Toward One Wausau

HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR COMMUNITY A WELCOMING PLACE FOR EVERYONE?

ONE WWAUSAU
About This Issue Guide

The purpose of this issue guide is to help us talk productively about a difficult issue that concerns all of us.

Deliberation

It’s not a debate or a contest. It’s not even about reaching agreement or seeing eye-to-eye. It’s about looking for a shared direction guided by what we most value. It’s about examining the costs and consequences of possible solutions to daunting problems and finding out what we, as a community, would or would not accept as solutions.

A Framework

This guide offers alternative ways of looking at the issue, each rooted in shared concerns. It also provides strategic facts associated with each approach and suggests the benefits and drawbacks of possible solutions. We engage in deliberation by:

• Getting beyond the initial positions we hold to consider our deeper motivations - that is, the things we most care about, such as fairness, responsibility, and community

• Carefully weighing the views of others and recognizing the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable

• Working through the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what we - and others - consider valuable

It is important to remember that, as a group, we are dealing with broader underlying concerns that are not defined by party affiliation. Your work here is to dig down to the things that define us as human beings and community members rather than as liberals and conservatives.

The research used to develop this issue guide came from interviews, conversations, and surveys of over 500 community members from all walks of life. Data was also collected from law enforcement organizations, schools, health agencies, as well as government and other primary sources.

What Happens Next?

Issue guides like this one are designed to frame and support community conversations. Trained note-takers will capture what is said during each conversation. Participants will also be asked to take an anonymous survey at the end of each forum. Together, this information will be collated, analyzed and findings presented to the public and to community leaders at a future public meeting at a time and place to be determined. Following this, the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, the Wausau Daily Herald, and Wisconsin Public Radio will host a series of action planning meetings and invite individuals and community organizations to prioritize and plan next action steps. In this way, the individual opinions of forum participants will be used to make collective choices as members of a community—the kinds of choices from which public policy may be forged or public action may be taken on this issue.
Toward One Wausau Project

Toward One Wausau brings together community members from all walks of life to talk openly, listen earnestly and act in unity so that Wausau is a safe, welcoming and attractive place for all. The project is led by citizens of our community who care about this issue with sponsorship from the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, Wausau Daily Herald, and Wisconsin Public Radio. Generous funding has been provided by the B. A. and Esther Greenheck Foundation and the Community Foundation of Northcentral Wisconsin. Using a well-established method of deliberative dialogue, we will engage residents of the Wausau metro area in a series of community conversations designed to help people come to reasoned public judgment about the problems associated with an increasingly diverse community and tensions that have arisen around perceptions of whether or not our community is a welcoming place for people of different cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, socio-economic and other backgrounds. Ultimately, the purpose is to help the community find tangible and constructive means of working together to move toward a vision of one Wausau that is welcoming to all residents regardless of differences.

Ground Rules for a Forum

It is important for participants to agree on guidelines for their discussion.

- Listen carefully to each other.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- No one or two individuals should dominate.
- Consider all options fairly; new ideas welcome.
- [Add your own ground rule(s) here if desired].
IN 2015, A TRAGIC INCIDENT OF TEEN violence triggered a series of events in the Wausau area that uncovered serious tensions in the community and caused some residents to question the assumption that our community is equally welcoming for everyone.

For most residents, the Wausau area remains a safe, friendly, and inviting place to live, work and play. But our perspective depends on factors like where we come from, how much money we have and the color of our skin. As the Wausau-area population has become more diverse, residents have had more opportunities to learn about cultures, lifestyles and views different from their own. At the same time, the community has been exposed to real cultural and ethnic divisions, with deep roots that rarely are acknowledged, much less understood. Recent activism around the trial and conviction of a teenager in the homicide of another youth laid bare these tensions, and exposed gaps in the way the community is perceived and understood by those who live here. While Wausau has come a long way since it began welcoming Hmong refugees 40 years ago, many residents still feel that our community could do a better job helping new and diverse residents feel at home.
Wausau and Marathon County are predominantly white, but becoming increasingly diverse. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the most diversity is found in the city of Wausau, where 78.8 percent of residents are white; 12.4 percent are Asian; 3.7 percent are Hispanic or Latino; 1.7 percent are African American and 0.4 percent are Native American. Looking to our future, among the city’s residents who are under 18, the Census Bureau in 2015 found only 60.9 percent were white; 20.8 percent were Asian; 8 percent were Latino; and 3.3 were African American. In other words, the next generation in Wausau has roughly twice as much ethnic diversity as the current overall population. Are we prepared as a community to embrace our increasingly diverse population?

Some report feeling as though there are two Wausaus. There is the friendly community with excellent schools, good paying jobs, and responsive local government, including vigilant and professional law enforcement. But a persistent minority viewpoint holds that not all are treated fairly. Some believe they are sometimes skipped over for promotions, profiled by law enforcement for traffic stops, and underrepresented in positions of community leadership simply because of their gender, race, or ethnicity. How do we reconcile these two views? How do we ensure that our community is treating all residents fairly and without bias? How do we help citizens respect and trust our institutions, including law enforcement and our criminal justice system? How do we embrace diverse points of view without giving up what we hold valuable as a community?

