

# Mecklenburg Livable Communities

Culture Connections Think Tank: Meeting 1

## Developing Partnership Alliance (DPA) and Tone Setting

1. What is the atmosphere you desire during the think tank?
  - a. Informal: relaxed, high energy, talking to each other
  - b. Open and honest
  - c. Inclusive to and for all ideas
  - d. Respectful
  - e. Agree to disagree, and that's okay
2. What can you count on from each other, what commitments would you like to ask from each other?
  - a. Listen
  - b. Every idea is genuinely considered rather than saying that it will never work
  - c. Empathy: listening with the intent to hear what's behind the other voice
3. How do we want to be when it gets difficult?
  - a. Calm
  - b. Remember our pump up songs!
4. What does success look like?
  - a. Implementation of the actual collaborative solutions
  - b. Measurable outcomes
  - c. Coming up with a list of neighborhood leaders
  - d. What we propose is sustainable
  - e. Includes funding consideration
  - f. Coming up with a common language that we can agree on – i.e. what is included in concepts like culture and diversity
  - g. Communications: how can we create or integrate communications plans so that the community is apprised of what is happening with this project our our initiatives
  - h. Defining what "community" means, because it may look different depending on one's role

## Represented Partners & Their Current Initiative Report-Outs

**Cardinal Innovations:** is a manage care organization for behavioral health; works with public funding for mental health, substance abuse, etc. programs; does lots of training and prevention; has been in Mecklenburg County since April 2014.

- World Refugee Day Celebration: goal is to increase awareness of refugees in our community as a whole because many people don't realize that Mecklenburg County houses many refugees.
- Quarterly Community Meetings: goal is to reach out to different cultures/diverse members.
- Project 658: monthly meeting that reaches out to Latino community.
- Involved with the Mecklenburg Immigration Task Force, which is a city initiative.
- Lots of meet and greets and sharing of resources with people and departments in the community.

**Central Piedmont Community College:** Have theater, opera, dance, etc. programs that are provided for students and community members to participate in; 12,000 to 13,000 attendees from students and community at the Spring Show; figuring out how to promote CPCC's arts and cultural programs in the community

**Charlotte Mecklenburg Library:**

- Literature festival – day of the children, day of the books – bring multicultural books – 1,500 – 2,000 families come – a literary celebration
- Technology classes for refugees and ESL communities. Have different communities in the library that are international and diverse community groups
- ESL story time. Bilingual story time
- Shamrock International senior center, ESL center for international seniors
- Work a lot with early childhood, ESL children to get them ready for preschool
- Provide services for ALL residents, provide them with free access to resources and information.
- Multicultural book collection
- Provide programs to students with special needs
- Have tutoring programs in different languages for free.
- Summer reading programs, invite writers from different communities to host workshops
- Invite/support authors in local communities.
- All CMS students will use their student ID cards as their library cards – initiative to provide free resources to reduce fines.

**For Charlotte:** About 55% of people in the community attend church; there is a competition culture between churches, want to shift that culture to collaborative. For Charlotte is a platform for pastors and church leaders to come together to build relationships and collaborate on how to meet the needs of the city and the community.

- Have convening events like Q commons, which is a TED Talks.
- Justice conference – engage injustice in the city and how the church can come together to serve the city.
- Connect community with causes: if people are passionate about different topics (i.e. homelessness, poverty, etc.) bring people together to have that conversation.

**Generation Nation:**

- Works with CMS to equip teachers with examples of civic issues, local government, media, to help children learn about how the community works
- Provides programs outside the classroom for kids that help them connect directly to community leaders and community issues
- Works with organizations like Charlotte Mecklenburg Youth Council and Leadership Charlotte to help students explore leadership opportunities and to show students different roles that they can have to make their voices heard in the community

**Keep Charlotte Beautiful:** Volunteer based program; have about 700 volunteers throughout the city.

- Adopt-a-Street and other clean up projects
- Want to diversify volunteer groups – reach out to immigrant populations to have them involved in community beautification projects.

- Quarterly – have grants that groups can apply for and use to beautify their community
- Great American cleanup – go into all 7 districts of Charlotte and have cleanups

**Mecklenburg County Community Support Services:**

- Project safe neighborhoods – program through US Attorney’s Office aimed towards ending crime and drug violence.
- Work with neighborhood leaders in Mecklenburg County to transform neighborhood leadership—grow into a board of directors.
- Have partnership with Charlotte Law School to develop certain neighborhood associations into a 501c3 organization.
- Housing Advisory Board
- Women’s Advisory Board.
- Divisions within CSS: domestic violence, homeless, veterans, to address different areas of the community
- Do the Write Thing: program that awards students with a trip to Washington DC

**International House:**

- Education: ESL citizenship classes
- Host international leaders from abroad

**Camino Community Center:** Support immigrant families at risk.

- Have free clinic and food pantry
- Homeless mission
- Language and culture program – when teaching Spanish and English, includes both language and culture between two groups
- Village Happy Project: bring together churches from different denominations and cultures to work together to prevent obesity in the community

**Levine Museum of the new south:** Focuses on history of Charlotte and Piedmont area; use history as a catalyst for community conversation.

