At the TABLE COLORADO

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

At the Table Colorado: Sustaining Public Deliberation Processes

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PUAD 5361 Fall 2018

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Executive Summary

Participation in deliberation and public engagement processes builds social capital while enhancing transparency, accountability, and decision-making (Healy, 2011). Despite these benefits, research suggests that only half of Americans are engaged in public life in some way (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). At the Table Colorado (ATTC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing diverse groups of people together in inclusive conversation to discuss important issues. An inaugural series of conversations were held throughout the state in the fall of 2018.

As a means of encouraging ongoing deliberation and civic engagement, this capstone project explored the following research question: What strategies can help ensure the sustainability of ATTC? The strategies explored were based on factors including various aspects of the conversation itself, next steps, communication preferences, and ideas and resources needed for ongoing or future engagement. A voluntary, self-administered survey consisting of both open and closed-ended questions was administered at the conclusion of ATTC conversations to collect participant feedback and preferences concerning the above factors. A total of 50 survey responses were received from participants. Additionally, a review of the literature was conducted to explore the sub-topics of who should be involved in public engagement processes, factors that promote the sustainability of public engagement processes, and smart practices that contribute to the success and effectiveness of public engagement processes.

Overall, the findings suggest that respondents were satisfied with the structure and content of the conversations and that the conversations successfully allowed respondents to share

information, resources, and build relationships. Demographic information collected from the surveys indicated that all groups within the population may not have been represented at the conversations. The majority of survey respondents expressed an interest in communicating with other participants either monthly or once every few months. The preferred method of communication was e-mail. ATTC is effectively utilizing a variety of different types of media to spread awareness and disseminate information. An invitation to attend the conversations from a friend or colleague is the most effective means of encouraging participation. Most respondents expressed a desire to continue their conversation and take action.

With this information, the preferences of participants collected through the survey, the goals and values of ATTC, and considering the findings of past empirical studies reviewed in the literature, several recommendations are offered. It is recommended that (1) groups with lower participation rates within the community be specifically invited; (2) those with access to different resources or policy influence from other community organizations are invited to attend as equals in the conversation; and (3) hosts provide participants with a consolidated list of key resources as applicable. Two recommendations are also offered related to the use of a survey to collect data from participants. Specifically, (1) hosts should be encouraged to have paper surveys available and to set-aside time for survey completion; and (2) re-write the survey in a shorter format that collects the most relevant pieces of information from participants.

Introduction

Encouraging deliberation and civic participation are issues that are relevant across public organizations and jurisdictional boundaries. Public deliberation not only enhances transparency, accountability, and decision-making, but also brings community members together to discuss common issues that are important to them while building social capital (Healy, 2011). Civic participation links community involvement to a greater good. Collectively, public deliberation and civic participation are widely considered cornerstones of democracy and good governance.

Deliberation is broadly defined as a type of public discussion that "seeks collective solutions to challenging social problems" (Blacksher, Diebel, Forest, Goold, & Abelson, 2012, p. 15). Deliberation serves many purposes such as offering information or education regarding important issues, locating common ground, informing policy decisions, and providing an opportunity to learn about alternative points of view in an inclusive setting (Blacksher, Diebel, Forest, Goold, & Abelson, 2012). On the other hand, civic engagement is "aimed at achieving a public good, but usually through direct hands-on work in cooperation with others" (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006, p. 51). The two concepts are explicitly linked in that deliberation is a "means of enhancing civic engagement" (McCoy & Scully, 2002, p. 177).

Considering the community and social benefits of public deliberation and civic engagement, it is in the best interest of society to promote and encourage robust and productive engagement opportunities. Nonetheless, research suggests that only half of Americans are engaged in public life in some way (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). It

can be a challenge to encourage participation and continued interest in deliberation and civic engagement processes. Public participation processes must be "carefully organized and facilitated, even cultivated and nurtured" (Fischer, 2006, p. 21).

Local governments are often the conveners of public engagement and deliberative processes. However, other types of organizations are also working to bring community members together. One such organization is At the Table Colorado (ATTC), which is the client of this research project. The goal of ATTC is to bring diverse groups of people together to have a conversation focusing on ways to create stronger, more sustainable, and vibrant communities (ATTC, n.d.). It is important to take the time to celebrate the good things about our communities, as well as talk about ways to improve them. ATTC aims to create an inclusive, deliberative process that is sustainable and enhances civic engagement.

Studies suggest that different generations are engaging in a variety of ways and that younger generations are less politically engaged (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). Civic participation can have a far more expansive reach than the traditional forms of engagement such as voting or working on a political campaign. One of the goals of ATTC is to assist in enabling participants to recognize a broader definition of civic participation. Alternate forms of civic participation can be activities such as helping a neighbor or discussing an issue of concern with another person. Public conversations will enable participants to get to know and understand each other (Born, 2012).

The purpose of this research is to investigate strategies that can be used to improve the experience of participants and encourage ongoing participation in public deliberation processes. The project report contains five major sections. The first section examines the literature on deliberation and other public engagement processes. The second identifies the specific research

question and methodology of the research. The third presents the results of the research. The fourth is a detailed discussion of the findings and recommendations of the research. Finally, the fifth section is the conclusion which includes a summary of the research and the expected contributions of the findings.

Client Background Information

ATTC is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to bringing groups of people together in inclusive public conversation. The Chicago Community Trust developed the concept as On the Table in 2014, and similar events have subsequently been held in twenty-six cities nationwide (ATTC, 2017). This is the first year that the annual event was held in Colorado and took place primarily during the month of September. "Table" events were held in communities throughout the state over a period of a few weeks covering a variety of topics from development issues, to public art, native plants, and pregnancy and infant loss. Hosts are volunteers who choose the location, topic, and time, and then register their conversation on ATTC's website. The discussion can be registered as private, where the host invites participants, or public, where anyone can sign up to attend the discussion. Once registered, hosts are provided tool-kits and resources to help them plan and lead the table discussion. To further engage participants, ATTC has an informative website, is active on social media, and distributes a monthly newsletter.

Literature Review

A review of the literature was conducted to investigate public deliberation and other types of engagement processes. Several topics inform this issue. First, the literature provides guidance as to who should be involved in these processes. Second, is an examination of the

factors that promote sustainability of engagement processes. Third, is an examination of smart practices for public deliberation and other types of public engagement processes.

Who should be involved. Groups of community members are coming together in conversation to explore a variety of topics (Julian & Ross, 2013). The literature suggests that who participates in these conversations can make a difference when considering issues such as taking action, seeing meaningful results, and the equality of the conversation (Blacksher, Diebel, Forest, Goold, & Abelson, 2012; Fung, 2006; Helling & Thomas, 2001; Himmelroos, Rapeli, & Gronlund, 2017; Lasker & Weiss, 2003; McCoy & Scully, 2002).

