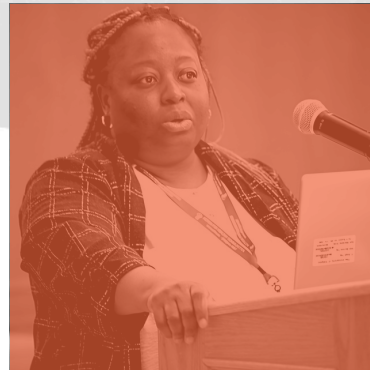
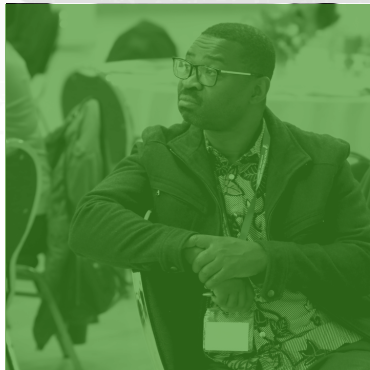
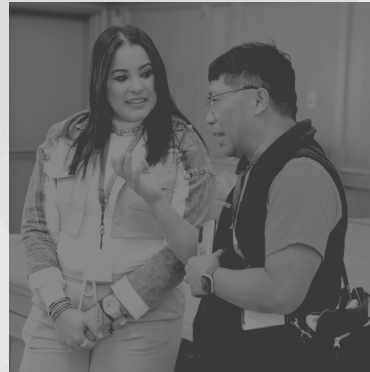




4th Annual Building Inclusive Communities Forum

2025

Impact of Collective Actions



Insights from 4th Annual Building Inclusive Communities Forum

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNIT

✉ communitydevelopment@a4hc.ca

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The 4th Annual Building Inclusive Communities Forum, hosted by Action for Healthy Communities (AHC) on October 8, 2025, convened nearly 120 participants, including representatives from 25 grassroots organizations, community developers, and nonprofit sector. The forum provided a dynamic platform for dialogue, collaboration, and collective action focused on advancing inclusion and strengthening community connections across Edmonton.

What began as a small community gathering with the goal of fostering connection has evolved into a citywide flagship event in Edmonton's community development landscape. Each year, the forum brings together grassroots groups, nonprofits, and public institutions to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and build partnerships that drive inclusive community growth. Through interactive discussions and collaborative networking, the event continues to amplify community voices, highlight innovative practices, and strengthen collective efforts toward a more welcoming and equitable city.

Over time, the Building Inclusive Communities Forum has become a unifying space where residents, organizations, and civic leaders reaffirm their shared commitment to creating inclusive environments where everyone feels respected, represented, and empowered to participate fully in community life. This report highlights the key insights and lessons emerging from the forum, focusing on opportunities for continued learning and collaborative action to address systemic barriers, strengthen civic engagement, and empower equity-deserving grassroots groups and organizations across the Greater Edmonton Area.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & OPENING REMARKS



The forum commenced with a warm welcome to participants, followed by a Land Acknowledgement recognizing and honoring the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples on which the event took place. Mr. Aftab Khan, Executive Director of AHC, formally opened the event with his remarks, extending appreciation to all attendees for their continued engagement in fostering inclusive communities.

In his address, Mr. Khan highlighted that this marked the fourth edition of the Building Inclusive Communities Forum, underscoring its role as a shared learning platform that connects grassroots organizations, funders, and service providers to exchange ideas and strengthen collaboration. He also expressed gratitude to the forum's long-standing funding partners—the City of Edmonton (Family and Community Support Services - FCSS) and the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF)—for their ongoing support of AHC's community capacity-building initiatives. Followed by his opening remarks a video was showcased to the audience capturing 30 years of journey of AHC (1995 to 2025) supporting communities in the Greater Edmonton area.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: BUILDING BELONGING THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



The keynote address, titled “Building Belonging Through Inclusion and Civic Engagement,” was delivered by Dr. Bukola Salami from the University of Calgary. Dr. Salami began by highlighting that immigrants constitute nearly 23% of Canada's population, yet many continue to face barriers such as language challenges, lack of mentorship, discrimination, and limited representation in civic and leadership spaces.