This issue guide is a framework for residents to work through these important questions together. It offers three different options for deliberation, each rooted in different shared concerns and different ways of looking at the problem.

“Racial prejudice, anti-Semitism, or hatred of anyone with different beliefs has no place in the human mind or heart.”
Billy Graham

“America is known as a country that welcomes people to its shores. All kinds of people. The image of the Statue of Liberty with Emma Lazarus’ famous poem. She lifts her lamp and welcomes people to the golden shore, where they will not experience prejudice because of the color of their skin, the religious faith that they follow.”
Ruth Bader Ginsburg
The resulting conversation may be difficult, as it will necessarily involve tensions between things people hold deeply valuable. No one option is the “correct” one; each includes drawbacks and trade-offs that we will have to face if we are to make progress on this issue. They are not the only options available. **They are presented as a starting point for deliberation.**

The **First Option** says that our top priority is to ensure all citizens receive equal and fair treatment from local institutions and fellow citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. National economic and other data still reveal institutional discrimination and lingering societal biases - leading many to conclude that the fight for social justice for some individuals and groups is not over.

The **Second Option** says that providing equal opportunities for residents and requiring individuals and institutions to be accountable for their actions will naturally foster a stronger and more civil community. With opportunity comes individual responsibility to uphold the laws, pay taxes, be productive and help make the community a better place. In return, residents can expect to receive basic government services, be represented by accountable elected officials, and be treated with respect and dignity by fellow residents and community institutions.

The **Third Option** says that to bridge underlying divisions in our community - whether real or perceived - we must acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate diversity. This is not simply a matter of helping everyone feel good about themselves; it is a proven path to create new relationships, increase trust between citizens and community institutions, and build much-needed social capital. A community that embraces and celebrates new and diverse residents is a step closer to developing a welcoming culture that is likely to attract and retain working families.

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**Perceived level of discrimination among groups in U.S.**

Q. How much discrimination do the following groups face in America today? (%)

![Perception of Discrimination](image-url)

The case of Dylan Yang and beyond . . .

On February 27, 2015, Dylan Yang stabbed 13-year-old Isaiah Powell twice in the back during a confrontation outside of Yang’s Wausau residence after a series of escalatory Facebook messages. Though just 15 at the time, after admitting his crime to police, Yang immediately entered the adult court system as required by state law. At one point, Yang could have petitioned the judge for a hearing that might have switched his case to the juvenile system, but he waived that right and was tried as an adult. A jury convicted him of reckless homicide in March 2016 and he was later sentenced to 13 years in prison followed by 17 years of extended supervision. “I would do anything to bring him back,” Yang told the judge and the packed courtroom while thousands more watched via online video. “If I had a chance, I would change places with Isaiah.”

Extraordinary as these events were for the Wausau-area community, they took on even more importance as hundreds of Hmong American residents and supporters across the state descended on Wausau on May 31, 2016, for a Save Our Children peace march following Yang’s conviction. Hundreds of demonstrators rallied on the 400 Block downtown, marched past the school administration building as well as the police and fire departments, and finally ended at the Marathon County Courthouse. Most people were there to support the claim that Dylan Yang should not have been tried as an adult and that he deserved leniency given his young age and the circumstances of the homicide. They were also there to show solidarity in calling for the prevention of bullying and the promotion of healing in the community. But an undercurrent of the march was that Dylan had not been treated fairly by the criminal justice system, potentially due to his Hmong heritage—with a few directly accusing the system of being biased and discriminatory. But overall the peace march was both peaceful and disciplined.

Perhaps the community might have moved on from there. However, law enforcement officials were concerned about the message of the march, believing it implicitly (and explicitly) criticized their role in the Yang case. This feeling was intensified by the participation of Marathon County Administrator Brad Karger in the march. Although Karger had engaged during his lunch hour and reportedly said nothing negative about the handling of the case, some questioned the appropriateness of his participation. The County Board was concerned and launched a closed-door inquiry that quickly led to a one-month unpaid suspension for Karger and a demand that he apologize and repair relationships with all law enforcement departments in Marathon County. A few unfortunate public remarks by some officials, coupled with intense media coverage, aggravated the situation. Some residents reacted negatively to Karger’s suspension, arguing he was merely exercising his free speech rights. More troubling, some in the Hmong community and beyond interpreted Karger’s punishment as disrespect for ongoing public concerns about the Dylan Yang case. Another segment of the community felt that Karger had overstepped his bounds. As a result, the community continues to wonder to what extent this situation reflects deep underlying issues of social injustice or simply “a perfect storm” of untimely actions and reactions - or some combination of both.
ACCORDING TO THIS OPTION, it is important that all citizens receive equal and fair treatment from local institutions and fellow citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender, faith or socioeconomic status. Although our nation and community have come a long way in treating people fairly under the law, discrimination and lingering societal biases still exist and cause some residents to feel that they are not fully welcome in our community.

