sexual orientation, culture, but also occupation. City needs to acknowledge and invest in arts, music and creative industry and not allow this industry to be an afterthought or a luxury, but view it as essential to our community's successful recovery, community wellbeing and economic health.
 - Invest in it for the things it can create, impact it can make, healing it can bring and not an afterthought or first thing to be cut in budgets.
 - Need a representative body/group like an arts council, leadership group, ...
 - Feel under served, under appreciated, under invested in and not listened to at the city level
 - Need to recognize that creative work is "work" and a valuable contributor to our city
 - Art has created our high quality of life here and sense of culture and are at risk of being pushed out
 - Artists and creative leaders need to be part of the process more often, in leadership and staff positions at the city and county, have them on contract with the city helping on projects both arts related and no arts related.
 - Huge impact with lots of loss of jobs, income, businesses, staff, careers, sense of community, mental health and happiness.
 - Not currently an equitable environment and artists are an underserved and marginalized population with limited access, and artists of color are more so impacted

- **Short Term:**
 - Clearer policies about COVID safety and rules, mandates...
 - Mental health support
 - Short term debt relief as many have been closed or nearly closed for 1-2 years
 - Affordable Spaces to host makers markets, rent studios, rehearse and put on performances in safe ways
 - Fewer barriers to working with city and for grants
 - Access to de-escalation training/support group and customer education
 - Staffing help, attraction and retention of workers and help building safe environments for them to work within
 - Incentives to build up our technical personnel for venues and industry support (lighting, sound, crew,...)

- Access for underserved populations including BIPOC, differently abled, LGBTQ and other artists to performance and creation spaces, grants, and professional development
- Easier access to COVID tests and quick results
- Affordable or free mental health and health support for artists, arts administrators and creative business owners - including group support environments
- Access to programs that employ artists -- like Art in Public Places, being a vendor, hosting a market, host an event, ... the city processes put too many barriers for many newer artists are discouraged
- Arts need to come back to schools and afterschool programs, a way of coping and processing the effects of the pandemic
- Marketing campaign for Fort Collins that it is a arts destination and establish that brand as an arts leader
- Let the Arts help us heal as a broader community - that's what we are good at, - art therapy, PTSD/trauma healing through the arts, murals, music, writing,....
- Help with supply and demand of products - can we source things locally and team up with manufacturers here.

- **Long Term:**

- Living wages for creatives/artists
- Affordable housing and work spaces
- Creative Industry leadership group/Arts Council/Sector collective
- Representation of the arts within the City and staff through positions and leaders
- Creative Centers that support all types of artists and art forms, where there are chances to have collaboration between disciplines and feeling on community - need multiple of these and can be activating non city owned private spaces to create this.
- Mental health support
- Safety nets for gig workers, artists and self employed business owners
- Use large vacant commercial spaces or underwrite established cultural organizations to establish creative spaces for creative entrepreneurs to set up shops, studios, make sales, host events, create goods and perform.
- Have representation for the Creative Industry that can communicate to, serve as a authority and Industry representative
- Have centralized information/communications about arts events, classes & businesses
- Make tangible investments to back up commitment to and not tokenism of the arts
- City funding a Micro Grant Program, granted to Community partner organizations or businesses to be given to their specific populations of artists/business entrepreneurs to cultivate and foster unique and innovative projects/startups, can be geared around solving problems that face community or simply to create products or works. Can serve the arts but also underserved populations.
- Supportive of Fort Fund and Art in Public Places - need more support and fewer barriers for entry and engagement
- Revamp the mental health services offered or streamline them - group therapy, better crisis hotlines and more education about resources for the community at large

- Random Takeaways/Comments:

- Multiple offers were made to have individuals come speak before your planning group and leadership to express the importance of the arts as a business sector, impact of the pandemic on the creative industry, the importance in investment, return on investment, and issues pertaining to access and inclusion in the arts
- One of our participants shared a video from a film industry and music industry professional about living in Fort Collins -- Musician Russick Smith talks on the importance of repairing and investing on the developing film scene in our county. https://www.dropbox.com/s/p7pxo0jyela6elw/james_russick_smith_on_the_film_com_mission.mov?dl=0
- "...Also, how many times do we give the city our ideas and they completely ignore them? It's frustrating."
- "I completed the survey, but found it to be bureaucratic, the typical City jargon with useless questions that lack enough background information..... I've chosen to put my time and talents into creative organizations that are making a difference and delivering on their promises. Or at least trying. The City is not that for me or my organizations — for profit or nonprofit."
- In discussion this was offered: "Check out this video that discusses what happens when a community is without the arts." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xe81-eHGc0w>.
- "Hmm...well, there are already studios for rent in town for musicians. Perhaps there could be studios for rent in order for dancers and choreographers to record away from babies and parents! Also...I've been imagining what it would be like to have more bandshells like the one in Old Town in all the parks!"
- From Elizabeth Martin at the Museum of Art Fort Collins - "I wanted to include some articles and food for thought on the systems-level change that I mentioned. Our own strategic planning moved us back to our growth phase and a "radical alignment" and a bold new vision looking past scarcity and towards a future where the arts are recognized as the economic driver they are. Indeed someone on the call mentioned that--without the music scene that is supported--where would Fort Collins be?"