She emphasized that belonging is a cornerstone of mental well-being, community connectedness, and long-term social inclusion. True belonging, she noted, requires co-creating programs with communities, not merely for them—centering community voices in design, decision-making, and leadership.

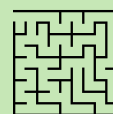
Dr. Salami discussed a range of challenges that immigrants frequently encounter, including:



Unemployment, underemployment, & income insecurity



Difficulties navigating systems and processes



Complex immigration pathways



Language and communication barriers



Discrimination and systemic bias



Shifts in family and intergenerational dynamics



Despite Alberta's growing immigrant population and its strong contributions to the province's economy, Dr. Salami observed that many still experience underrepresentation, economic marginalization, and declining health outcomes post-migration.

To foster a sense of true civic engagement and belonging, Dr. Salami outlined three interconnected layers of belonging that must be nurtured:



Cultural Belonging – Connection to one's ethnic or cultural roots and heritage.



Geographical Belonging

A sense of attachment to one's neighborhood and city.



National Belonging

Identification as an active and valued member of Canadian society.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: BUILDING BELONGING THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

She emphasized that for these layers to be meaningful, they must be intentionally integrated into all levels of planning, policy, and program development. Dr. Salami also offered key recommendations for advancing inclusion and civic engagement:



Address systemic racism and ensure diversity and equity in governance.



Co-design programs in partnership with communities to foster authentic belonging.



Promote civic education and mentorship opportunities to strengthen participation.



Celebrate and sustain cultural identity as the foundation of belonging.



Advocate for inclusive and equitable policies across all levels of government.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Salami spoke about “Shattering the Glass Ceiling,” describing how success within immigrant communities often stems from individual perseverance and resilience. She encouraged continued collective efforts to remove structural barriers—so that belonging, leadership, and civic participation become the norm rather than the exception.

PANEL DISCUSSION: STRENGTHENING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GRASSROOTS CAPACITY BUILDING



A highlight of the forum was the panel discussion titled “Strengthening Civic Engagement Through Grassroots Capacity Building.” The conversation brought together an inspiring lineup of community leaders who shared powerful insights on fostering inclusion, equity, and civic participation across Edmonton’s diverse communities.

The session was moderated by Aftab Khan, Executive Director of AHC, and featured the following distinguished panelists:



Dunia Nur – President & CEO, African Canadian Civic Engagement Council (ACCEC)

Nur is a national leader in advancing civic participation and human rights for people of African descent.



Sunpreet (Sunny) Singh Johl – President, Stop Hate Alberta

Johl is a passionate anti-racism advocate and one of Alberta’s Top 30 Under 30 changemakers.



Olivia Howard – Public Engagement Advisor, City of Edmonton

Howard champions inclusive and equitable engagement practices that elevate equity-deserving voices.



Zedingle Ghebremusse – Community Social Worker and Planner, City of Edmonton

Ghebremusse has over two decades of experience advancing community empowerment and inclusion.

PANEL DISCUSSION: STRENGTHENING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GRASSROOTS CAPACITY BUILDING

The panelists reflected on how grassroots leadership and capacity building are central to strengthening civic engagement. They underscored that when community leaders are empowered with the right tools, networks, and support, decision-making becomes more inclusive, participatory, and reflective of Edmonton's diversity.



The discussion highlighted the importance of collaboration among community groups, funders, and policymakers to create sustainable pathways for civic participation. Panelists also encouraged continued investment in community education, mentorship, and policy advocacy as key strategies to build long-term civic capacity.