This approach says that our community should take concrete steps to eliminate discrimination and bias wherever it may exist. It is especially important for institutions of power, including businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government bodies, to proactively engage in policies and actions to ensure that all residents are treated fairly.
This option commits local government, including law enforcement, to improving relations with minority communities. According to African American resident David Stuart, “I wake up each morning wondering if this is the day I am going to be stopped by the police because I am black.” By his recollection, Stuart has been pulled over at least 20 times for a variety of minor reasons and “random” checks in his 16 years living in the Wausau area. The most challenging example occurred when he and his family were driving in town and pulled over by a police officer. “Within about two minutes, there were six police vehicles surrounding us. An officer asked me if I knew why I was being stopped, to which I replied, ‘I really have no idea.’” The officer had spotted an older registration sticker - just a few days overdue as it turns out. So why six police cars? According to Stuart, the officer indicated that he had been randomly selected to have his vehicle searched. “Within about two minutes, there were six police vehicles surrounding us. An officer asked me if I knew why I was being stopped, to which I replied, ‘I really have no idea.’” The officer had spotted an older registration sticker - just a few days overdue as it turns out. So why six police cars? According to Stuart, the officer indicated that he had been randomly selected to have his vehicle searched. Although Stuart was angry, suspecting that he had been racially profiled, he granted permission, “because I knew they would delay me even longer if I said ‘no’ to the search.” Despite these experiences, Stuart appreciates our community law enforcement and recognizes they have a tough job. “But when you get pulled over ‘randomly’ so many times you start to feel like you are being targeted for the simple reason that you look different.”

This kind of story motivates Wausau Deputy Police Chief Ben Bliven to make sure police officers are treating all residents respectfully and fairly without regard to their background. “This is already a priority for our Department,” says Bliven, “and we have taken steps to be mindful of the potential for bias and to actively counter such tendencies whether explicit or implicit.” For instance, the police are actively meeting with community members, including those of diverse backgrounds, in order to build new relationships and overcome stereotypes about the role of law enforcement. “We are always looking to find new and creative ways to reach people,” says Bliven, “and our participation in Toward One Wausau has helped us to forge new relationships that did not exist before.”

Working with law enforcement is only one small part of what our community could do according to this option. We need to involve other government organizations along with businesses and nonprofit organizations to create a culture of equitable treatment for all. We might start by seeking more diverse representation in leadership and employing implicit bias training. We could teach our students the negative effects of discrimination and the importance of social justice. We may even need to reconsider the very language we use in talking to one another.
Implement implicit bias training

If we are to ensure that all are treated fairly, not only must we build and strengthen relationships between law enforcement and the community, we must also proactively take steps to reduce bias within our institutions of power, including businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government entities. This option says that we should commit our community institutions to enact implicit bias training.

The concept of implicit bias holds that there are beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes that exist in all of us, often unconsciously. These biases can create problems in interactions between and among authority figures and community members. According to researcher and author of *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell, “Attitudes toward things like race or gender operate on two levels. First of all, we have our conscious attitudes. This is what we choose to believe. These are our stated values, which we use to direct our behavior deliberately.” But research shows there is a second level of attitude, including “our racial attitude on an unconscious level - the immediate, automatic associations that tumble out before we’ve even had time to think. We don’t deliberately choose our unconscious attitudes. And . . . we may not even be aware of them,” says Gladwell.

Implicit bias training is not designed to criticize our community organizations or those who lead them. On the contrary, it acknowledges that everyone harbors bias, and shows people how to respond in difficult situations without letting unconscious bias drive our decisions around things like hiring and advancement, and making assumptions about the diverse people we encounter every day.

Eliminate language and behavior that divide people

Often, the very language we use to describe our differences is problematic and can create misunderstanding and hurt feelings. Some people decry this as unnecessary “political correctness.” In a rapidly changing world of identity politics, some argue, who can keep straight what may or may not cause offense? This option holds that, to treat people fairly, we must begin by removing offensive and inaccurate language from our conversations. For example, we could rid our vocabulary of the word “race” altogether, which is a flawed concept based on the false notion that there is some characteristic, trait, or gene distinguishing one so-called race from another. And yet, racism - unequal treatment because of one’s skin color or ethnic heritage - is very real. According to this option, a good start would be to examine how we talk to and treat one another and to learn how do so in ways that are respectful to all.

Expand social justice education in our schools

A critical element of this option is to expand social justice learning goals in school curricula to create more opportunity for students to learn about the negative impacts of bias and discrimination on society. While such topics get discussed in school curricula to some extent already, this option holds that our taught history underrepresents the role of diverse populations. The recent Oscar-nominated movie “Hidden Figures,” for example, highlighted the role of African American female mathematicians who were indispensable in helping launch the first American astronauts into orbit. Yet, this history was virtually unknown to generations of Americans until now. According to this option, only by actively expanding our goals to teach accurate and diverse history along with more emphasis on social justice issues are we likely to encourage the next generation to actively fight against discrimination.

