

2020

SURVEY REPORT

**COMMUNITY'S DIVERSE YOUNG
PROFESSIONALS
SPRINGFIELD, MO**

"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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Project Consultant: Lenica Consulting

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SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

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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

community. 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:

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (Vol. 20). NYU Press.

Kalton, G. (1983). Models in the practice of survey sampling. *International Statistical Review/Revue Internationale de Statistique*, 175-188.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.

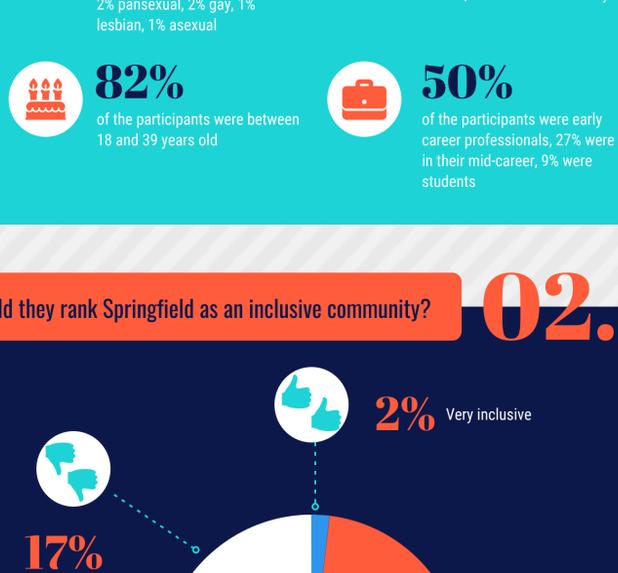
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Over 100 diverse professionals were surveyed on how inclusive Springfield is –where its members feel safe, respected, and comfortable in being themselves and expressing all aspects of their identities. Here is what we learned:

01.

Who participated in the survey? (n=105)



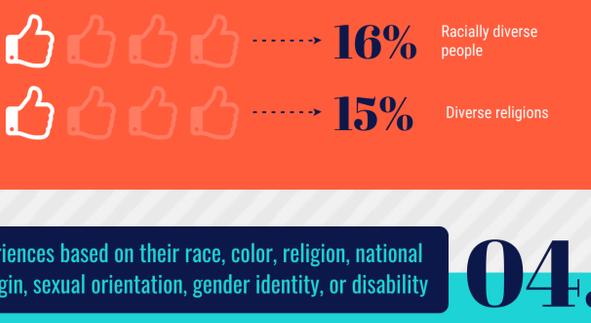
How would they rank Springfield as an inclusive community?

02.



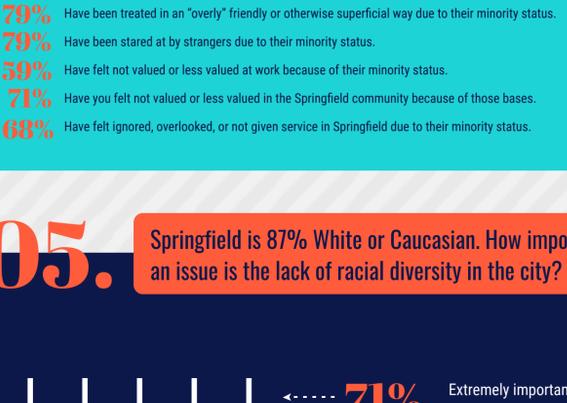
03.

Do they consider Springfield a welcoming community for the following groups?



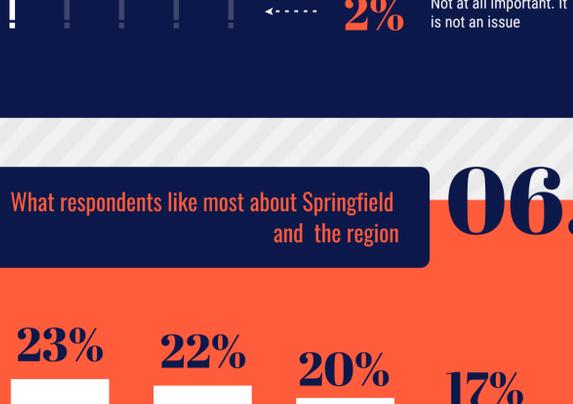
Experiences based on their race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability

04.



05.

Springfield is 87% White or Caucasian. How important of an issue is the lack of racial diversity in the city?