The session concluded with an open dialogue where attendees exchanged experiences, challenges, and practical ideas—fostering new connections and collaborative momentum to enhance civic engagement at both community and policy levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The panelists shared practical recommendations to strengthen grassroots leadership and enhance civic participation across Edmonton. These serve as a collective call to action for community groups, funders, policymakers, and the AHC Community Development Unit (CDU) team:

- Redefine Civic Engagement
- Shift from top-down consultation to community-led co-design and shared ownership of civic processes.
- Form a Grassroots Civic Engagement Coalition
- Create a city-wide coalition of ethnocultural and community-based groups to strengthen collective advocacy and representation.
- Invest in Leadership and Mentorship
- Provide ongoing civic leadership and mentorship opportunities, especially for youth, women, and equity-deserving communities.
- Foster Institutional Empathy and Inclusivity
- Encourage institutions to adapt engagement practices that reflect community realities, cultural diversity, and communication needs.
- Ensure Sustainable Funding
- Advocate for flexible, long-term funding that supports grassroots stability and ongoing civic participation.
- Enhance Collaboration and Co-Design
- Build stronger partnerships between community groups, policymakers, and funders through regular dialogue and joint planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote Civic Education and Knowledge Sharing
- Strengthen community awareness of civic rights, responsibilities, and participation tools through peer learning and education.
- Support Community-Based Research and Advocacy
- Empower grassroots groups to lead research and use data to influence equitable public policy.
- Leverage Civic Tools and Platforms
- Use existing tools—letters, petitions, online platforms, forums—strategically while advocating for more inclusive engagement systems.
- Empower Community Initiatives as Civic Bridges
- Support CIs as key connectors linking residents with decision-makers and advancing community-informed policy solutions.

CALL TO ACTION



Grassroots groups are encouraged to collaborate and amplify their collective voice, while AHC's CDU team will continue to strengthen coordination, capacity building, and partnerships.

Together, these efforts will advance a more inclusive and civically engaged Edmonton.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITIES: GRASSROOTS PRESENTATIONS

Theme 2025: The Impact of Collective Action



One of the most engaging segments of the forum was the “Voices from the Communities” session, which showcased 16 grassroots initiatives under the 2025 theme, “The Impact of Collective Action.” These presentations reflected the diversity, creativity, and resilience of community groups across Edmonton and Alberta.



Community presenters were organized into four thematic clusters, based on their initiatives' goals, focus areas, and beneficiary groups. Each cluster explored shared experiences, lessons learned, and opportunities for collaboration to tackle systemic barriers, mobilize resources, enhance sustainability, and strengthen collective impact.

This dynamic and interactive session featured stories rooted in lived experience, demonstrating how grassroots initiatives are transforming local communities through inclusive action and civic participation.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITIES: GRASSROOTS PRESENTATIONS

Theme 2025: The Impact of Collective Action

CULTURAL CONNECTION FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



Presented by Africa Caribbean Heritage Alliance Foundation (Okama Brook), Tunisian Women Society of Alberta (Adam Elloumi), Senegalese Community of Edmonton Society (Ahmed Sow), and Guinean Association of Edmonton (Mamadou Balde)

Groups under this theme explored how cultural expression serves as a bridge for inclusion, trust-building, and community connection. Through arts, heritage, language, and storytelling, they illustrated how celebrating identity helps dismantle stereotypes and foster cross-cultural understanding. Their collective message emphasized that connection is not only about preservation but also about creating shared spaces where diversity becomes a source of strength and belonging.

YOUTH IN ACTION: BUILDING RESILIENCE, LEADING CHANGE



Presented by Habeesha FC (Nathan Begna), Creative Collectives, (Raiyana Islam) and Step-up YEG (Rovena Castar)

This youth-led presentation featured emerging leaders who are mobilizing to address systemic inequities, social exclusion, and barriers to participation. They shared how collective action empowers young people to reimagine community leadership, promote social innovation, and strengthen civic voice. The youth presenters spoke passionately about collaboration as a tool for resilience and transformation—demonstrating that youth voices are critical to shaping inclusive futures.

