

The 2014 Morgantown Human Rights Needs Survey

A summary report prepared by the Morgantown Human Rights Commission

September 15, 2014

What is the Morgantown Human Rights Needs Survey?

The City of Morgantown Human Rights Commission (HRC) sponsored and conducted a mixed-mode community survey of Morgantown, WV residents to identify current community human rights needs and to solicit community input on ways to make Morgantown a more inclusive city. Conducted between January and June 2014, the survey was distributed by Commission members to various interest and diversity groups, neighborhood organizations, service clubs, West Virginia University faculty and students, as well as senior citizens of Morgantown. It was made available at public special events, on the City website, and by individual appointments with a Human Rights Commissioner held at the public library. The survey was administered by HRC members and volunteers from partnering organizations and was administered in the form of a web or paper survey. Large print and Braille formats were available. It is important to note that the survey was not intended or designed to be a scientific research study but rather a community process to systematically gather opinions to inform the HRC, City Council, and other interested organizations. The information is being used by the HRC to develop a community action plan for making Morgantown a more inclusive city.

Who Participated in the Survey?

A total of 657 Morgantown residents responded to the community survey. The table below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents:

Table 1. Survey Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	%
Sex	
Male	39.6
Female	59.1
Transgender	1.3
Age (years)	
13-18	5.4
19-25	22.2
26-50	39.9
51-65	18.5
66-80	11.6
81+	2.4
Race/Ethnicity	
White	81.7
Black or African American	6.9

Characteristic	%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.2
Asian	1.1
Hispanic or Latino	1.5
Two or more race groups	6.5
Religion	
Reported religious affiliation	59.6
Reported no affiliation	40.4
Employment Status	
Employed (part-time or full-time)	59.3
Seeking employment	5.0
Not employed	10.2
Disabled	1.7
Retired	13.0
Volunteer	1.5
Other	9.3
Disability	
Reported a disability	19.3
Physical	6.9
Mental/emotional	8.4
Disability from childhood	1.5
Deafness	1.1
Blindness	<0.1
HIV/AIDS	<0.1
Other	4.3
No disability/did not answer question	80.7
Military Status	
Active Duty	0.4
Reserves	1.3
Veteran	5.1
Not in military	93.4
Financial Status	
Financially secure	28.3
Moderate income, financially stable	41.1
Struggling to make ends meet	26.0
Unable to make ends meet	4.6
Housing Arrangement	
Home owned	48.8
Home rented	39.6
Dormitory/Residential Hall	2.6
Temporary shelter	0.9
Live with family	4.7
Other	3.4
Transportation	
Owns car	83.4
Does not own car	16.6

Note: Data were missing for approximately 20% of survey respondents for each of the demographic survey questions.

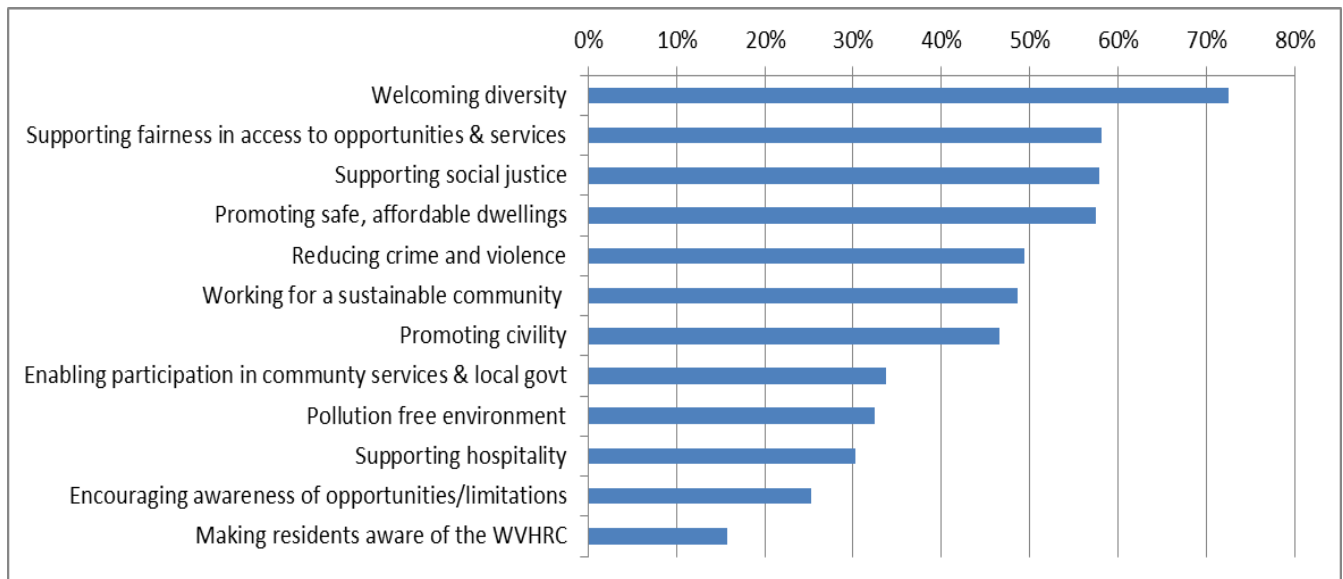
The survey was successful in reaching a large number of Morgantown residents. Nonetheless, it is important to note several key differences between the survey participants as a whole and the general population of Morgantown (see U.S. Census information for Morgantown available at the city’s website at: <http://www.morgantownwv.gov/about/census-info/>). For example, compared to Morgantown’s population, disproportionately more females participated in the survey (59.1% vs. 46.5%), and respondents were generally older than the city’s population, with relatively high percentages of young, middle-aged, and older adults participating in the survey. Also, whereas about half of Morgantown’s population is estimated to be employed, more survey respondents (almost 60%) reported being employed.