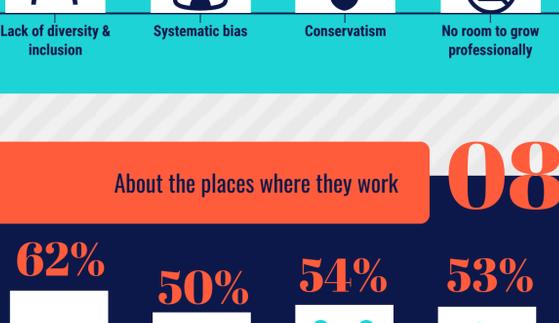
What respondents like most about Springfield and the region

06.



07.

What respondents like the least about Springfield and the region



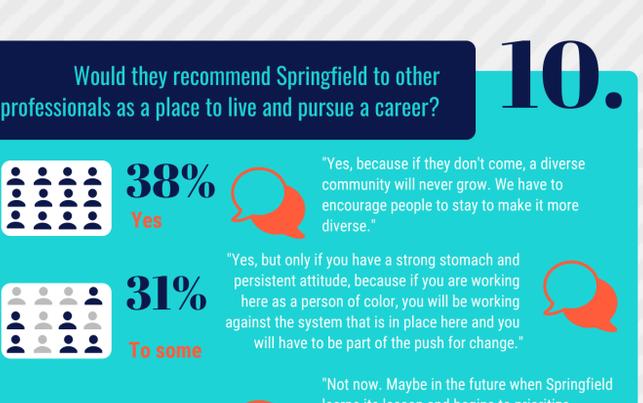
About the places where they work

08.



09.

Staying in Springfield & reasons for leaving



Would they recommend Springfield to other professionals as a place to live and pursue a career?

10.



11.

Recommendations to make Springfield more attractive to diverse professionals

- Make the city and work places more diverse and inclusive. Not only on paper, but by being proactive and taking action.
- Increase diverse representation in leadership roles at the city level, universities, businesses, boards, and committees.
- Create more and improve the job opportunities, including better wages, progression, and promotion.
- Promote and incentivize events and amenities geared towards locally underrepresented groups, e.g., drag show, hip hop music, graffiti art, salsa dancing, African hair braiding, lunar new year, etc.
- Provide more fair and equitable access to housing, jobs, and financial resources for minorities.

What would make Springfield a stronger, more inclusive community?

12.

1. Representation matters

Representation in leadership positions empower those who have traditionally been left out from decision-making spaces, and help mainstream groups understand the perspective of others. Minority representation in leadership is important across city spheres: council, chambers, boards, businesses, school district, police and fire departments, higher education institutions, etc.

2. Anti-racism training

Anti-racism and implicit bias training are strategies intended to build capacity to understand systemic racism and oppression. Groups and individuals at all levels would benefit from understanding the inequity in society and learn how to oppose injustices based on race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. Ideally the training would be conducted in schools, work places, and churches.

3. The business side

Successful initiatives to incentivize, support, and empower minority-owned and minority-supported business would help diversify what Springfield has to offer to underrepresented and mainstream groups. City-wide business initiatives would help tear down the most common obstacles minority businesses face, such as lack of social capital, difficulty securing funding, and discrimination.

4. Amplify the voices of minorities

One of the many barriers minority groups face is that their voices are not heard, which prevents their social and political empowerment. Success is usually depicted as mainstream achievement, while minorities are often depicted as the opposite (underachievers or underdogs). This communication barrier needs to come down to showcase the voices from underrepresented groups in the city. Amplifying the voices of marginalized populations would not only educate the mainstream groups, it would give them a place at the social, legal, and political conversation.

5. Policy and ordinances

For a diverse community to thrive, feeling welcome and safe is of paramount importance. Expanding protections (e.g., the repealed SOGI ordinance) would go a long way in improving the current environment. Along the changes to ensure equal rights, some of the specifics mentioned were protections to our LGBTQ+ community, law enforcement evaluation and training, and changes to punishment systems in schools.

6. Spaces for culturally diverse art

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.

7. Education

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 (Black people have been especially impacted). Change starts with education. However, schools are currently not poised to accurately teach about the events that have marked the past and present of minority groups. 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 long and difficult healing process that is much needed.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It looks like the vast majority of diverse professionals who participated in this survey consider Springfield to be a work in progress in terms of inclusion. There is much work that needs to be done. Many participants were tired of the inequality but were willing to participate and be the agent of change and see the potential Springfield has to be a diverse and inclusive place to live.

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