- Use of dialogue – constantly offering opportunities for public conversations through art exhibits.
- New exhibit: NUEVOLution
- 3-Part Dialogue Program: sustain dialogue for current and emerging leaders. Teaching students how to conduct dialogue within their circles of influence.
- Participate naturalization ceremonies
- Help High school programs with history: bring high school students together and learn about history, go on a trip to reinforce their learning and be able to conduct that dialogue with each other

**Arts and Science Council:**

- ASC Culture Blocks – funded by county – effort to make intentional investments in arts and science in community where there is low funding. How can we be more involved and support program emerging in the community? Working and connecting with groups that work in these communities.

- Cultural access funding – targeted dollars to fund multicultural activities in the community. Diverse grassroots artists and organizations – provide artistic response/opportunities for people to create dialogue around community issues.
- Dialogue space – new program called catalyst for cohort equity – leadership program to help build skills around community diversity equity.
- Fund cultural events
- Cultural leadership training program – train emerging civic and business leaders who are interested in being a part of arts and cultural boards

**Carolina Voices:** Community singing. Most connections are through adults but have some with children.  
**Mosaic project:** want to help those communities find their voice of celebration through community singing.

**Charlotte Rescue Mission:** Meet with church groups to talk about addiction

## Defining “Diversity” & “Culture” Activity

### Table 1:

- Diversity and culture are one in the same
- Understanding, awareness, knowledge, accessibility
- How you do things: may look the same, but may have different perspectives, life experience
- Most people are not from this community
- More than what we see

### Table 2:

- Diversity:
  - Different views, perspectives, and abilities
  - Race and ethnicity
  - Age
  - Socioeconomics
  - Gender
- Culture
  - Frame of reference that’s shaped by who you are where you come from
  - Creative expression
- History
  - Provides a frame for how Charlotte-Mecklenburg came to be, culture, challenges, and opportunities

### Table 3:

- Culture: a set of beliefs that guide the way you live your life in your community
- Diversity: recognizing and celebrating differences

## Gaps & Root Cause Discussion

**What gaps exist?**

- Lack of knowledge of various groups and what they do
- Some collaboration going on but it can be better
- Lack of seeking to understand other humans or spiritual experience
- Some events or initiatives have no inclusion, only exposure. They are not actually embracing that culture
- No cultural communication system in place to leaders and to make awareness happen
- Not enough time or money to play
- How to empower diverse groups?
- The need to identify community leaders who are intentional about being inclusive
- Festivals that aim to address certain communities only occur in that community space – no exposure for other people who don't live in that area
- Need to know where local business owners with diverse backgrounds are to empower them to make change in their community
- Communication: how do we communicate out to other people the existing services and opportunities to develop partnerships
- Reducing stigma amongst certain groups of people
- People don't know what they don't know – “you must first collect the dots, before you can connect the dots”

#### **Why do these gaps exist?**

- Language and culture barriers – some people are not going to walk up to you and start talking
- Neighborhoods are so homogenous
- Lack of web (internet/computer) access, which is how many people try to share information
- Working in silos, so people are overwhelmed within their own sphere and don't know how to reach out
- Compete with each other for collaboration and grants – or collaborating for just the time period of that grant
- Lots of grassroots and community building but people who have massive influence may not be advocating
- What is the role that members with diverse backgrounds play? They may be invited to the table but what is their role?
- Lots of conversations without real change

***\*Ran out of time during the meeting to discuss creating collaborative initiatives. Will discuss more during second meeting.***

## Ideas for New Collaborative Initiatives

**Initiative:** History of Mecklenburg County in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Curriculum

**Initiative:** Create a program that promotes dialogue, leadership, and collaboration around culture and diversity

**Initiative:** Establish a directory that provides information on what organizations are doing and communicating around culture and diversity

## Ideas for Expanding Current Initiatives

**Current Initiative:** Arts & Drama Programs

**Current Initiative Owner:** Central Piedmont Community College, Carolina Voices

**Collaboration Opportunity:** Central Piedmont Community College & Carolina Voices

**Current Initiative:** Homeless Initiatives

**Current Initiative Owner:** Mecklenburg County Community Support Services, Carolina Voices

**Potential Collaborative Partners:** Mecklenburg County Community Support Services, Carolina Voices, and Housing Advisory Board, For Charlotte

**Current Initiative:** Neighborhood Grants

**Current Initiative Owner:** City of Charlotte Neighborhood and Business Services

**Potential Collaborative Partners:** Charlotte Mecklenburg Library