What are the Key Findings from the Survey?

The Morgantown Human Rights Survey questionnaire included items on a range of topics including respondents’ definition of an inclusive city, awareness of Morgantown’s efforts to become an inclusive city, perceptions of Morgantown as an inclusive city, experiences with exclusion and barriers to active community participation, and recommendations for making Morgantown a more inclusive city. Key findings are as follows:

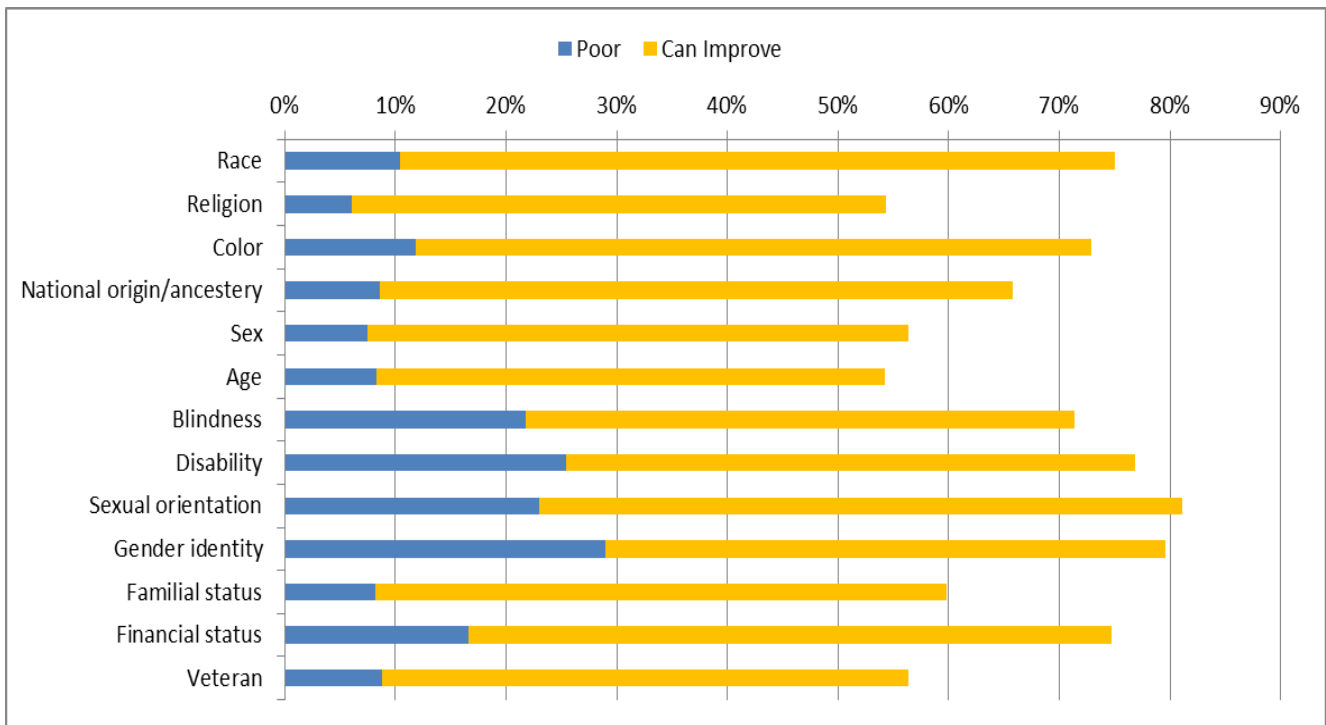
Defining what it means to be an inclusive city: Respondents were asked to select their five most important characteristics of an inclusive city among a list of 12 (Q3). Welcoming diversity was identified by over 70% of the survey respondents, followed by supporting families in access to opportunities and services; supporting social justice; and promoting safe, affordable dwellings (approximately 58.0% each). Just under half of respondents also reported reducing crime and violence (49.4%), working for a more sustainable community for present and future citizens (48.7%), and reported promoting civility (46.6%). See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Characteristics of an Inclusive City: % of Respondents Reporting Each