EMPOWERING VOICES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE



Presented by Edmonton Chinese Writing Club (Cathy Shi), WMEN – Women: Mindful, Empowered, and Nurturing (Maneeta Thapa), The Young Learns Africa Foundation (Tabitha Biel), and Tajik Society of Alberta (Nozima Nurmukhamedova)

This cluster highlighted initiatives that challenge marginalization, foster inclusion, and promote empowerment through literacy, skill development, and creative expression. Presenters used videos and visuals to demonstrate how their programs counter social isolation and strengthen individual and community agency—particularly among newcomers and underrepresented populations. These initiatives illustrated how moving beyond individual action toward collective partnership strengthens the social fabric and enhances community resilience, and collective empowerment drive lasting social change and community well-being.

THRIVING TOGETHER THROUGH COLLABORATION



Presented by Circle International (Rehman Ali), Himalaya Rocky Sports Club (Nischal Balami), and Kyrgyz Association in Canada (Naz Aitkulova)

The final group of presenters demonstrated how collaboration and relationship-building create thriving communities. Their joint presentation highlighted how trust, shared purpose, and resource mobilization enable diverse groups to co-create solutions and achieve collective success. These initiatives illustrated how moving beyond individual action toward collective partnership strengthens the social fabric and enhances community resilience.

COMMUNITY SHOWCASE



The Community Showcase featured 16 grassroots groups hosting interactive booths that transformed the venue into a vibrant hub of connection and collaboration. The session provided an invaluable opportunity for attendees to network, exchange ideas, and share best practices from their community initiatives. It also fostered new partnerships and cross-community learning, highlighting the collective energy and innovation driving Edmonton's grassroots movement.



CONCLUDING REMARKS



The event concluded with heartfelt closing remarks from Suzanna Dumo, Director of Programs at AHC. She extended her appreciation to all participants, presenters, and partners for their meaningful contributions, energy, and commitment throughout the day. Suzanna reflected on the event's overarching message — that connection, learning, and collaboration are the building blocks of inclusive communities.

Drawing from the discussions and presentations, she highlighted several key takeaways:

- Belonging begins with one's cultural, local, and national identity; cultural spaces are vital in strengthening community bonds.
- Inclusion must be co-created through shared experiences, not prescribed from the top down.
- The community presentations were the “spice of the day”—showcasing authentic creativity, resilience, collaboration, and commitment to change.
- Communities should shift perspectives from needs-based approaches to strength-based development, recognizing and leveraging their inherent assets.
- Change is gradual yet powerful, as the timeless saying reminds us: “Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

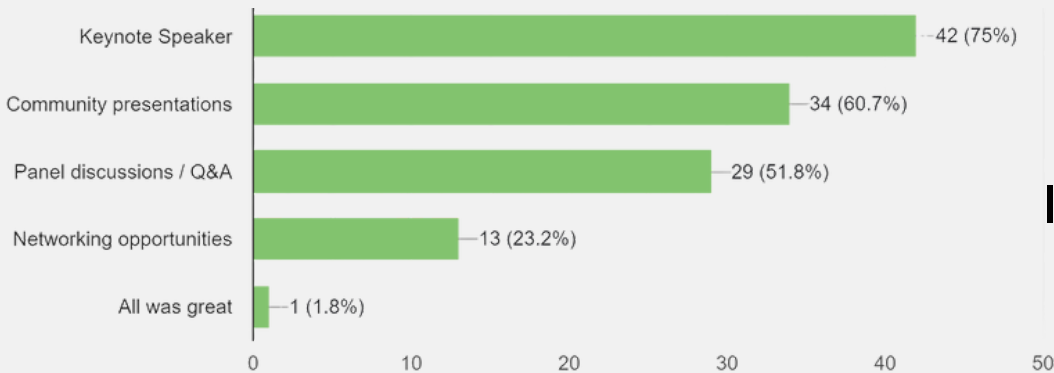
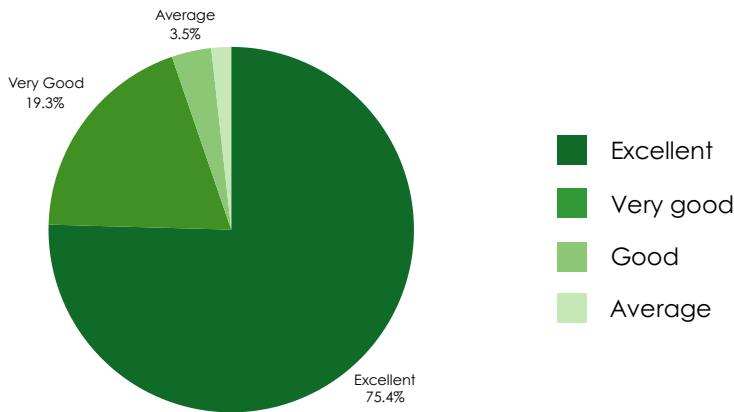
“If we’ve shared, connected, and learned even one thing today, that alone is an accomplishment. Together, we are building inclusive communities — one step at a time.” — Suzanna Dumo