Sandy Marvel and People for the Power of Love Co-Chair Chris Norfleet engage in discussion at a Toward One Wausau event.
What We Could Do

Diversity in Wausau area leadership positions

In examining a sample of governing and decision-making organizations in the Wausau area, including the Marathon County Board of Supervisors and county department heads, the Wausau Common Council and city department heads, the Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce Board, and the D.C. Everest and Wausau Boards of Education, it is apparent that our local leadership is much less diverse than the community these groups represent.

Seek diverse input and representation on local boards

Creating a community that is free from discrimination in which all are treated fairly is more likely to be realized when diverse residents have input into institutional decision-making and are represented in positions of authority in our community. This option suggests we work diligently with local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government institutions to bring diverse viewpoints to the table.

Taking a page from Church Mutual’s playbook might be a good place to start. After his promotion to CEO in December 2015, Rich Poirer remembers, “Candidly, one of the first things I was struck by was the lack of diversity here.” Poirer soon launched a Women’s Leadership Initiative devoted to promoting and enhancing career development for women in the company. Over 400 women have since participated in networking and one-on-one mentoring sessions. Noticing an all-male cast in board meetings, continued Poirer, “I also made it a point to add women to the company’s board.”

To have an impact, our efforts must move beyond tokenism and toward equalizing the playing field for all residents. Only when residents can see themselves reflected in positions of leadership, the argument goes, can we change perceptions regarding our community’s reputation as equally welcoming for all.
Bias training is useful, but can we realistically ask all institutions to add such training? And do we want our law enforcement to question their intuition and risk personal safety when guns are so easily available and when violence is so prevalent in our society?

Is there room in already demanding school curricula for additional time devoted to social justice issues? What is the appropriate balance for teaching the history of historically underrepresented populations?

How can law enforcement reach out to diverse populations more effectively? Can law enforcement personnel build capacity to strengthen relationships with diverse residents without sacrificing other public safety priorities?

Trade-Offs and Downsides

- Committing law enforcement to focus more on building relationships in the community may require a shift in resources and take away from other public safety priorities.
- Changing language around issues of diversity risks minimizing the value of unique cultures or heritage and may interfere with historically protected status of some groups.
- With a small pool of diverse residents to draw from, requiring boards and other groups to bring on diverse representatives may create unrealistic service expectations and lead to tokenism and resentment.
- Social justice issues are addressed in schools already; to expand this might put pressure on teachers to reduce other key content.
- Requiring implicit bias testing is likely to add costs to institutional budgets; some departments may find it harder to attract and hire new employees.

Questions for deliberation . . .

1. Bias training is useful, but can we realistically ask all institutions to add such training? And do we want our law enforcement to question their intuition and risk personal safety when guns are so easily available and when violence is so prevalent in our society?

2. Is there room in already demanding school curricula for additional time devoted to social justice issues? What is the appropriate balance for teaching the history of historically underrepresented populations?

3. How can law enforcement reach out to diverse populations more effectively? Can law enforcement personnel build capacity to strengthen relationships with diverse residents without sacrificing other public safety priorities?
OPTION 2
Provide equal opportunity

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL RESIDENTS AND ENCOURAGE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BEHAVIOR.

THIS OPTION SAYS that providing equal opportunities for residents and requiring individuals and institutions to be accountable for their actions will naturally foster a stronger and more civil community. With opportunity comes individual responsibility to uphold the laws, pay taxes, be productive and help make the community a better place. In return, residents can expect to receive basic government services, be represented by accountable elected officials, and be treated with respect and dignity by fellow residents and community institutions.
When Hmong refugees first began to arrive in the Wausau area in the late 1970s, few understood the social ramifications for the community or the Hmong people. Over time, most Hmong families began to adjust to their new home despite a few flare ups along the way. USA TODAY Network-Wisconsin Media storytelling editor Rob Mentzer notes, “Hmong Americans have followed exactly the pattern of German or Polish immigrants in the early 20th century: a sometimes-rocky transition and an older generation that is not terribly assimilated, followed by a bootstrapping generation of workers whose kids are Americans.”

In the early 1990s, a school board decision to “even out” Hmong students across neighborhood lines through busing uncorked a community tempest. A spotlight Atlantic Monthly article and “60 Minutes” broadcast in 1994 reopened the wounds. According to Peter Yang, former executive director of the Wausau Area Hmong Association, “We felt really burned after all the negative press. Hmong people were stereotyped as unwilling to learn English and as burdensome to the community. We were unfairly targeted as part of the national immigration debate,” continued Yang, “We just wanted to go about our lives.”

“I remember welcoming Hmong refugees,” says one retired community physician. “We provided them an opportunity to settle and take advantage of everything our community had to offer - jobs, good schools, medical care, and a high quality of life. It was in our interest for them to succeed because they were becoming our neighbors.” And who can argue that they did not? Today, many Hmong residents hold professional jobs and have entered the middle class. Likewise, many second- and third-generation families are completely integrated into the community and, in some cases, fully assimilated into American culture.

Community members prepare for Hmong New Year celebrations.

**Some definitions**

**Assimilate** – The process whereby minority groups gradually adapt to the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture and customs.

**Acculturate** – The process whereby minority groups make cultural and psychological adjustments and adaptations in response to contact with the dominant majority.

