



The North East
Community
Foundation

Compilation of North East Community Foundation Stakeholder Surveys and Sessions

Executive Summary

As part of the strategic planning process under study by the NECF task force, surveys were distributed to and dialogue sessions were conducted with/among a number of constituencies within the North East community, from March through May.

Data and comments from surveys and sessions were captured, collected and compiled by KeyStone Research Corporation for evaluation by the NECF task force. Survey responses were noted to show how many times a particular response was found.

The notes captured from each session were also captured and presented for discussion by the task force as part of the NECF strategic planning process.

SWOT Results from Surveys

Strengths

Community members believe that there are many strengths of the North East community, the most notable being that the NE community rallies together (20), and is well-resourced (8).

Weaknesses

The most mentioned weaknesses include: a lack of local government leadership (4), lack of communication (3), loss of business (3), losing Mercyhurst (3), a belief that assets are under-utilized (3), lack of adequate housing (3), and widespread poverty (3).

Opportunities

The biggest opportunity currently for the North East community is figuring out the future for the Mercyhurst North East property (4).

Threats

Several areas that community members believe must be addressed moving forward include: drug use (10), poverty (4), empty storefronts (3), limited programs for youth (3), and a lack of local leadership (3).



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SWOT Results Captured from the In-Person Discussion Sessions

The in-person stakeholder sessions had a different dynamic; they were more focused on those common issues and opinions of specific importance to those in each group. The following were some of the most common thoughts expressed:

Strengths

Strategic location (5); Strong commercial diversity within the community (4)

Weaknesses

Resistance to change / “Not Invented Here” (NIH) mentality (3)

Opportunities

Tremendous potential; Storefronts / investment possibilities (4)

Threats

Lack of engagement (2); nothing for kids& teens (2)

Throughout surveys and sessions, comments seemed to fall within/underneath four broad categories:

- Tourism and the Marketing of North East as a Four-Season Destination
- Long-Term Improvement of Parks and Recreation for Residents and Visitors Alike
- Communication, Community/Government Relations and Economic Development
- Community Resources and Social Services



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Next Steps

With this data in-hand and having the opportunity to observe/participate in the various stakeholder discussion sessions, the NECF Task Force has now begun meeting to consider and discuss the possibilities/ opportunities uncovered through this research and to develop a draft strategic plan for consideration by the board:

- Continuing to move the NECF toward consideration of grant making which can be transformational, in nature.
- Redefining (and possibly expanding) the Foundation's mission, based on recent best practices (such as 4th of July fireworks, Erie Philharmonic concerts in the park, and live music for Saturday Markets in Gibson Park). Funded efforts could be initiated by the NECF and not funded as a reaction to specific grant requests.
- Possible expansion of scholarship offerings, working with the NESD and its foundation.
- Exploration of collaborative relationships with other non-profits and local foundations, to combat the "silo mentality," and to help enhance our shared resources, in support of community needs.
- Working to understand (and to possibly redefine) the types and level of active involvement by the Foundation in community issues:
 - May require the NECF to redefine its boundaries/comfort zone
 - May change/enhance the Foundation's committee structure, requiring greater focus and more active involvement by board members.
 - Potential for Consultative role, helping and working with other non-profits/community organizations in North East, to help, to facilitate, and possibly to initiate action for the good of North East.
 - An expanded role may require a "brick & mortar location" and the active involvement of paid staff at some point in the future.
- The task force will now be focusing its efforts on the preparation of a proposed strategic plan draft, for presentation and discussion at the next NECF meeting.