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



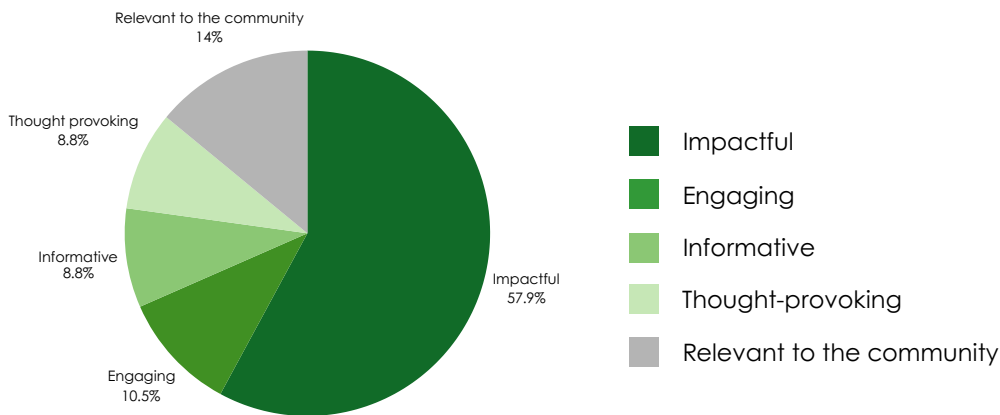
Following the forum, attendees were invited to complete a structured feedback survey designed to capture their insights, perspectives, and overall experiences. The survey aimed to assess the event's effectiveness, highlight strengths, and identify opportunities for improvement. The summarized responses provide valuable guidance to inform and enhance the planning of future events.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR OVERALL EXPERIENCE AT THE EVENT?



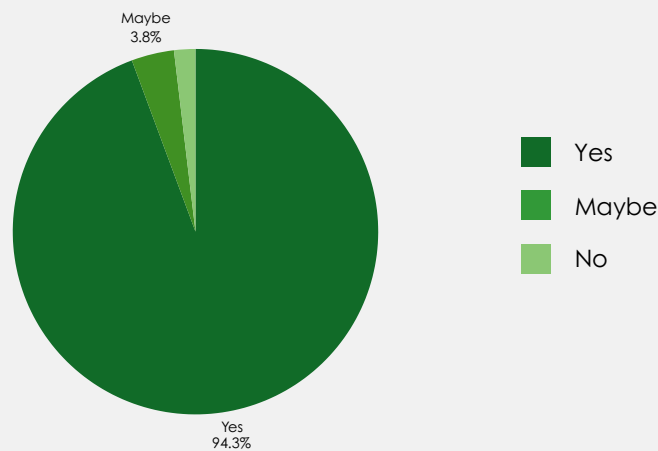
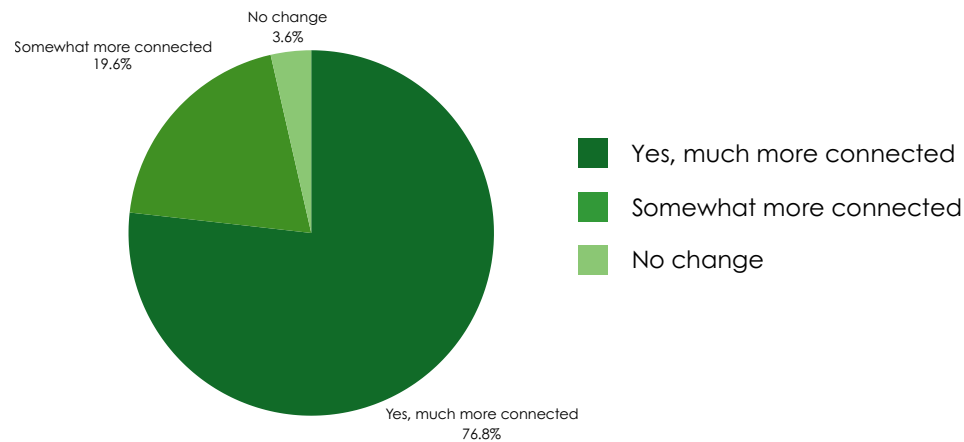
WHICH PART OF THE EVENT WAS MOST IMPORTANT FOR YOU?