**Integrate** – The process of bringing people or groups with particular characteristics into equal participation in or membership of another group or culture.

However, it is often noted that citizens with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to struggle - with less education, fewer decent wage job prospects, lack of transportation and childcare, and other conditions that leave them vulnerable. This option holds that, unless we find some ways of providing opportunities, they may continue to be drawn into cycles of poverty and discontent. Eventually, this can lead to perceptions that institutions with power are somehow conspiring against them.

This option holds that when our community is committed to providing equal opportunity for all Americans - and when citizens take responsibility and make something of the opportunities to better themselves - the entire community thrives. Residents with steady jobs tend to be happier, productive and more invested in the community. The community, in turn - including our institutions and neighbors - begin to invest in each other. Social capital - neighborliness - builds among residents and creates a healthy respect among citizens that transcends issues of faith, gender or ethnic heritage.

Wausau East High English teacher George Hagge and the Youth Culture Club raise money for a prosthetic arm for veteran Chong Lee.
Create new pathways to community leadership

To change a generation (or more) of perceptions about deficiencies in leadership for diverse residents, we must create new pathways that provide opportunities for all residents. This may require beginning early in the lives of youth with mentoring and leadership programs with special attention to attracting underrepresented participants. In addition, scholarships, apprenticeships and other forms of assistance can provide opportunities for young people not privileged with wealth or station.

Mirella Espino from the small Village of Dorchester knows the value of hard work, but she also appreciates the role opportunity has played in her educational pursuits. As a young Latina woman and the first to attend college in her family, she is a role model to her three younger sisters. While attending UW-Marathon County, and earning high grades as a pre-law major, Mirella worked to pay for her tuition and expenses. In 2016, she discovered a summer Washington Seminar program offered through her school. It was an opportunity to interact with policymakers, judicial branch leaders, and many other professionals who had started their careers in law. However, she did not have enough funds to attend the program - not to mention miss work to save up money for her transfer to UW-Eau Claire the next fall. After Mirella shared her situation with the program director, she was offered a substantial scholarship that made the trip possible. Upon her return she wrote, “The Washington Seminar exposed me to a variety of organizations and processes that are part of the nonprofit world which I aspire to work in. It was also a great opportunity for hands-on learning about our government and how it really works.” It was, she articulated, a “life-altering experience.” While this option does not demand perfect equality, it does suggest that our institutions have a responsibility to create opportunities for diverse individuals. The point is to bring them to the starting line. In the end, it is up to those individuals to work hard and achieve success like anyone else.

Reinvigorate character education among our youth

This option values holding individuals responsible for their actions and related consequences. To expect people to behave civilly and respectfully to one another, therefore, we should invest in character education in our schools, churches and families. Understanding basic principles like respect for self and the Golden Rule would be a good starting point. Religious education can play an important role. Community member Ray Mickevicius had eight years of Catholic school education, including four in high school. “The essence of what my Catholic education taught me was that I’m not that important; and that while I’m special, I’m no more special than anyone else. And as a result, I shouldn’t expect to always get what I want how I want it.” Contrast this with the typical “me first” culture that surrounds us and “it is no wonder people have a hard time putting others above self to the detriment of the common good,” says Mickevicius. We need to do more to instill these principles in the rising generation if we want to make our community a more respectful and welcoming place.

Government transparency and outreach

During the Dylan Yang trial there was a great deal of public confusion regarding various aspects of the criminal proceedings and of the justice system generally. This led to comments and accusations on social media ranging from unfair police interview techniques to Yang being inappropriately tried as an adult. The May 2016 peace march included signs linking the process to “white supremacy” among other tough (and many would argue incorrect) descriptors. This was tough to take in for officials working within the criminal justice system. Some described feeling under siege but unable to respond publicly due to the ongoing trial. This was particularly challenging because, as one official put it, “we were just doing our jobs” as prescribed by the law and standard professional practice.
One clear conclusion that emerged from these events is that the public is not well versed in the law or in criminal proceedings generally. It was news to many, for instance, that Yang had to be tried as an adult under state statute given the crime charged. Many also weren’t aware that Yang waived his right to have the case considered in the juvenile justice system. They interpreted the attorney’s potential mistake as an indictment of the entire criminal justice system.

This option suggests that there is shared responsibility for helping the public receive and understand accurate information about public processes. While the public may already have access to most information, the reality is that it hard to find, difficult to understand and uninteresting - except when it is most needed. More government outreach and transparency might help. What if government agencies and personnel would prioritize engaging in meaningful public outreach and education? This applies to elected bodies as well. Perhaps some training in how and when to connect with public audiences is in order, according to this option.