Besides the comment I made about a **shared creative space** (which could be the post office building), a shared back office is a great system change. We are all struggling to pay IT, HR, Payroll, bookkeeping, etc. Here are a couple of articles about that:

- <https://www.intellichief.com/5-ways-to-make-your-back-office-shared-services-center-more-productive/>
- <https://www.nonprofitcenters.org/events/back-office-alternatives-need-know-shared-services/>
- <https://www.tcg.com/blog/who-says-shared-services-are-only-for-back-office-functions/>

- *Along with the idea of investing in public space that fosters creativity, here is a resource I like about investment in civic commons to drive equity that the city can think about--maybe they already are. There is a great action guide here.*
- *Here is an article about saving a historic building using pandemic relief funds from Cleveland*
- Comments on the Facebook post did mention the Americans for the Arts - Fort Collins Arts Economic Study and how the planners should look at that to see how much impact the arts have on our local economy (It was most recently done by DDA & City?)
- Also the Arts Space Feasibility Study was mentioned several times as an important document to look at for housing and space needs. (It was conducted by Bohemian Foundation DDA and City of Fort Collins)
- And there are also statistics that can be found from the Creative Vitality Index reports (Downtown Fort Collins Creative District has access to this database and reports)
- Other comments shared in virtual chat:
 - *In support at the LC, that includes the tech people who run streaming services. There have been many snafus during our broadcasts and this is likely a lack of experience on the part of those creating the stream product.*
 - *The upgrade of the streaming support would be huge. This may bring more work for that industry as well.*
 - *We also need investment in growth for our organizations on every level as well as salaries and honorariums for artists and subsidized studio space*
 - *We'd like to add that in times of social crisis in the history of our country and civilization, we've routinely turned to the arts to maintain balance in our mental health, happiness, and perseverance. It's on us as this community's creative arts leaders to work together and invest in new opportunities and infrastructure that benefit the creative community as a whole.*
 - *When Steve Jobs built Apple headquarters, he put one set of restrooms near the front of the building. Specifically so people would run into each other to begin conversations . . .*
 - *yes- investment is the underlying systemic need and solution to lift us all*
 - *Let's make one of the outcomes of COVID being to put aside our silos and work together for the greater good of the entire creative arts community in FC*

Coding Memo

The coding process began with open coding, which is designed to allow themes to emerge rather than beginning with a predetermined set of ideas or topics. This first stage of coding encourages variety and creativity in assigning codes to small units of text (Glaser 1978). Multiple codes for a single unit of text were used when appropriate to avoid early bias towards specific concepts or themes (Charmaz 2006). These themes were then cross-checked with key stakeholders to ensure that written comments were reflective of discussions. The next stage of coding, focused coding, zeroed in on specific codes that appear to be the most useful or relevant (Glaser 1978). After focused coding, the theoretical coding stage related codes that have remained relevant to each other (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1978). According to Charmaz, theoretical codes are “integrative” and “lend form” to relevant codes (Charmaz 2006: 63).

Quantitative Results

Survey Results

The following represent the quantitative results from surveys conducted during engagement. It is important to note that although valuable, these survey results do not provide the full picture of public engagement. Much of the engagement conducted happened during events, interviews and other one on one conversations, which focused more on qualitative storytelling and open-ended questions. Qualitative, mixed-method analysis results are detailed in the full Community Engagement Report (above).