Most public participation processes are inclusive events that are open to all who want to be involved (Fung, 2006). However, those who choose to participate may not be representative of the larger public (Fung, 2006; Lasker & Weiss, 2003). Fung (2006) suggests two alternative methods of encouraging participation among disadvantaged groups. Participants can be selectively recruited by seeking out people who live in parts of the community that are less likely to engage such as low-income and minority neighborhoods (Fung, 2006). Participants can alternately be randomly selected from the general population (Fung, 2006).

It may be beneficial to carefully consider who should be specifically invited to attend. The literature suggests that there are noted advantages to involving policymakers in community conversations. This is particularly relevant with regards to the resources and policy changes that are sometimes needed to lead to desired action (Helling & Thomas, 2001). Policymakers can be invited as participants and equals in the conversation (McCoy & Scully, 2002). The literature suggests that even with the involvement of influential policymakers it is essential that community conversations maintain a bottom-up method (Helling & Thomas, 2001). The process should "allow stakeholders to set the meeting agendas, times, and places, to purchase analyses

and evidence from outside sources, and to communicate freely with one another" (Helling & Thomas, 2001, p. 764).

The literature suggests that one of the benefits of public deliberation is the opportunity to consider differing perspectives and the importance of deliberative processes including diverse perspectives from community members who are less likely to engage (Blacksher, Diebel, Forest, Goold, & Abelson, 2012). However, the literature also indicates that there could be advantages in creating deliberative processes that include like-minded individuals (Himmelroos, Rapeli, & Gronlund, 2017). Himmelroos, Rapeli, and Gronlund (2017) found that "the opportunity to deliberate with like-minded people appears to generate a greater sense of equality among individuals with lower resources than taking part in mixed group discussions" (p. 155).

Sustainability. The literature suggests that there are several techniques and strategies that can be used in the design and execution of public deliberation processes that contribute to sustainability of participation (Abelson et al., 2003; Christens & Speer, 2011; MacKenzie, Christensen, & Turner, 2015; McCoy & Scully, 2012; Ramachandra & Mansor, 2014).

Ramachandra and Mansor (2014) found that sustainability is linked to a sense of ownership of the process among participants. The perspective of multiple stakeholders should be taken into account when determining the sustainability and success of public deliberation processes (Ramachandra & Mansor, 2014). Relationships and collaborative inquiry are also positively linked to meaningful and sustained participation (Christens & Speer, 2011). In a study of the influences on participation among people in community organizing processes, Christens and Speer (2011) found that future participation was positively associated with the amount of time participants spent in face-to-face interactions with other participants building relationships

and trust and participants who sought out additional sources of information and education on the issue.

Effectively communicating results of processes is a strategy that can be used to sustain interest of participants and to generate new interest for future processes (McCoy & Scully, 2002). For example, MacKenzie, Christensen, and Turner (2015) explored the challenges of disseminating research results within communities. The researchers concluded that feedback from participants and stakeholders on how and where to disseminate results is needed to maintain positive relationships within the communities in which they work and to add value to participation (MacKenzie, Chistensen, & Turner, 2015). It follows that a technique to sustain public deliberation processes is to effectively communicate results by asking for participant feedback regarding dissemination of the results of their discussion.

The evaluation of deliberative methods will lead to improvement and more effective processes in the future. The literature suggests a framework for the evaluation of public participation processes based on the elements of "(1) representation; (2) the structure of the process or procedures; (3) the information used in the process; and (4) the outcomes and decisions arising from the process" (as cited in Abelson et al., 2003, p. 244). Representation is an assessment of how various types of representation might be met such as geographic, demographic, or political (Abelson et al., 2003). Procedures is an evaluation of factors such as if there was enough time for discussion, if all participants had an opportunity to speak, and if the process was respectful (Abelson et al., 2003). An evaluation of information considers how materials are selected, presented, and interpreted (Abelson et al., 2003). Finally, outcome considers principles such as legitimacy, accountability, participant satisfaction with the process, and communication of decisions (Abelson et al., 2003).

Smart Practices. The literature suggests a variety of smart practices that can contribute

to the overall success of public deliberation processes (Julian & Ross, 2013; Kotze, Seedat,

Suffla, & Kramer, 2013; Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Molfenter et al., 2018; McCoy & Scully, 2002).

Weerawardena, McDonald, and Mort (2010) suggest that implementing best practices,

innovation, and collaborating with for profit organizations are strategies that can bolster the

social value created by non-profit organizations. For non-profit organizations, sustainability has

been linked with value creating strategies (Weerawardena, McDonald, & Mort, 2010).

Julian and Ross (2013) suggest that practitioners involved in collaborative problem

solving should consider enhancing certain aspects of community infrastructure that supports the

process. Past research has identified various factors that contribute to effective collaboration,

which Julian and Ross (2013) consider part of a community's infrastructure. These factors

include formalization of processes, leadership, member participation and diversity, group

cohesion, quality of the plans, an orientation toward action, member ownership, knowledge, and

empowerment (as cited in Julian & Ross, 2013).

Kotze, Seedat, Suffla, and Kramer (2013) conducted a review of community engagement

processes used in community conversations from the perspective of the host. A key

recommendation identified is that participants should have multiple opportunities to engage and

that community conversation processes should give due consideration to the timing of

conversations to ensure that key stakeholders are able to attend (Kotze, Seedat, Suffla, &

Kramer, 2013). A lack of time was identified as a key limitation in the process (Kotze, Seedat,

Suffla, & Kramer, 2013). Hosts and organizers of community conversations should ensure that

they are properly able to manage the expectations of participants and to clearly identify

objectives and limitations at the beginning of the process (Kotze, Seedat, Suffla, & Kramer,

2013). In a separate analysis, McCoy and Scully (2002) offer that participants should be given a wide range of options for ways to become involved through multiple methods of engagement.

The literature suggests several smart practices for use during public deliberation and other types of engagement events. Effective communication, listening, and asking the right questions are important aspects of encouraging participation (McCoy & Scully, 2002; Molfenter et al., 2018). McCoy and Scully (2002) suggest that the "single most effective way to overcome people's initial hesitancy to discuss public issues is to ask them to share their experiences and talk about how the issue at hand affects their daily lives" (p. 121).   These types of interactions lead to a shared understanding among participants and strengthen personal relationships and trust (McCoy & Scully, 2002). Additionally, sharing personal experiences allows participants with varying degrees of technical expertise and professional experience to build a shared sense of ownership of the issue (McCoy & Scully, 2002).

Questions asked of participants should be broad to maximize participation and proactively framed versus focusing on potential barriers (Molfenter et al., 2018). Lasker and Weiss (2003) suggest that it is important to facilitate productive group dynamics. For example, the participants need time to get to know one another, everyone should have an opportunity to speak, and the differing knowledge, skills, and resources of participants should be combined to allow for a collective understanding of the issue and possible actions that go beyond participants' initial assumptions (Lasker & Weiss, 2003).

The literature suggests that people are more willing to participate in processes that are time-consuming when they know that their participation will make a difference (as cited in Abelson et al., 2003; McCoy & Scully, 2012). However, change can take time. Hamby, Pierce, and Brinberg (2017) offer that "big change is often driven by multiple small wins" (p. 377).