**Provide better service for the disadvantaged**

Citizens with lower socioeconomic status, less education, transportation and childcare challenges, and other disadvantages are more vulnerable. Unless we find some ways of providing them opportunities to improve their condition, they may continue to be drawn into cycles of poverty and discontent. Eventually, this can lead to perceptions that institutions with power are somehow conspiring against them. Simply put, those who are less fortunate cannot take on the level of responsibility to be productive members of society if they cannot even meet basic needs. This option says that our community institutions can and should have a role to play here.
Trade-Offs and Downsides

• Encouraging new residents to assimilate may burden newcomers with expectations to give up or curtail cultural and language preferences in public settings.
• Creating new pathways and programs could duplicate existing efforts and lead to concerns about the need for separate programs for different groups.
• Investing in character education could create value conflicts as citizens grapple over whose vision of morality will be considered the baseline for our community.
• Seeking greater institutional transparency and outreach would be time-consuming and require more energy and resources from government at the expense of efficiency.
• Requiring more resources and opportunities for disadvantaged residents would require more and deeper investment in public services - a challenging task in the current budget environment.

Questions for deliberation . . .

1. In an attempt to lend a helping hand and provide opportunities to diverse young people, how do we ensure we are not favoring people merely by virtue of their background rather than their acumen or potential?

2. With families increasingly under stress and church attendance among young people waning, are schools prepared to take on this burden? How will we decide whose values comprise the right character education for our community?

3. How can our institutions effectively reach out to various community groups while still accomplishing their desired work output? Does a commitment to greater transparency and accountability require greater public outreach? Will the public care enough to demand such change?
TO ADDRESS UNDERLYING divisions in our community - whether real or perceived - we must acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate diversity. This is not simply a matter of helping everyone to feel good about themselves; it is a proven path to create new relationships, increase trust between citizens and community institutions, and build much-needed social capital. A community that embraces and celebrates new and diverse residents is one step closer to developing a welcoming culture that is more likely to attract and retain working families.
What makes a community a welcome and desirable place to live? What motivates residents to stake their future in it? The Knight Foundation’s recent “Soul of the Community” project surveyed 43,000 people in 26 communities asking a range of questions about personal satisfaction with community life, pride in the community and optimism about its future. People with the most favorable opinions about their community also had positive assessments of three key indicators: social offerings, aesthetics, and openness. Of the three, openness was found to be the lead driver in predicting attachment to community. According to former Knight Foundation Vice President for Strategic Initiatives Paula Ellis, “if people are more attached to the community that they lived in, they would engage and help make it a better place.”

Openness has to do with perceptions of how welcoming the community is to new residents, new ideas, and diversity generally. So, how open to new ideas, people and diversity are we in Wausau? In an effort to gather information for this issue guide, Toward One Wausau surveyed or spoke directly with over 500 area residents about this issue. Most believe Wausau is a great community that has “come a long way” in welcoming new people and ideas. However, many also reported that there is still work to be done. As 24-year-old resident Cheng Khang put it, “Wausau is not entirely open to newcomers. But once you do get to know the people, and become a part of the community, Wausau has become a beautiful place to me.”

According to this option, the way forward is to welcome new people and ideas and embrace and celebrate diversity. There is increasing evidence that doing so has positive benefits for communities. In his groundbreaking book, The Difference, University of Michigan professor of complex systems, political science and economics Scott E. Page shows mathematically how collections of diverse people can locate optimal solutions to difficult problems, even though their individual abilities are limited. In fact, communities and society as a whole regularly take advantage of the superiority of collective performance in problem solving. For example, British leaders in charge of codebreaking at Bletchley Park during World War II famously brought together historians, linguists, mathematicians, chess champions, and crossword experts, among others of diverse backgrounds, to successfully break and decipher enemy codes and messages. As Page puts it, “when we meet people who think differently than we do, . . . we should see opportunity and possibility. We should recognize that a talented ‘I’ and a talented ‘they’ can become an even more talented ‘we.’ That happy vision rests not on blind optimism, or catchy mantras. It rests on logic. A logic of diversity.” Organizational theorists generally agree that teams of cognitively diverse agents improve rates of innovation over highly intelligent but like-minded teams of individuals in many tasks. Similarly, says Page, “There is a lot of empirical evidence to show that diverse cities are more productive, diverse boards of directors make better decisions, the most innovative companies are diverse.”

This option suggests that as a community we need to do a better job recognizing the strength of our diversity and finding ways to celebrate different perspectives. We can do this by deliberately recognizing the diversity we already have through a well thought-out social media campaign and working with traditional media outlets to feature more voices of diversity. Some suggest we engage in regular community dialogues, bringing diverse residents together to strengthen relationships as well as build social capital. We could also engage in innovative projects like the Humans of New York project or other similar “get to know your neighbors” efforts and create a mechanism to share our experiences. According to this option, we could also encourage more diverse community celebrations featuring multiple cultural events rather than monocultural events. This sort of openness to new people and ideas will make our community a more welcoming place for all.

“There is a lot of empirical evidence to show that diverse cities are more productive, diverse boards of directors make better decisions, the most innovative companies are diverse.”