Surveys included in the results below:

- Our City Online Priority Survey (English and Spanish)
- Larimer County Recovery Survey – Responses marked as living in Fort Collins (English and Spanish)*
- Priority Surveys – Completed by Community Connectors LLC (paid partnership), vast majority of respondents were Spanish-speaking, living in manufactured housing

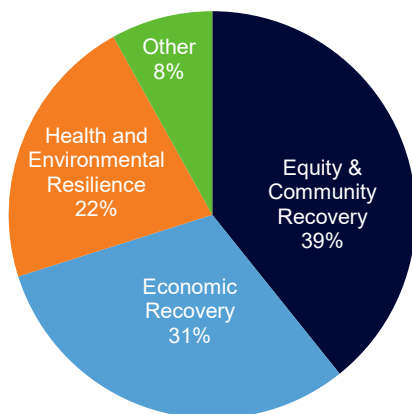
*The Larimer County Survey did not include all questions asked in the Fort Collins Our City Online Priority Survey. When not included, a note has been added to the graph.

Priority Snapshot

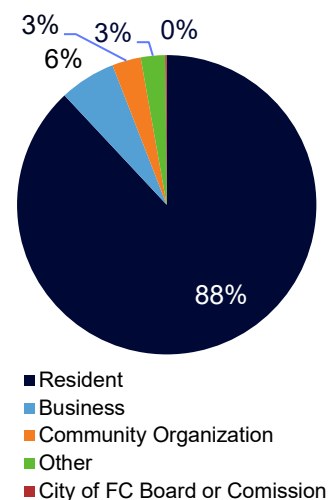
The majority of survey respondents were residents of Fort Collins, however many local businesses and community organizations also responded. Additional community organizations and businesses, including many nonprofits, were engaged through other methods – virtual open houses, paid partnerships, and stakeholder meetings. Additional engagement of businesses occurred separately, including the surveying of small business grant recipients.

Respondents were asked which area of pandemic recovery matters most to them as a quick way to gauge priorities. Each area was split fairly evenly, and the majority of those who responded “Other” mentioned that each area was equally important for recovery.

Which area of Pandemic Recovery Matters Most to You?

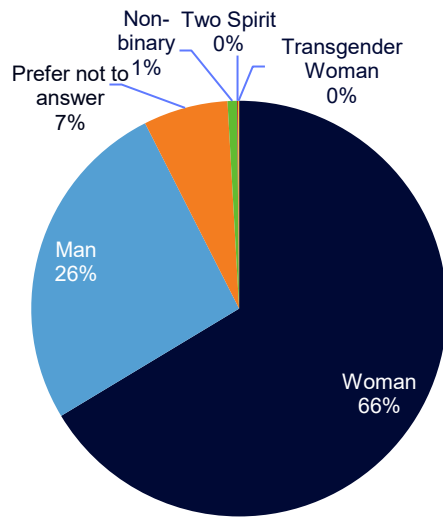


Respondant Profiles

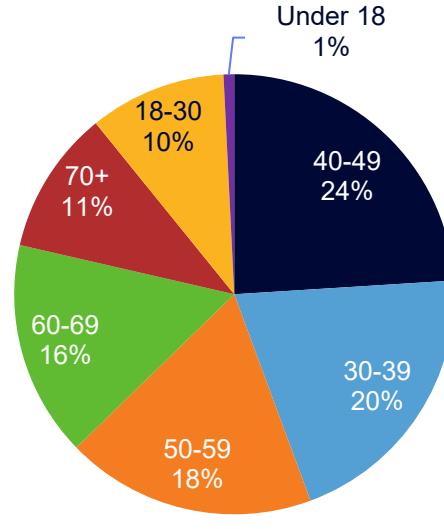


Demographic Questions

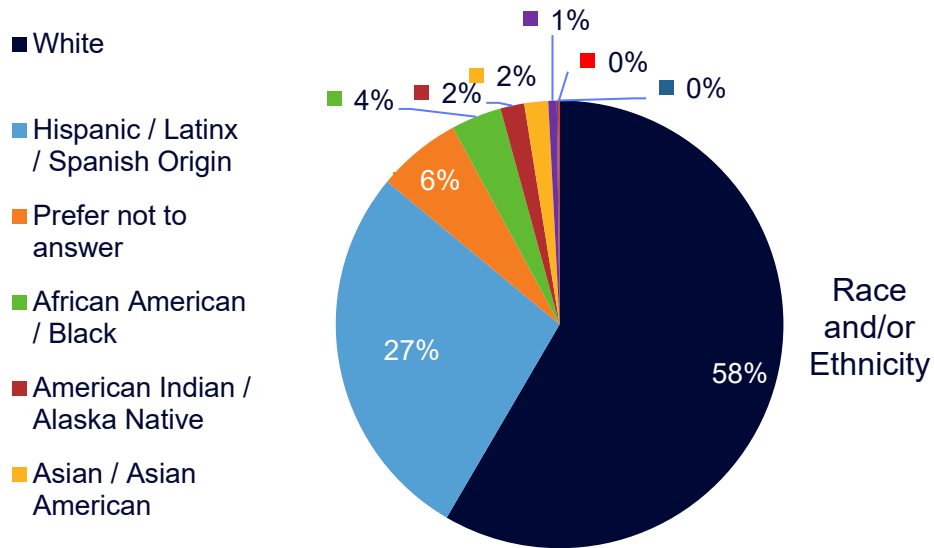
Demographic questions asked within the survey were opt in. Not all respondents answered the demographic questions and some choose to partially answer the questions.