McCoy and Scully (2002) suggest that meaningful engagement must include a connection to change. Change doesn't only include large accomplishments such as institutional change or changes in public policy. Change can also include changes in individual behavior and attitudes, new relationships and networks, and new working collaborations (McCoy & Scully, 2002). McCoy and Scully (2002) offer that deliberative dialogue should be connected to action and change.

Summary. In summary, a review of the literature suggests that it is important to consider who attends public deliberation and other engagement processes including ensuring representation and contemplating the involvement of influential policymakers (Blacksher, Diebel, Forest, Goold, & Abelson, 2012; Fung, 2006; Helling & Thomas, 2001; Himmelroos, Rapeli, & Gronlund, 2017; Lasker & Weiss, 2003; McCoy & Scully, 2002). The literature suggests that sustainability is linked to ownership and relationships, including time spent in face-to-face dialogue, effectively communicating the results of the processes, and evaluating the methods used (Julian & Ross, 2013; Kotze, Seedat, Suffla, & Kramer, 2013; Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Molfenter et al., 2018; McCoy & Scully, 2002). Smart practices to improve the overall success of public deliberation processes include enhancing community infrastructure, allowing enough time, offering multiple opportunities and methods of engagement, effective communication and asking the right questions, and that the process must include a connection to action and change (Julian & Ross, 2013; Kotze, Seedat, Suffla, & Kramer, 2013; Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Molfenter et al., 2018; McCoy & Scully, 2002).

Methodology

Research Question

With consideration of the goals and purpose of ATTC, the following exploratory research question is proposed:

What strategies can help ensure the sustainability of ATTC?

The identified strategies are based on participant feedback on various aspects of the conversation itself, next steps, communication preferences, and ideas and resources needed for ongoing or future engagement.

Measurement and Data Collection

Original quantitative and qualitative data was collected. A voluntary, self-administered survey was distributed using the Qualtrics survey program comprised of open and closed-ended questions. The survey informs the research question by collecting participant preferences on topics such as keys issues, feedback on the format and structure of the table conversations, ideas for future improvement, follow-up plans and actions, participant preferences for communication, interest in future events, and past and future civic engagement activities. The survey questions regarding past and future civic engagement included a wide-ranging and inclusive list of civic engagement activities that was meant to broaden respondent's perception of civic engagement. Past survey instruments from On the Table in Chicago were used as reference to create the ATTC survey.

Survey Distribution

The unit of analysis is individuals. The population of interest was people who hosted or participated in an ATTC conversation. Respondents from the study population were self-selected and all participants who engaged in an ATTC table conversation were invited to take the survey.

The survey was distributed in both electronic and paper form. Electronically, the survey was disseminated using an anonymous, reusable link that was e-mailed to hosts and participants who registered for a table conversation and provided their contact information. Additionally, a QR code linked to the survey was created in Qualtrics and distributed to registered hosts for greater accessibility. To assist in eliminating language barriers, the survey was available in both English and Spanish. In consideration of the varying resources and preferences of participants, registered hosts were also e-mailed printable surveys for distribution at table events.

The goal of data collection was to have the highest survey response rate possible among ATTC participants. Maximum participation results in a more informed indication of the experiences, ideas, and preferences of respondents. Further, the sample population is very specific. For these reasons, this project attempted to collect data from one-hundred percent of participants with time being the only limitation. To this end, ATTC continued to solicit for survey responses from participants via the newsletter and social media throughout the data collection period. The primary dates of the ATTC conversations were initially identified as September 17-20, 2018, with the expectation that some conversations would take place outside of this timeline. Due to increasing interest, momentum, and positive response during publicity, ATTC formally announced that the inaugural series of conversations would be extended through October 15th. Survey responses were solicited and accepted through this extended period.

Validity and Reliability

The face validity of the survey questions was evaluated to ensure that they informed the topic of strategies to help ensure the sustainability of ATTC. Internal validity of the survey questions was maximized by utilizing the experience of the Executive Director of ATTC, as well

as past survey instruments from events similar to ATTC that have taken place in other cities throughout the United States.

Reliability was maximized by comparing the responses of participants at different table conversations. The recommended strategies were based on findings that were consistent throughout the separate events. Finally, a pilot study of the survey among key stakeholders was conducted to ensure that the questions were clear and understandable, and that the survey instrument through Qualtrics was functional and correctly formatted.

The findings of the research will be generalized toward strategies that can help ensure the sustainability of ATTC and future conversations that will be associated with the organization in the future. The recommendations can also cautiously be applied toward similar events that may take place in other states or regions. However, external validity is threatened due to the data collection technique of non-probability sampling and self-selection. Selection bias is a notable limitation in that participants who chose to respond to the survey may be fundamentally different than those who chose not to respond.

Data Analysis

Analytical features available in Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the quantitative data collected in the survey using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of answers. The survey collected qualitative data through open-ended questions. Qualitative data was analyzed using coding and then categorized for further examination to identify common themes and ideas. Coding is a process that allows for the comparison of qualitative data. The frequency of codes identified in the analysis of the open-ended questions allowed similar themes

to emerge that were consistent across conversations. Original or creative ideas from respondents is also noted for consideration and possible implementation.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Overview

In total, there were ten conversations held in connection with the 2018 ATTC inaugural event and approximately 268 attendees. Of the ten conversations, eight were public conversations that were registered on ATTC's website as being open to any interested participant. Two of these conversations were in the Denver area, while one was held in Arvada, one in Greenwood Village, and one was slightly west of Denver in Gilpin County. The other three public conversations took place in Castle Rock, Eagle, and Grand Junction, respectively.

There were six private conversations registered on ATTC's website as "invitation only". Only two of the private conversations were held during the timeframe of this project. Three of the registered private conversations are still pending and one was cancelled. One of the private conversations was held in Highlands Ranch and the other one took place in Littleton.

Topics discussed at the conversations varied widely and are listed in Appendix B. Total reported attendance at each conversation also varied significantly. The majority of the conversations reported between two to 25 people in attendance. Two of the conversations reported approximately 50 attendees.   The largest number of reported attendees was 88 for the public conversation "Silent Voice: Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness". However, participants at larger table events were split up into separate groups so that the same table event

had multiple conversations occurring at once. These separate tables averaged approximately eight participants each.

Survey Response

Overall, 63 survey responses were received. Of these responses, 27 surveys were recorded in Qualtrics and 36 surveys were completed on paper. Twenty-six Qualtrics respondents utilized the anonymous link that was sent to conversation hosts in advance and one respondent used the QR code. Some of the recorded survey responses did not contain usable data. The first question of the survey (see Appendix A for details) is "Did you participate in an At the Table Colorado conversation in 2018?" In Qualtrics, seven respondents answered "no" to this question, at which point the survey defaults to the end. Additionally, there were six respondents in Qualtrics who answered "yes" to the first question but completed no other questions. Partial responses are automatically recorded in Qualtrics after one week of inactivity. After eliminating these 13 responses in Qualtrics with no usable data, 14 electronic responses remained and were included in this study. The 36 paper responses were mostly completed in full and were combined with the Qualtrics responses for a total of 50 responses used to inform the research question. With a total reported attendance of 268 people, the survey response rate was approximately 19%.