- Scott E. Page
Hold regular public dialogues

There is no better way for people to get to know one another than to sit down for a conversation, whether one-on-one or in a group. “It is basic human nature,” says Tony Gonzalez, Spanish language interpreter and co-chair of the Toward one Wausau project. “You don’t walk away from a dialogue without sharing something of yourself and learning something about the person across the table.” Community dialogues can increase social capital, which is the lubricant that strengthens personal relationships, creates healthy neighborhood bonds, and helps communities work together more effectively. According to political scientist Robert Putnam, who once decried that we citizens were “bowling alone” - a metaphor for waning civic engagement - Americans are starting to reclaim a stronger connection to community. However, he warns of a growing divide among the younger generation of “haves” versus “have nots,” with the latter remaining more socially isolated and less participatory in their communities. This same divide seems to exist between rising generations of young white people and young people of color. This option suggests that engaging in organized dialogues around difficult issues such as overcoming socioeconomic and ethnic barriers could positively influence our young people as well as the community as a whole.

Increase positive media focus on diversity

This option suggests that celebrating diversity also means calling upon the media to carry out more positive human interest stories on diverse people and topics. By normalizing positive images of diverse people in our community, perhaps we can overcome stereotyping that is well established in American news reporting. For example, in a recent study by University of Illinois researcher Travis Dixon, whites continue to be given a dominant role representing authority and police on television. In the Los Angeles news market, for example, whites were more likely to be portrayed as police officers 73% of the time compared to an actual employment rate of 53%. Conversely, writes Dixon, “Latinos were less likely to be portrayed as officers on television news (16%) than to be employed as officers (30%).” Similarly, Dixon, continues, “whites were more likely to be depicted as homicide victims on local television news (35%) than to be victimized by homicide according to crime reports (13%).” Perceptions of mistreatment in the media can also cut across professions. For instance, a recent Pew study shows that 81% percent of police officers nationally believe that the media treats them unfairly. If we can convince the media that it is in their interest to portray more positive images both of diverse people and of local law enforcement, perhaps we can create the welcoming atmosphere we seek.

Majority of police officers say they are mistreated by the media

% of officers saying that, in general, the media treat the police unfairly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
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<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Officers</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of law enforcement officers conducted May 19- August 14, 2016
**What We Could Do**

**Sponsor events with more diverse voices**

The Wausau area has an enormous amount of cultural activity relative to its size. There is a thriving center for the arts, a robust community theater scene, numerous festivals, not to mention an award-winning museum, among other highlights. And there exist already many celebrations of local heritage ranging from German and Polish celebrations to the Hmong New Year and Black History Month events. In many ways, these types of activities and events already make our community an inviting place. Could more be done?

This option suggests that we broaden and deepen these types of activities. For example, rather than have celebrations divided by cultural or ethnic differences, what if we were to deliberately incorporate multicultural influences into more of our community celebrations? What if our annual Hmong New Year celebration sought to highlight diverse performers? What if Black History Month included events and performances celebrating a variety of cultural influences? Our local institutions of higher education, UW-Marathon County (Multicultural Resource Center) and Northcentral Technical College have been leaders in organizing celebratory events featuring food and entertainment by students and community members from around the world. Both Marshfield and Stevens Point hold similar festivals that are big draws and highly successful community events. Young Professionals Week is attempting to hold a similar rich and diverse event as part of its 2017 celebration. According to YP Week co-organizer Nick O’Brien, “The idea of holding an event that celebrates multiple cultural traditions in the form of food and entertainment is highly appealing to young professionals in our community. It is precisely these types of events - along with the many other positive things we find in our area - that make them want to work here and stay here for the long term.” The more diversity “people of my generation see and can celebrate,” continues O’Brien, “the more they feel that this is a welcoming community for everyone, and for them in particular.”

**Start a social norms campaign highlighting our diversity**

According to this option, if we want people in our community to embrace diversity, and if we want to send a message to people outside of our community that we are a welcoming place for them to visit and settle, we should begin a social norms campaign that highlights our diversity. In our cities, villages, towns, and county, we need to put the faces of diversity on our websites, in newsletters, on billboards, and especially on social media. If we want to be the welcoming place that we prescribe, we need to show commitment by deliberately featuring our multicultured faces - not just the faces and voices of the white majority. This is not meant to exclude the majority, rather, it signals a commitment to reach out to others.

**Institute a community “get to know you” project**

Finally, this option proposes that our community get a little more creative in helping people to feel welcome by designing a “meet and greet” project that gets people excited about reaching out to people they don’t know. Perhaps this could be incentivized by local businesses so that people could meet at what community researcher Rebecca Ryan calls “third places” - neutral ground outside of home and work such as local eateries, taverns, or coffee shops. Setting up some sort of reporting mechanism like a blog or online story capture could help our community celebrate and process how this activity affected us and our perceptions of the community. The Humans of New York project is a wonderful example of a Web-based story capture project that highlights many different New York City residents in creative and meaningful stories and photographs. The possibilities here are only limited by our imagination.
Trade-Offs and Downsides

- Regular community dialogue would take a long-term community commitment and organizational resources to support.
- Focusing more on diverse residents may lead to criticism that the media is manufacturing news to accomplish a social agenda.
- Encouraging multicultural celebrations could dilute the passion and energy residents invest in recognizing the cultural heritage they most identify with.
- Creating a social norms campaign may create a perception that the community is favoring certain groups above others.
- Engaging the community in a meet-and-greet project would be difficult because people are busy and would have to give up precious personal time and step out of their comfort zones in order to participate.

