"Springfield has a lot of potential, but it must prioritize diversity, inclusion, equity, and access in order to grow and thrive."

- survey respondent

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This Community Research Report was funded by generous support from:

Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Final Report Submitted April 2021
Springfield has long been challenged by what was named in 2010 a “welcoming deficit” with regard to how underrepresented groups feel living, working and playing in the region. Many community groups have sounded the alarm about the risk of “brain-drain”, and losing our best and brightest to other communities perceived as more diverse and welcoming. Numerous seminars, workshops and discussions have been conducted designed to create a more inclusive climate in our city; however, none of them were based on local research. This study is a formalized response to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of young professionals in order to illuminate their concerns, from which leaders may derive more targeted strategies. This academic study was approved by Missouri State University’s Institutional Review Board and was funded by generous support of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks.

Principal researchers are Dr. Lyle Q Foster and Dr. Ximena Uribe-Zarain with research assistance provided by Lenica Consulting Group, LLC.

**Objective:**

This project seeks to impact diversity and inclusion issues by speaking, surveying, and listening to the voices of young diverse professionals about the climate of inclusion in the city. The purpose of this study was to conduct a survey for diverse young professionals in Springfield and Greene County to learn about their experiences of living and working in the
The main question was about how inclusive Springfield is—and to what extent residents from underrepresented backgrounds feel safe, respected, and comfortable in being themselves and expressing all aspects of their identities.

**Background literature:**

This research work is anchored in Critical Race Theory (CRT), a body of literature developed over the past 50 years with applications in legal, educational and community environments. One of the touchpoints of CRT is to recognize the value of lived experience as a source of academic and applied inquiry. In this vein, CRT relies upon and utilizes community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Further, it is informed by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) emphasizing the importance of story and giving a voice to underrepresented and marginalized groups to share their experiences in community building. The very nature of the project follows and adheres to the public sociology strategy of working with existing communities and listening to their concerns in order to collaboratively build and affect change with their input.

**Significance of the study:**

The results of this study will provide an opportunity for our community to develop initiatives that are responsive to young diverse professionals’ perceptions of the barriers to inclusion. The results will provide concrete recommendations to improve the climate of inclusion in Springfield, and therefore will aid in attracting and retaining diverse young professionals. Some aspects of this report may seem initially less flattering, although they echo findings in the 2019 Community Focus report. The authors of this study encourage readers to see these themes as opportunities for the community to be successful in their efforts at developing a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

**Sampling method and participants:**

For this study, we used the purposive sampling method (Sometimes called judgmental sampling). This method belongs to the family of convenience sampling methods because participants are chosen specifically based on their specialized knowledge of the topic of interest (Kalton, 1983). A total of 145 participants began the survey, and the completed surveys represented 103 respondents (reflecting diversity of race, color, religion, national
origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability), mostly under 40, who work or study in Springfield, MO.

**Data collection procedures:**

Community partners were asked to promote, support, and help gather survey participants for this project. We appreciate the assistance of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Minorities In Business, Springfield NAACP, Missouri State University African-American Men's collective, GLO Center, Alliance for Leadership, Advance, and Success for Hispanics in Springfield.

The original plan was to conduct online and face-to-face surveys across the community using tablets, but social distancing procedures due to COVID-19 limited us to all online data collection, from May 15th to September 2nd, 2020. Researchers believe that unexpected advantages of this online data collection were that participants were self-motivated in completion of the survey, and were not influenced by the presence of a researcher in some more difficult responses. At the end of the survey, participants had the option of indicating their interest in participating in a focus group. Unfortunately, due to pandemic limitations, these interviews were not conducted.

**Instrument:**

The main section of the survey consisted of 22 multiple-choice questions and 8 open-ended questions about diversity and inclusion in the city and workplaces. Two examples of the questions related to Springfield are, “How would you rank Springfield as an inclusive community?” and “Do you think of the lack of racial diversity in the city is an important issue?” Some examples of the questions related to the workplace are, “Would you recommend Springfield to other professionals as a place to live and pursue a career?” and “My organization/company has a diversity/inclusion policy and/or practices for recruiting, hiring, developing, and promoting diverse individuals.”