Perceptions of Morgantown as an inclusive city: Nearly half (47.0%) of all survey respondents indicated that they are aware of city and neighborhood efforts Morgantown has taken to be an inclusive city (Q2), and over 50% of respondents consider Morgantown to be an inclusive city (Q15). Over 40% of respondents graded Morgantown as “excellent” at welcoming and supporting people on the basis of religion, age, and sex (Q4). However, only 5.5% of the respondents “strongly agreed” that Morgantown is an inclusive city (Q2), and the majority of respondents reported that our city “can improve” or is “poor” in welcoming and supporting people on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin/ancestry, sex, age, blindness, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, familial status, financial status, and veteran status (Q4). In fact, a fifth or more of survey respondents scored Morgantown as “poor” in welcoming and supporting people on the basis of blindness, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Q4). See Figure 2.

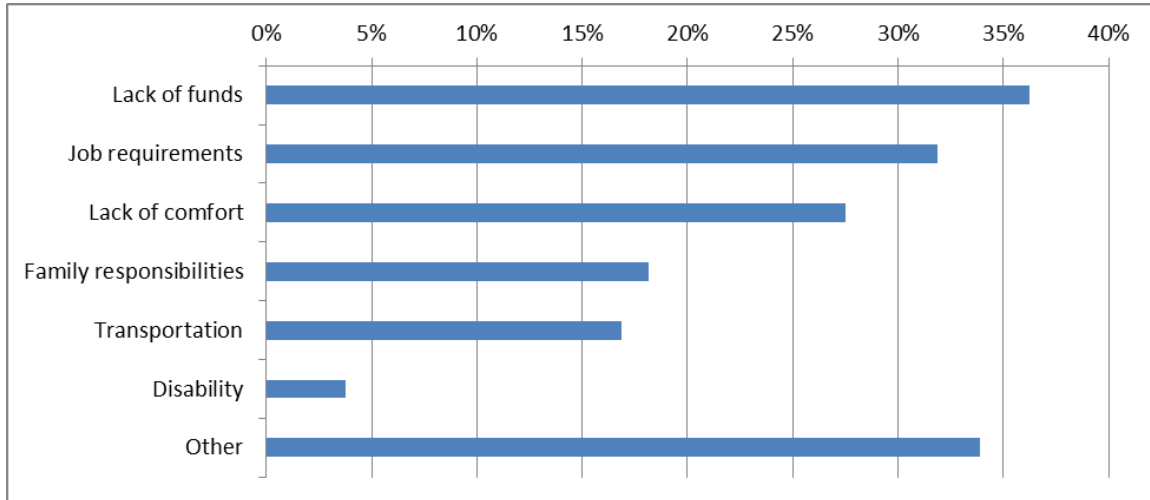
Figure 2. Areas for Improvement: % of Respondents Reporting Areas in Which Morgantown is “Poor” or “Can be Improved” in Being Welcoming and Supportive



Experiences with exclusion and barriers to active community participation: The majority (77.2%) of respondents reported that they had not personally experienced exclusion from any activity in Morgantown (Q7). Of those who had experienced exclusion, the most commonly cited reasons for exclusion (Q8) were job, race, sex, familial status, age, disability, and sexual orientation (18-25% each). Two thirds of survey respondents consider themselves to be an active participant in the Morgantown community (Q13). Of those who do not, the main barriers