Gender

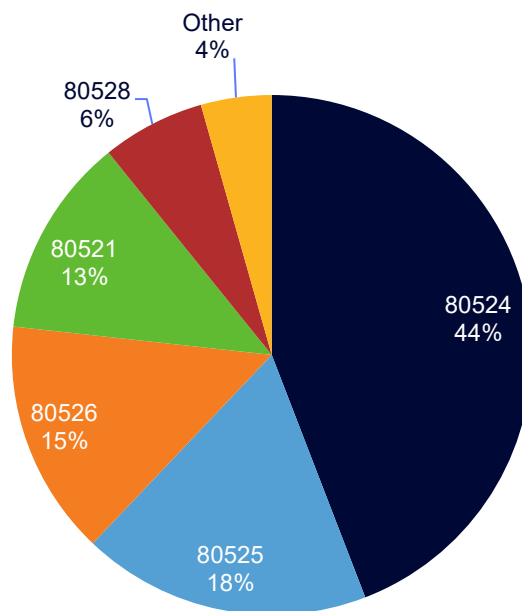
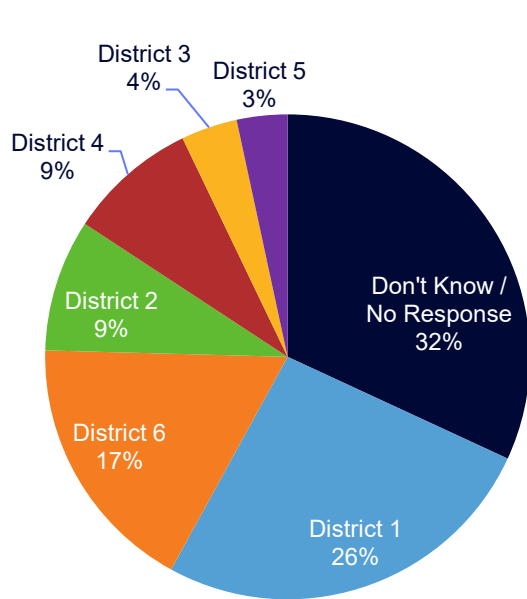
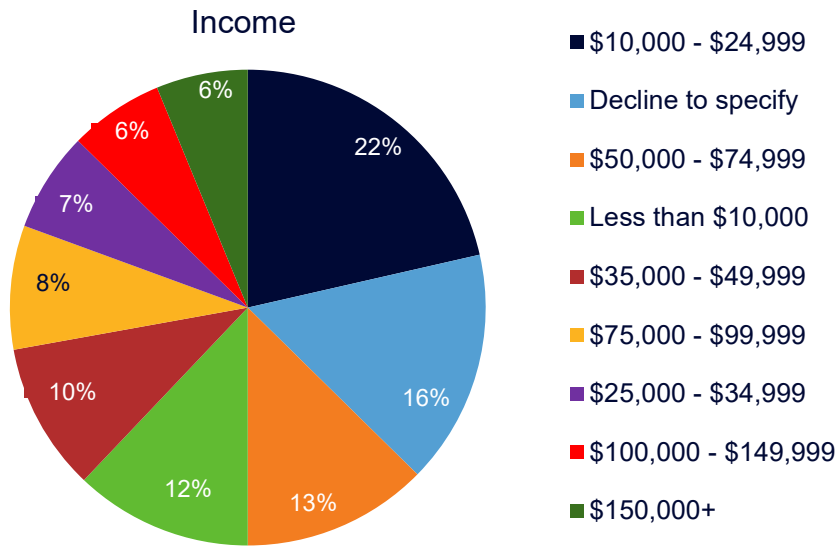


Respondant Age



Race and/or Ethnicity

The following graphs for Income, Zip Code and Council District include only respondents to the City's priority survey, not the survey put out by Larimer County.



Phase 3 Engagement Results

WILL BE INSERTED ONCE COMPLETE - BEFORE PLAN ADOPTION