**Data analysis:**

The survey was conducted using the online platform Qualtrics. The data from close-ended responses were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Frequency distribution was the main mode of data display. The data from open-ended responses were analyzed through
qualitative content analysis. Responses segments were coded, categorized, and synthesized.

**Researcher recommendations:**

Not surprisingly, Springfield as an 85% white community, retains a challenge. Some concrete suggestions have been identified, such as:

**References:**


How would they rank Springfield as an inclusive community?

Experiences based on their race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability

Over members feel safe, respected, and comfortable in being themselves and expressing all aspects of their identity.

The cultural and artistic scene in Springfield tends to be very traditional and mainstream-oriented. The city can embrace all cultures through diversified radio stations, cultural events, murals, and many other spaces and forms of art.


We have a history of systematic inequalities in this country, and Springfield is no different. This oppression has rendered an inability for minorities to fully participate in our society.

History education needs to start in a fact-based and unbiased K-12 curriculum, but it does not end there. Springfield citizens ought to be informed and know about the lynching in 1906 of Fred Coker, Will Allen, and Horace Duncan. Openly and honestly acknowledging the racial tensions would be the first step in a direction towards non-discrimination and equality.

There is much work that needs to be done. Many participants were tired of the never feeling that Springfield is a place where the community is not divided by race and that Springfield is a place where all voices can be heard.

Successful initiatives to incentivize, support, and empower minority-owned and minority-conforming businesses, boards, and committees. Increase diverse representation in leadership roles at the city level, universities, education institutions, etc.

For a diverse community to thrive, feeling welcome and safe is of paramount importance. Having a history of inequality and discrimination, Springfield needs to work towards creating a more inclusive community that embraces diversity and promotes equal opportunities for all.

We've had some progress but the rate of progress has truly been unacceptable. For mainstream groups to understand the perspective of underrepresented groups, e.g., drag show, hip hop music, graffiti art, salsa events, murals, and many other spaces and forms of art.

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What respondents like most about Springfield

1. Sense of community
2. Sense of safety
3. Sense of belonging
4. Ease of living
5. Prizes are
6. Stock of cost of living
7. Stock of low cost of living
8. Stock of low cost of living
9. Stock of low cost of living
10. Stock of low cost of living

Who participated in the survey? (n=105)

- 57% were 20-29 years old
- 31% were 30-39 years old
- 8% were 18 and 39 years old
- 4% were 40 and 49 years old
- 1% were 50 and 65 years old
- 2% were 66 and 79 years old
- 1% were 80 and 92 years old
- 5% were 93 and 125 years old

- 57% were people of color
- 1% were Asian
- 10% were Latinx
- 5% were Native
- 1% were Pacific Islander
- 1% were Middle Eastern
- 1% were other

- 51% were female
- 49% were male

- 12% were working
- 11% were retired
- 11% were students
- 9% were homemaker
- 5% were unemployed
- 27% were career professionals
- 20% were mid-career professionals
- 16% were early career professionals
- 12% were late career professionals
- 11% were never employed
- 6% were other professionals
- 4% were self-employed

- 31% were White
- 38% were Black
- 9% were Hispanic
- 8% were Asian
- 5% were Native
- 3% were Pacific Islander
- 2% were Middle Eastern
- 1% were other

- 51% were single
- 39% were married
- 9% were divorced
- 1% were separated
- 8% were widowed

- 57% were heterosexual
- 31% were gay or lesbian
- 5% were bisexual
- 1% were transgender
- 1% were asexual
- 1% were pansexual
- 1% were underrepresented
- 1% were other

- 65% were an issue
- 38% were an issue
- 79% were an issue
- 92% were an issue
- 68% were an issue
- 77% were an issue
- 92% were an issue

- 22% agreed
- 35% somewhat agreed
- 25% somewhat disagreed
- 18% disagreed
- 8% strongly disagreed