Questions for deliberation . . .

1. If we hold community dialogues, what issues do we believe the community will want to talk about? How do we bring different groups to the table?

2. We already enjoy many culturally diverse celebrations in our community, so can we make room for more? How do we convince different groups to work together to plan more diverse community celebrations?

3. Are people willing to step outside of their comfort zone and give up personal time to meet new people?
OPTION 1
Treat all Fairly
ENSURE ALL RESIDENTS ARE TREATED FAIRLY BY LOCAL INSTITUTIONS AND FELLOW CITIZENS.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

Commit law enforcement to invest in deep neighborhood relationship-building and more frequent and effective interaction with diverse residents.

Addresses language and behavior that divides people; focus on treating every individual with dignity and respect.

Seek more diverse input and representation on local boards and organizations.

Expand social justice learning goals in school curricula so that students have more opportunity to learn about the history and effects of bias and discrimination.

Commit businesses, nonprofit, and government institutions - including law enforcement and court officials - to participate in implicit bias training.

What Else?
Please add an action item that fits with this option.

TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER

This may require a shift in resources and take away from other public safety priorities.

May minimize the value of unique cultures or heritage and interfere with historically protected status of some groups.

With a small pool of diverse residents to draw from, this may create unrealistic service expectations and lead to tokenism and resentment.

Social justice issues are addressed in some courses already; to expand this might put pressure on teachers to reduce other important content.

In addition to adding costs to institutional budgets, some departments may find it harder to attract and hire new employees.

What’s the trade-off?
Please insert the trade-off for the action you added.

This option suggests that inequity and bias are at the root of much of the tensions we have experienced in our community. Can becoming aware of these biases actually change behavior? Will our institutions, public and private, commit to changing organizational culture through training, education and new ways of acting?
This option suggests that lack of opportunities and accountability among individuals and institutions is the underlying cause of tensions in our community. By opening new pathways for achievement, can diverse residents take responsibility for bettering their circumstances and changing perceptions about the community as a whole? To what extent are individuals versus community institutions responsible for citizen success?
**OPTION 3**

**Embrace and Celebrate Diversity**

CREATE A WELCOMING CULTURE TO BUILD NEW RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTRACT AND RETAIN WORKERS.

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**EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize regular community dialogues that bring diverse people together to discuss the state of the community.</td>
<td>This would take a long-term community commitment and organizational resources to support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage positive perceptions of diverse residents through increased human interest stories in the media.</td>
<td>This may lead to criticism that the media is manufacturing news to accomplish a social agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our community could sponsor more neighborhood events and celebrations that feature diverse voices and performers.</td>
<td>Encouraging multicultural celebrations could dilute the passion and energy residents invest in recognizing the cultural heritage they most identify with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out a social norms campaign featuring faces of community diversity through social media and other communication outlets.</td>
<td>This may create a perception that the community is favoring certain groups above others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a community project in which residents reach out to one new person every few months. Create a story message board to share community experiences.</td>
<td>People are busy and would have to give up precious personal time and step out of their comfort zones in order to participate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What Else?**

Please add an action item that fits with this option.

**What’s the trade-off?**

Please insert the trade-off for the action you added.

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THIS OPTION SAYS THAT TO ADDRESS underlying divisions in our community - whether real or perceived - we must acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate diversity. This is not simply a matter of helping everyone to feel good about themselves; it is a proven path to create new relationships, increase trust between citizens and community institutions, and build much-needed social capital. A community that embraces and celebrates new and diverse residents is one step closer to developing a welcoming culture that is more likely to attract and retain working families.

But - these actions might give the impression of favoring some groups above others and cause resentment in the community.

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This option says that greater recognition and appreciation of diversity will help create a welcoming community culture that benefits everyone. Will embracing diversity dilute our existing culture and change what makes our community great? Is it reasonable to expect residents to readily accept and celebrate new people and cultures?
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**Feedback**

If you participated in this forum, please fill out a questionnaire, which is included in this issue guide. If you are filling out the enclosed questionnaire, please return the completed form to your moderator or to the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, 625 Stewart Ave, Wausau, Wisconsin 54401.

If you moderated this forum, please fill out a Moderator Response sheet. Your responses play a vital role in providing information that is used to communicate your views to others, including officeholders, the media, and other citizens.
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- Boys & Girls Club
- Church of St. Anne
- City of Wausau
- D.C. Everest School District
- First Universalist Unitarian Church of Wausau
- Hmong American Center
- Marathon County
- Marathon County Diversity Commission
- Marathon County Sheriff's Office
- Marathon County Public Library
- MCDEVCO, Inc
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Mount Olive Lutheran Church
- Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church
- NAOMI
- The Neighbors’ Place
- Northcentral Technical College
- People for the Power of Love
- St. John’s Episcopal Church
- The Women’s Community, Inc.
- Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce
- Wausau Police Department
- Wausau School District
- UW-Marathon County
- YMCA
- YWCA

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