Response Demographics

Survey responses were received from nine different ATTC events and included both public and private conversations. The topics of the conversations and the corresponding number of survey responses are identified in Figure 1.

Topic	Number of survey responses
History Matters in Gilpin County	1
Should our Cities Grow Only Native Plants?	8
Development Issues in Castle Rock	3
Eat Chat Parent: Your Kid's Brain on Tech	1
Silent Voice: Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness	9
What's on your mind?	2
How to Preserve History Camp?	11
Does Public Art Matter?	10
Spirituality in Today's World	5
Total Responses	**50**

Survey respondents were predominately female, with 70% of respondents identifying as female and 30% identifying as male. Respondents were primarily white. A total of 91% of respondents selected white as their race and/or ethnicity. Hispanic or Latino was selected by 4%

of respondents, while 2% of respondents chose Black or African American and Other (Northern European American), respectively.

Figure 2
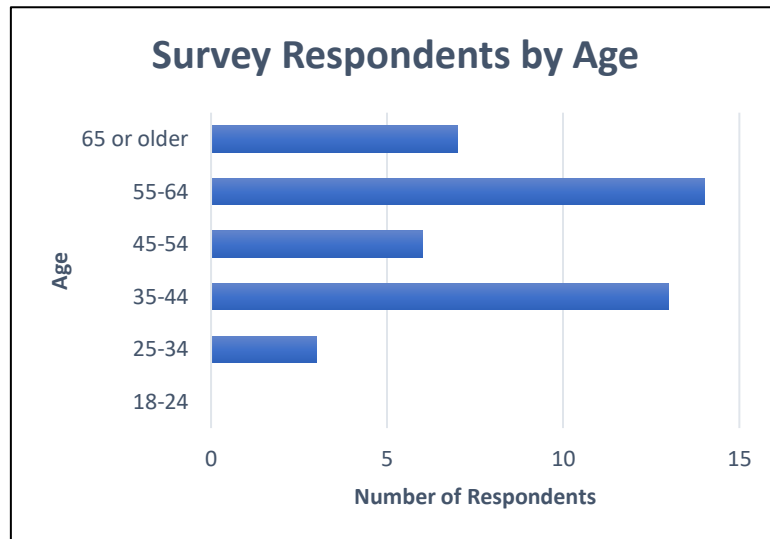
The age of respondents varied with the largest number of respondents in the 35-44 years old and 55-64 years old range. There were several respondents in all other age categories except the 18-24 years old range in which there were no respondents (Figure 2).

Respondents were well educated with the majority of respondents reporting having attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Specifically, high school was the highest level of education completed for 2% of respondents, 16% of respondents held an associate degree, 47% of respondents held a bachelor's degree, and 35% of respondents had attained a graduate degree or higher. Respondents reported robust levels of civic engagement. All respondents across each conversation indicated participation in multiple civic engagement activities prior to their conversations and specified their intention to continue to participate in civic engagement activities following their ATTC conversation. There were no respondents who had not previously participated in any civic engagement activities.

Respondents reported living in a wide range of zip codes with a total of 30 different zip codes represented. Only eight zip codes were identified more than once which indicates that

respondents came from a diverse mix of neighborhoods. A summary of zip codes is included in Appendix C.

Evaluation of Conversations

Feedback on the structure of the conversations was largely positive across every event. All respondents indicated that they learned something new during their ATTC conversation and that what they learned is useful for future conversations or action. Only one respondent indicated that they did not have an opportunity to contribute to their discussion, while all other respondents indicated that they did have an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings during the conversation. The majority of the respondents, or 88%, indicated that the overall tone of the conversation was positive, while 10% felt the conversation was somewhat positive and 2% categorized the tone of the conversation as neutral.

Respondents provided a variety of answers when asked what the most interesting thing was that they learned during their table conversation. Common responses included learning about different perspectives, available resources, and other background or specific information related to the topic of conversation. A summary of the responses organized by topic is included in Appendix D.

None of the respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with the location of the conversation, the knowledge shared by participants, the relationship among participants, the length of the conversation, the organization/flow of the conversation, or the way that the conversation ended. All respondents felt comfortable during their conversation and felt that the discussion was meaningful. With two exceptions, all respondents felt inspired and empowered following their conversation and felt that they could make a difference in their community. One
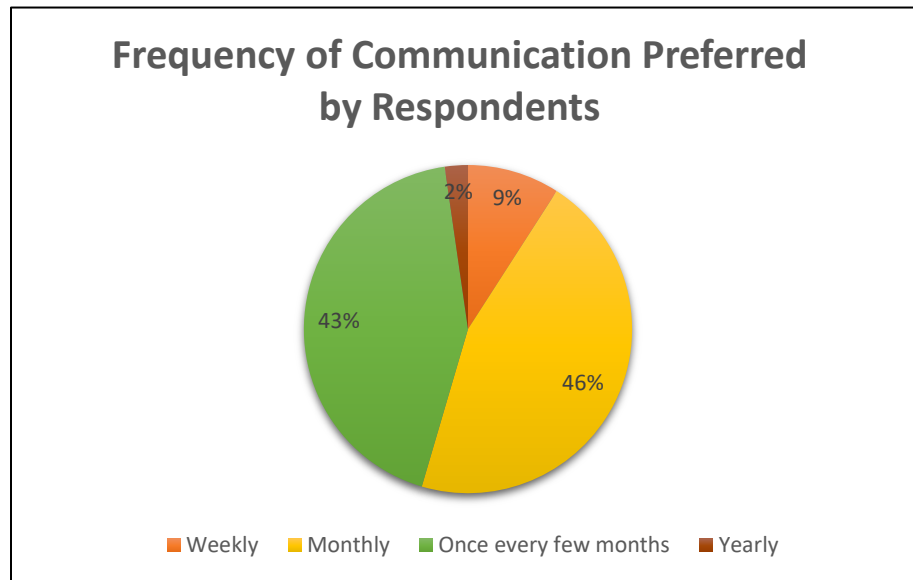
respondent answered that they did not feel inspired following their conversation and one respondent did not feel that they could make a different in their community following their conversation. These respondents were not the same person and they attended different ATTC conversations.

An open-ended question in the survey asked respondents what could have been done to make the conversation more effective. The most common answer was that the current structure worked well, and they could not think of anything specifically. Several respondents suggested that the focus of the conversation could be narrowed down through the use of an agenda, while several others indicated that they would have liked to have either more time or more people in attendance. One person suggested inviting key government and business leaders, which is consistent with the concept of inviting policy influencers that was found in the literature. A couple of respondents indicated that they felt that some participants talked more than others while other participants needed to be invited to share their thoughts. One respondent suggested that a resource list would have been a helpful addition to the conversation.