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE COLLABORATIVE PRESENTATIONS BY THE COMMUNITY GROUPS?



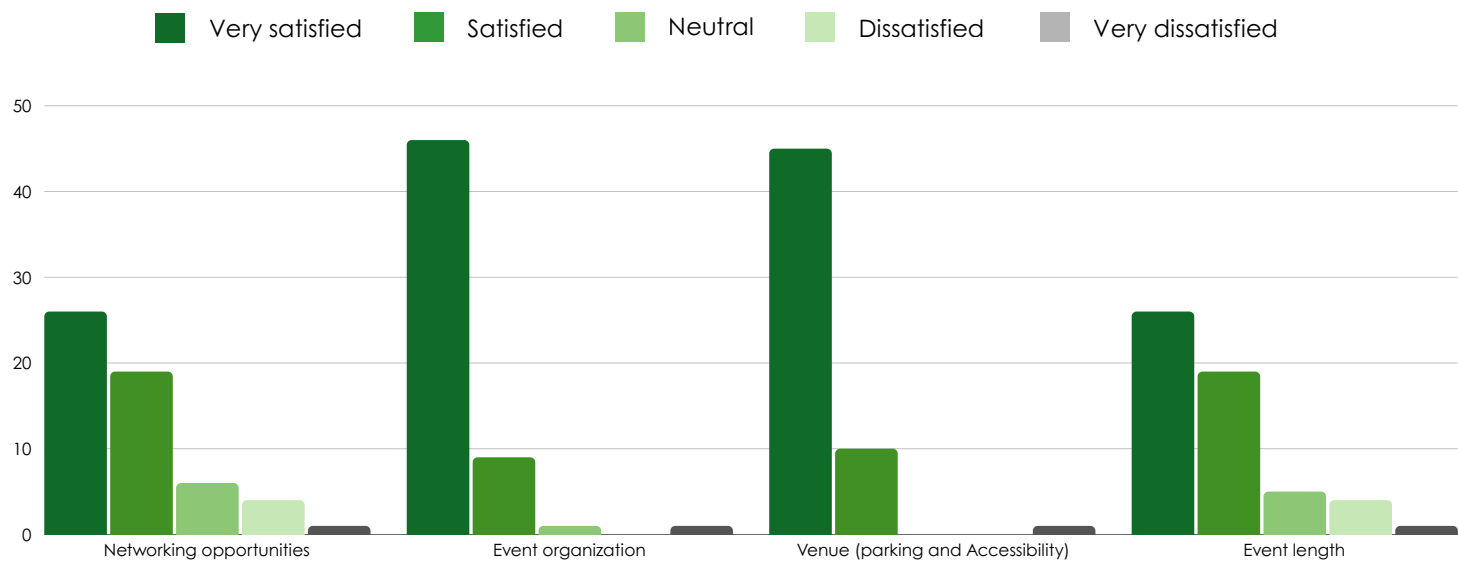
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

DO YOU FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO GRASSROOTS GROUPS AND SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATING IN THE BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES FORUM?