Communication

The survey collected data related to communication preferences and practices from ATTC participants. All respondents were interested in continuing to communicate with other participants from their conversation.

Figure 3

Frequency of Communication Preferred by Respondents

Weekly 9% · Yearly 2% · Once every few months 43% · Monthly 46%

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Once every few months
- Yearly

A similar number of respondents indicated that they would prefer to "communicate monthly" as "once every few months" with other participants from their conversation (Figure 3).

The preferred method of communication among the majority of respondents is e-mail (67%), followed by social media (27%), text message (4%), and newsletter updates on website (2%).

Figure 4

How did you hear about ATTC?

18% · 4% · 31% · 16% · 31%

- Social media
- Website
- I was invited by a friend
- I was invited by a colleague
- Other
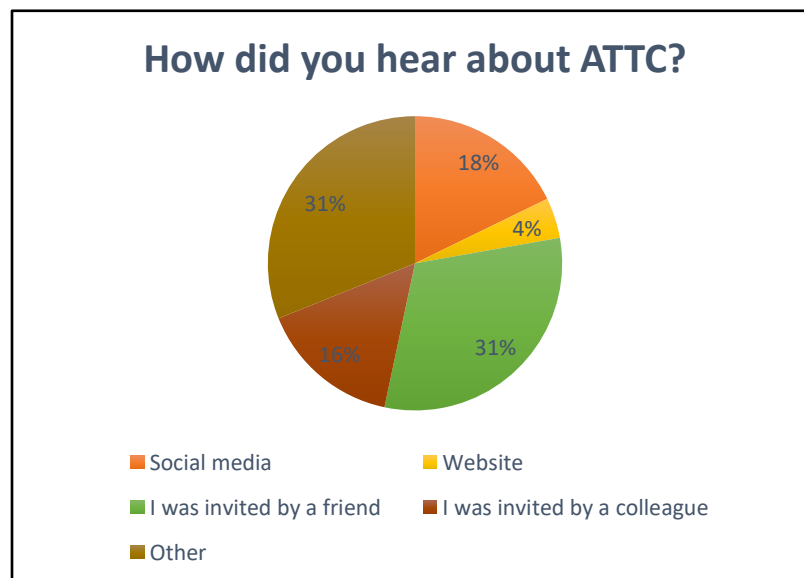
Respondents heard about ATTC in a variety of ways. Most respondents were invited by a friend, colleague, or the host, but social media, the ATTC website, newspaper ads, and television were also identified as ways in which respondents were made aware of the conversations (Figure 4).

Most respondents (63%) did not post anything about their conversation on social media.

However, among those who did (37%), 70% posted on Facebook, 17% posted on Instagram, and

13% posted on Twitter.

What's Next

Survey responses indicate that most respondents (88%) are likely to take part in

continued conversations. Four respondents (8%) indicated that it was unlikely that they would

continue to participate in continued conversations and two respondents (4%) were undecided.

No additional information was collected regarding why these respondents were unlikely to

participate in continued conversation. Of the four respondents who indicated that they were

unlikely to continue to participate, two attended the same conversation and the two others each

attended different conversations.

Respondents indicated a number of preferences regarding what they would like to see

happen next concerning their conversation including continuing the conversation with the same

participants (36%), take action as discussed during the conversation (27%), continue the

conversation with new participants (20%), and connect with other groups who discussed a

Figure 5
similar topic (18%).

Over 90% of respondents indicated that their group did discuss actions that can be taken to

address the issue discussed. The specific actions identified varied widely by topic of

conversation. A common theme among all responses was the desire to form connections with

other people or groups within the community or to pursue specific resources. A comprehensive

list of identified actions by topic is included in Appendix E.
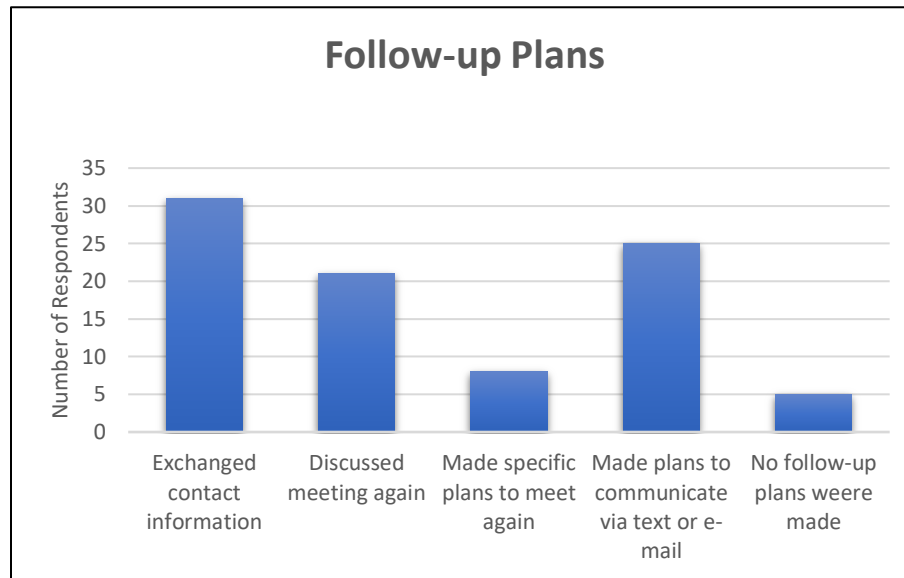
Follow-up Plans

As indicated in Figure 5, several different types of follow-up plans were made. Approximately 6% of respondents indicated that no follow-up plans were made.

Respondents indicated their preferences regarding what will keep them involved in future conversation including connecting with other groups that discussed a similar topic (25%), educational/information opportunities (21%), updates from At the Table Colorado (20%), progress/action (18%), learning about other conversations that took place on different topics (13%), and other factors such as relationships, access to resources, increased structure, and inviting representatives from government to join the conversation. Many respondents indicated that they would consider potentially having a different role in a future conversation. A little more than half of respondents (53%) indicated that they are interested in hosting their own ATTC conversation.

The survey asked respondents to identify the most important issue in their community. Water was the most frequently identified issue. Other issues that were identified by several respondents were mental health and healthcare, as well as issues related to the economy such as growth, development, and affordable housing. Social justice issues such as equity and immigration were also identified by several respondents. A comprehensive summary of each

issue, as well as any actions that were identified to address the issue, can be found in Appendix F.

Finally, an open-ended survey question asked respondents if they had any additional thoughts on the ATTC experience. All of the received responses were positive with several respondents indicating that they would like to see more conversations like these in their communities. One respondent suggested that the conversation should end at a set time with dedicated time at the end of the discussion to complete the survey.

Discussion and Recommendations

The majority of completed surveys were received in paper form indicating that respondents preferred completing the survey on paper versus electronically. There was a relatively low survey response rate overall with just 50 survey responses received containing usable data. However, some of the conversations had a very high survey response rate with nearly all of the reported number of attendees submitting survey responses. Examples include the survey response rate of participants who attended the "Should our Cities Grow Only Native Plants?" and "Does Public Art Matter?" conversations. This indicates the importance of the host and timing in facilitating survey responses.   To facilitate maximum survey participation, it may be helpful to ensure hosts have paper copies of the surveys on hand for participants and that participants are given the time and encouragement to complete the survey before they leave the conversation venue.

Demographic information collected through the survey indicated that all groups within the population may not have been represented at the conversation. Respondents were found to be predominately white females with high levels of reported education and past involvement in

civic engagement activities. However, the survey also indicated that, with the exception of 18-24-year olds, the conversations included a diverse age range of participants residing in a wide range of zip codes. As suggested in the literature, it may be helpful to specifically invite participants from groups within the population that are less likely to participate.

Feedback on the structure and the content of the conversation was positive across all conversations. This suggests that hosts were generally well prepared and that the conversations were effectively organized and facilitated. Respondents indicated an interest in continuing to communicate with other participants either monthly or once every few months. The preferred method of communication of the majority of respondents was e-mail. With this in mind, hosts could encourage the participants to exchange e-mail information and tentatively suggest meeting again in the next one to three months.

ATTC is effectively utilizing different types of media to spread awareness of conversations and disseminate information. Most respondents were invited to attend their conversation, which indicates that a personal invitation by a friend or colleague is the most effective method of encouraging a participant to attend a conversation. This is consistent with the observations of the Executive Director of ATTC who found during the planning stages that a personal conversation was a key element of getting hosts to commit to participate.

Respondents also attended conversations who learned of the event through multiple methods including social media, the ATTC website, and newspaper and television ads. Numerous methods of publicity may contribute to the diversity of participants and this research found that each of these methods were successful in recruiting attendees.

This research found that most respondents would like to continue their conversations and take action. Respondents indicated preferences for continuing the conversation with the same participants, including new participants, and connecting with other groups who discussed a similar topic. E-mailed updates from ATTC informing past participants of future events, educational and information opportunities, resources, and the results and findings of this project will encourage ongoing participation.

The recruitment and retention of hosts is a critical aspect of the sustainability and diversity of ATTC. More than half of respondents indicated that they are potentially interested in hosting their own conversation. It may be helpful in the future to collect feedback on experiences and preferences from the perspective of hosts to encourage retention, ownership, and improved support and resources for hosts in the future. It may also be helpful to collect contact information from respondents who are interested in hosting a future conversation through use of a sign-in sheet or through the survey.

Comparison to On the Table in Chicago

Demographically, ATTC respondents were similar to those who responded to the On the Table Chicago survey. The 2017 Impact Report notes that On the Table respondents were predominately female and highly educated, with few responses from the 18-29-year-old age group and those with a high school diploma or GED (IPCE, 2017).

Consistent data from four years of conversations in Chicago indicated that the discussions are helping respondents to be better informed about issues in their community, make connections with new people, and that the conversations are encouraging respondents to take action (Hoereth, 2018). Similarly, data from this research project indicated that ATTC respondents also learned

something new in their discussion, built relationships, and are interested in taking action.

However, when asked what they would like to see happen next, the largest percentage of

respondents from ATTC indicated that they would like to continue the conversation with the

same participants. This is consistent with an observation made by the Knight Foundation.

Knight used information from On the Table Chicago to launch a similar event in ten regions

throughout the U.S. In their 2017 report, Knight offered that "the first year of a large

conversation-based initiative in a region can often be about raising awareness and figuring out

the logistics" (Hoereth, Sweeney, Rothschild, & Perez, 2018, p. 45). Subsequent conversations

allow organizations an opportunity to improve the process, increase outreach, and encourage

participants to take action (Hoereth, Sweeney, Rothschild, & Perez, 2018). After a successful

first round of conversations, ATTC should plan subsequent events and continue to provide

information and resources to participants with ongoing outreach efforts to new participants.

While preparing to launch a conversation-based initiative modeled after On the Table

events, the Knight Foundation offered three important lessons from Chicago. Knight found that

keys to success include limiting the number of people per conversation to maximum of 12

people, that the conversation should not include an agenda, and that conversations should be

solution-oriented (Weinberg, 2016). ATTC conversations averaged eight participants each.

Some ATTC respondents indicated that the use of an agenda would make the conversation more

effective. However, the use of an agenda is not recommended because the conversations are

meant to allow participants an opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them, problem

solve, and build trust (Weinberg, 2016). An agenda may not allow the conversation to be open

and inclusive. Finally, the majority of ATTC respondents indicated that they did discuss actions

that can be taken to address the issue discussed and that the overall tone of the conversations was positive. This suggests that ATTC conversations were solution-oriented.

Recommendations

Considering the goals and values of ATTC, relevant literature and empirical studies, and the data, information and preferences collected in the survey, several recommendations emerge.

Program-Focused Recommendations

1. Encourage greater diversity of participation in conversations by specifically inviting members of the community from groups with lower participation rates. This research indicated that these groups include men, minorities, and 18-24-year olds. Members of the community with diverse levels of education and history of civic engagement should also be specifically invited.

2. At the discretion of hosts, consider inviting influential policymakers or those with access to needed resources from the community to participate in the conversation including non-profits, community organizations, and local government. Set clear expectations at the beginning of the conversation that these participants are equals in the conversation and encourage an open and honest dialogue among all participants.

3. Encourage hosts to provide a consolidated list of key resources to participants.

Survey-Focused Recommendations

1. Encourage hosts to have paper surveys available for use and time built into the conversation timeline to complete the survey. Participants should be encouraged to complete the survey before they leave.

2. To encourage greater survey participation, consider re-writing the survey to gather the most relevant pieces of information from participants in a shorter format. Possible suggestions of relevant information include feedback on ways to make the conversation more effective, suggestions for next steps, volunteers to host future conversations with contact information, topics of interest within a community, and demographics.

Limitations

As previously discussed, one limitation of this research is that those who chose to respond to the survey may be fundamentally different than those who chose not to respond. Survey participation rates compared to the overall number of attendees was relatively low in some cases. This could be due in part to the long length of the survey. Additionally, survey responses were not received from every conversation. Some groups within the community were not equally represented in the survey response and therefore the feedback and preferences collected in the survey may not be truly representative of the population. Future ATTC conversations should continue to collect information from participants via a survey device and the findings should be compared to past events for consistency and to identify trends.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

In summary, this research identified the attitudes and preferences of participants in the series of inaugural ATTC conversations. Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered. These findings and recommendations should be applied to future ATTC conversations to improve the experience of participants. Additionally, these findings are meant to ensure long-term sustainability of ATTC and encourage ongoing, effective, and inclusive public engagement processes, deliberation and civic engagement in communities throughout the state of Colorado.

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Appendix A: Survey

Thank you for participating in the inaugural At the Table Colorado statewide conversation!