FOLLOWING THE EVENT, DO YOU FEEL MORE OPEN TO WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS?

PLEASE RATE YOUR SATISFACTION WITH THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF THE EVENT



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

What was the most important insight or takeaway you gained from the event?



- To learn more what other organizations are doing, what are the challenges and successes.
- Social organizations should have more spaces like this to meet and collaborate on different projects that benefit our communities.
- Collaboration and cooperation and civic engagement.

Civil engagement and collaboration are the Key in making the change in the community for the good.

- Importance of civic engagement for marginalized communities and community leaders collaboration.
- That community engagement is varied. There is variety of engagement for communities. Make time to connect and build relationships.
- The commitment, dedication, and outstanding services of AHC to uplift ethnic communities.
- Collaboration.
- Community is about bottom up and collaboration. really insightful.
- Some insights the government rep shared regarding building community engagement.

Keynote speaker Dr Salami was incredible! She gave great strategies for moving forward helping newcomers and others become part of the community. Really got me thinking about how to better support adults in the LINC program int heir journey to become community members who are civic minded. The panel furthered this conversation. Came away with some great ideas!

A great community solution can come out if we work in collaboration and support each other. Great event indeed!

- We can start to volunteer for making a network.
- Community people have the car, they need the gas to move ahead and find a community solutions.
- To learn more what other organizations are doing, what are the challenges and successes.
- Everything.
- Collaborative Presentations.
- Co-creation and we have the car, we need the fuel.

The conclusion made me realize that we have to work in collaboration and strengthen our communities

- Connecting with and reconnecting with other community builders and gaining insight and access to todays community builders.
- The needs of newcomers vary depending on the length of their stay in the new community.
- How many organizations there are going good work.
- The power of grassroots to define and develop policy.
- Group presentations were amazing. There is a need to collect different resources to support newcomers with the tools they need to succeed.
- The speaker was excellent, I made connections, I talked to people, and I was happy doing.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Do you have any additional feedback, reflections, or suggestions for future events?



- Would like to start earlier (9am) and end by 3. Things felt very rushed. More interactive and hearing from other people in the room rather than being talked at. Fewer presentations and more opportunities to connect organically. More opportunities to speak and meet with each other.
- Congratulations for this amazing initiative.

When you feel that you belong to a community, your mental health is better.

- I would say time to start, and it should be more like 9 am, so that we can leave by 12 o' clock.
- Give us more time to network, even last year we did not have much time to work.
- Satisfied.
- It was so long.
- I would love to have more time to communicate and engage informally through coffee breaks and lunch time with other organizations - to establish relationships, share experiences.
- More events.
- If this event started earlier ended at lunch with a networking session that would be ideal.

For future events, it might be helpful to include more interactive sessions or small group discussions to encourage deeper engagement. Overall, I found the content valuable and look forward to participating in future sessions.

Big thank you to everyone who worked so hard to coordinate this event, especially to Pravatika, Javaid, Bazi, community members and others.

- More time slotted for key speaker and panel! Lunch was fantastic! Venue also great! Thanks for all the efforts to out in this forum.
- The community presentations ran a bit too long, with some overlapping content. I would also suggest adding a workshop component in future events to offer more hands-on learning opportunities for participants.
- French Translate if it's possible.
- Thank you. Keep up the great work.

Thank you for the event and invite. Please have a prayer mat and a small corner available for full day event for our Muslim community members to take a few minutes to do obligatory prayers

- I would suggest a map showing where these grass roots organizations are in the City. And if possible, a world map on where their original heritage is.
- Have a snack for when you come and coffee ready. Very nice lunch. Thank you!!!
- Thank you. Keep up the great work.
- I did not feel like the time to connect was enough.

Thank you!

FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE 4th ANNUAL BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES FORUM

We Look Forward To Welcoming You At The 2026 Forum!

CONNECT WITH US



Mon 9 AM - 5 PM
Sat Program Event
Stat holiday closed

Tues-Fri 9 AM - 8 PM
Sun closed



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