We appreciate your time and interest in responding to this survey. The purpose of the survey is to gain an understanding of the topics and issues discussed by participants. The results of the survey will be used to improve future At the Table Colorado events and determine participant ideas and preferences for further conversations and actions.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the right to terminate your involvement at any time. Your answers are anonymous and will be kept confidential. The total expected time to complete this survey is ten minutes. Please complete the survey and return it no later than October 15, 2018. This survey is also available to complete and submit online at www.atthetablecolorado.org.

If you prefer to complete the survey on paper after your conversation, please return it to your Table host before leaving. Completed surveys will also be accepted by mail at the following address:

At the Table Colorado
c/o Trailhead Institute
1385 S Colorado Blvd, #A622
Denver, CO 80222

If you have any questions, need clarification on the meaning of the questions, or are interested in the results of this survey, please contact At the Table Colorado at attc@atthetablecolorado.org.

Thank you again for your participation in this survey!

1. Did you participate in an At the Table Colorado conversation in 2018?

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

2. What was the topic of your discussion?

   _____

3. Approximately how many participants, including the host, were at your Table conversation?

   _____

4. Did you learn something new about your topic during your Table conversation?

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

   If yes, do you feel that what you learned is useful for future conversations or actions?

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

5. What is the most interesting thing that you heard during your Table conversation?

   _____

6. Did you have an opportunity to share your thoughts and feelings on the topic of discussion?

○ Yes

○ No

---

7. How would you describe the overall tone of your conversation?

○ Positive

○ Somewhat positive

○ Neutral

○ Somewhat negative

○ Negative

---

8. How likely are you to participate in continued conversations through At the Table Colorado?

○ Likely

○ Unlikely

○ Undecided

---

9. Please indicate which types of follow-up plans your group made: (check all that apply)

☐ Exchanged contact information

☐ Discussed meeting again

☐ Made specific plans to meet again

☐ Made plans to communicate via text or e-mail

☐ No follow-up plans were made

----

10. How satisfied were you with the following?:

	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Location of conversation	○	○	○
Knowledge shared by participants	○	○	○
Relationship among participants	○	○	○
Length of conversation	○	○	○
Organization/flow of conversation	○	○	○
The way the conversation ended	○	○	○

----

11. What could be done to make the conversation more effective?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Did your group discuss actions that can be taken to address the issue discussed?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, briefly describe one action that was identified?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. What would you like to see happen next concerning your Table conversation?

○ Continue the conversation with the same participants

○ Continue the conversation with new participants

○ Connect with other groups who discussed a similar topic

○ Take action as discussed during my Table conversation

○ Nothing, there is nothing else we can do

○ Nothing, I am not interested in the topic

----

14. How often would you like to communicate with other participants from your Table conversation?

○ Weekly

○ Monthly

○ Once every few months

○ Yearly

○ I am not interested in continuing to communicate with participants from my Table conversation

----

15. What will keep you engaged in future conversations? (check all that apply)

☐ Updates from At the Table Colorado

☐ Connecting with other groups that discussed a similar topic

☐ Learning about other Table conversations that took place on different topics

☐ Educational/information opportunities

☐ Progress/action

☐ Other (please specify) _____

---

16. Please answer the following questions concerning your experience:

	True	False
I felt comfortable during my Table conversation	○	○
I felt inspired and empowered following my Table conversation	○	○
I felt I could make a difference in my community following my Table conversation	○	○
I felt like we had a meaningful discussion during my Table conversation	○	○

17. How did you hear about At the Table Colorado?

○ Social media

○ Website

○ I was invited by a friend

○ I was invited by a colleague

○ Other (please specify) _____

---

18. Did you post anything about your Table conversation on social media?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, on which social media site did you post? (check all that apply)

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ Instagram

---

19. What is your preferred method of communication for continued conversation, to get updates, or to learn about future events?

○ Social media

○ E-mail

○ Text message

○ Newsletter update on website

○ Mailed invitation

○ Personal phone call

○ None, I am not interested

---

20. Are you interested in hosting your own Table conversation in the future?

○ Yes

○ No

---

21. What do you think is the most important issue in your community?

_____

---

22. What is one step, no matter how small, that could be taken to help address this issue?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

----

23. Please indicate which of the following types of civic engagement activities you have participated in at any time prior to your Table conversation: (check all that apply)

☐   Involvement in a neighborhood/community/regional event

☐   Attended a parade, rally, or public event

☐   Attended, hosted, or watched a community meeting

☐   Voting or volunteered for a political campaign or attended a political meeting

☐   Volunteered for a community organization or school

☐   Donated to charity or a community organization

☐   Participated in a club, HOA, or community organization

☐   Member of a community or religious organization

☐   Followed current events

☐   Helped a neighbor

☐   Discussed an issue that you are concerned about with another person

☐   Other (please specify) _____

----

24. Please indicate which types of civic engagement activities you are interested in participating in sometime in the future: (check all that apply)

☐ Involvement in a neighborhood/community/regional event

☐ Attended a parade, rally, or public event

☐ Attended, hosted, or watched a community meeting

☐ Voting or volunteered for a political campaign or attended a political meeting

☐ Volunteered for a community organization or school

☐ Donated to charity or a community organization

☐ Participated in a club, HOA, or community organization

☐ Member of a community or religious organization

☐ Followed current events

☐ Helped a neighbor

☐ Discussed an issue that you are concerned about with another person

☐ Other (please specify) _____

----

25. Do you have any additional thoughts on the At the Table Colorado experience?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

26. What is your gender identity?

○ Female

○ Male

○ Prefer not to specify

○ Other (please specify) _____

27. What is your race and/or ethnicity? (check all that apply)

☐   American Indian or Alaska Native

☐   Black or African American

☐   Asian

☐   Hispanic or Latino

☐   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐   White

☐   Other (please specify) _____

28. What is your age?

  ○ 18 - 24

  ○ 25 - 34

  ○ 35 - 44

  ○ 45 - 54

  ○ 55 - 64

  ○ 65 or older

---

29. What level of education have you completed?

  ○ Less than high school

  ○ High School

  ○ Associate Degree

  ○ Bachelor's Degree

  ○ Graduate Degree or Higher

---

30. What zip code do you live in?

  _____

Appendix B: List of dates, locations, and topics of conversations

At the Table Colorado 2018

Public Conversations

Date	Location	Topic
9/15/18	Central City	History Matters in Gilpin County
9/17/18	Grand Junction	Does Public Art Matter?
9/19/18	Denver	Should our Cities Grow only Native Plants?
9/25/18	Castle Rock	Development Issues in Castle Rock
9/27/18	Denver	Community-Led Urban Greening Colorado Tree Coalition
10/2/18	Eagle	Eat Chat Parent: Your Kid's Brain on Tech.
10/6/18	Arvada	Silent Voice: Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness
10/11/18	Greenwood Village	What's on Your Mind?

Private Conversations

Date	Location	Topic
9/19/18	Highlands Ranch	Spirituality in Today's World
10/13/18	Denver	How to Preserve History Camp?

Pending Private Conversations

Water Shortage Issues in Colorado
Senior Power
Foster Care in Colorado

Cancelled Private Conversations

How Do We Create a Stronger Community?

Appendix C: Zip Code Summary

Home Zip Code of Respondent	Number of Occurrences
80010	1
80026	1
80104	2
80109	3
80120	2
80122	2
80125	1
80126	1
80128	1
80205	1
80206	2
80210	1
80223	1
80224	1
80226	1
80227	1
80231	1
80236	2
80246	2
80247	1
80403	1
80439	1
80454	1
81501	4
81503	1
81507	1
81516	1
81521	1
81526	1
81657	1

Appendix D: Answers to the question "What is the most interesting thing that you heard during your Table Conversation?" by conversation

History Matters in Gilpin County

- A willingness to try new things to help spread the word about historical issues in Gilpin County to a larger audience.

Does Public Art Matter?

- Artists need more support.
- Need for community awareness of available art.
- About the resource of 970 West and upcoming arts festival.
- Info about 970 studio.
- Different perspectives.
- Many musicians who use 970 are in the evening food business- late shifts.
- The need for artists to be support by living wages and the info on all the various art groups in town.

Should our Cities Grow Only Native Plants?

- That two young City of Denver employees are passionate about sustainable and native public plantings.
- That droughts are cyclical and planting pocket gardens of drought resistant plants around city gardens is a way to get communities to consider new, sustainable plants during a drought.
- Denver parks workers changing culture.
- History of past happenings around Denver.
- Relativity of native plants.
- Trends in planting to alleviate droughts.

Development Issues in Castle Rock

- Why CR moved the Art Fest, helping merchants and keeping CR downtown attracting citizens.
- That many changes to the town have been made without input from longtime residents.
- How many projects are already permitted in Castle Rock.

Eat Chat Parent: Your Kids Brain on Tech

- The link between youth technology overuse to anxiety and depression is troubling.

Appendix D (cont.): Answers to the question "What is the most interesting thing that you heard during your Table Conversation?" by conversation

Silent Voice: Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness

- That unresolved grief can lead to serious depression and illness.
- New resources.
- The wide variety of resources available in Colorado for this topic.
- Number of resources available.
- Additional loss support.
- Personal stories, options for resources.
- Hearing from additional resource vendors and what they provide families.

What's on Your Mind?

- That others believe that working together at the grassroots level is the only way to really effect change.

Spirituality in Today's World

- Reminder to live in present.
- Use of music in spiritual meditation.
- Different experiences from group members how [sic] their thoughts, regarding spirituality.
- God is more than fundamentally black and white.
- Learned about the travels of others in Scotland, Iceland, and England.

How to Preserve History Camp?

- That it is important to include all viewpoints in the discussion of historic events.
- All of the work that Carrie's put into History Camp.
- Organizing.
- How it is organized.
- The amount of work that goes into history camp and the cost.
- How to get this service going with committees.
- Boston has purview over Colorado events. More detail regarding "Lee" and his authority/support would be helpful.

Appendix E: Actions identified to address the issue discussed by conversation

History Matters in Gilpin County

- Expanding event to a larger audience.

Does Public Art Matter?

- How to raise more money for public art.
- Consider getting an additional piece community-purchased.
- Getting min. payment for artists who donate their work for non-profits.
- Join the GVCA.
- To be aware of all that is happening tap into Creative Alliance.
- We talked about the artist community getting together to stop donating for free to organizations- to at least get paid something for their art. They are hit up a lot in this town!

Should our Cities Grow Only Native Plants?

- Grab opportunities to make changes when they arise.
- Use drought tolerant plants before a drought hits.
- Have [sic] talk to Parks
- Education, perseverance.
- Lead by example.

Development Issues in Castle Rock

- Checking into to see what Art fest was moved, do we have a Downtown Merchant Association (which I checked into and we do).
- Find out why a longtime festival was moved out of downtown Castle Rock.
- We are focusing on bringing the Arts Festival back downtown and identifying like-minded groups.

Eat Chat Parent: Your Kids Brain on Tech

- Parents need to monitor their children's technology use closely and constantly.

Silent Voice: Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness

- Additional conversations, some just for the men, some for the women and some for the whole family.
- Better sharing of other resources.
- Connecting to resources.

Appendix E (cont.): Actions identified to address the issue discussed by conversation

What's on Your Mind?

- Continue to reach out at the grassroots level to engage community members in conversation.

Spirituality in Today's World

- We chose to read a book that made the discussion more meaningful.
- Reading and discussing various books on various forms of spirituality. Practicing meditation.
- Support to take care of self in midst of challenging relationships.

How to Preserve History Camp?

- Plan the timing of the next meeting.
- Committee creation for heading up future History Camp.
- We definitely want to have a History Camp Colorado again next year.
- Expanding and improving History Camp.
- Decision for organizing committee.
- Organizing history camp in the future.
- Forming a committee.
- Get other organizations involved to include the diverse CO culture.

Appendix F: Table of the most important issue in respondent's community and one action that could be taken to address the issue

What do you think is the most important issue in your community?	What is one step, no matter how small, that could be taken to help address this issue?
Lack of community participation	Let people know about ways they can get involved.
Water quality and quantity	Mobilize other community members (which we are in the process of doing).
Growth	
Affordable housing	Vote.
Youth violence	Support better educational opportunities for youth people.
Development and water	Talk with the Downtown Development Authority.
Anxiety, Depression and Suicide	More community conversations.
The lack of compassion for each other	Reach out to help someone that is struggling.
Providing easily accessible resources and support to bereaved families	Continuing to get the word out via media & social media about pregnancy and infant loss.
Elitism	Treat everyone with respect.
Education	Support a complete overhaul of our educational system.
Racial divides	Acknowledge the truth of our past.
Water use and availability	Involve residents of developments with grandfathered irrigation water rights because they are over using water.
Economy	
Sustainable economy and lifestyle	
There is no public art without government	Get these 4 groups at the same table, same time 1. government 2. business 3. public 3 age groups 4. artists and a 5th spokesperson for AOTC Loan/Program
Education	Money and commitment to a great education for all.
Price of housing going through roof	How I vote. Another group I am in is building affordable housing for homeless.
Water management and development	Water conservation and removal of lawns.
Immigration justice	Our church is working to become a sanctuary location. We regularly protest at the holding facility in Aurora.
Health care and school funding	
Isolation	Going to groups where I live.
Water	City ordinance.

	Participation.
Water use in the green industry	Water wise plants.
Equity	More conversations (socialism).
Teen drug use, immigration	Conversation like At the Table host, include law enforcement.
Mental health	More open discussion.
Trauma	Continue advocacy.
Sexual assault	
	Communication, creation of committee, calendar of 2019 dates/deadlines, expectations.
	Email list.
	Help with getting ACC for next year.
Future of event	Keep organizing,
Continuing history camp	Getting people involved and having them stick with it.
	Advertisement.
Establish organizational structure and goals.	Advance information regarding first action meeting.