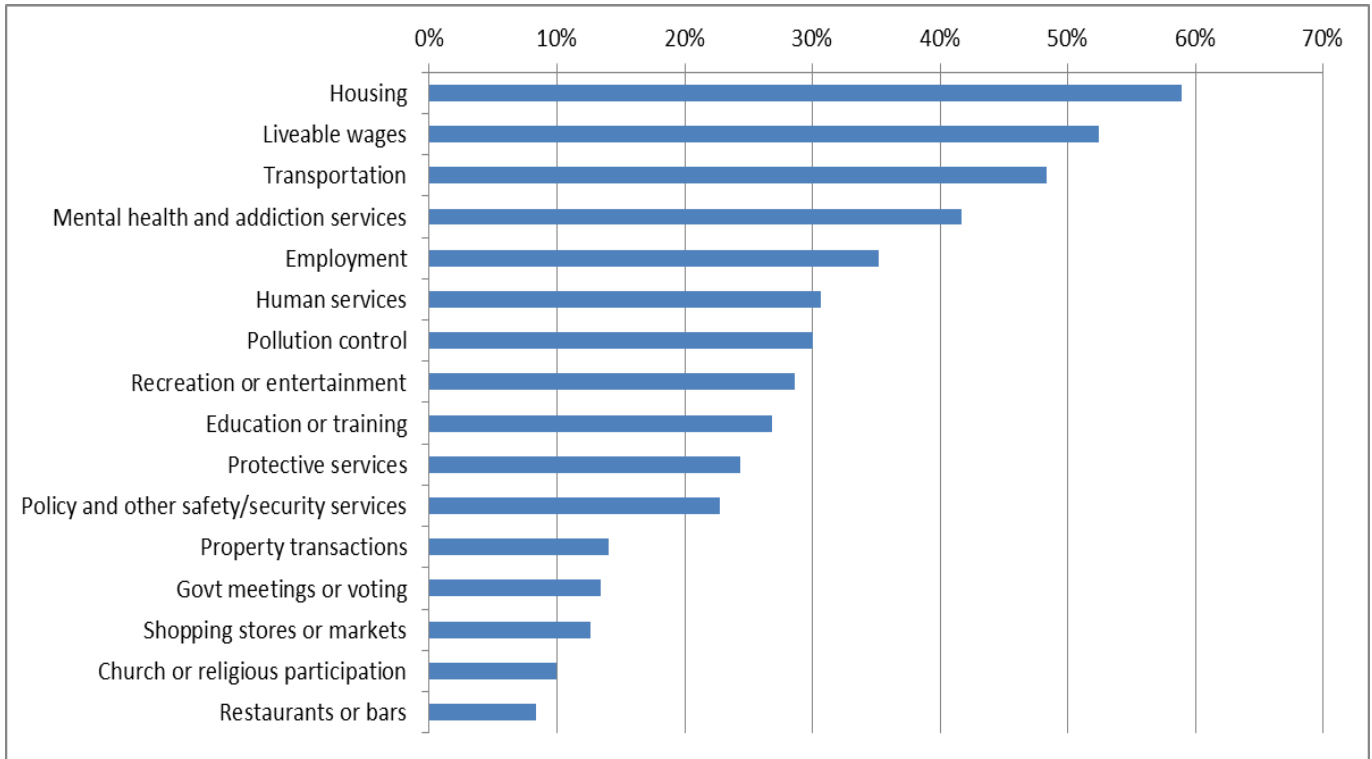
to participation cited (Q14) were lack of funds (36.3%), followed by job requirements (31.9%), and lack of comfort (27.5%). See Figure 3.

Figure 3. % of Respondents Reporting Barriers to Community Participation



Recommendations for making Morgantown a more inclusive city: Respondents were asked to select five top areas (among a list of 16) in which Morgantown should improve to be a more inclusive city (Q5). Key areas identified by respondents included housing (58.9%), livable wages (52.4%), transportation (48.4%), and mental health and addictive services (41.7%). Almost a third of respondents also selected employment (35.2%); human services such as food, clothing and shelter (30.7%); and better pollution control (30.1%). Least important to respondents were dining establishments or bars and church or religious participation (each less than 10.0%). See Figure 4 on the following page.

Figure 4. % of Respondents Reporting Areas in which Morgantown Needs Improvement to become a More Inclusive City



Likewise, respondents were asked which of seven activities they would like to see happen in Morgantown to foster inclusiveness (Q6). It is noteworthy that a significant number of respondents (at least 40%) selected each of the activities. Over half of respondents selected more education about how citizens can be more inclusive in business, community activities, and other areas; more community activities to highlight the diverse characteristics of Morgantown citizens and their positive contributions; more education in schools about Morgantown’s diversity; more jobs with livable wages; and more accessible and affordable housing. Another activity selected by 46% of respondents was more education about laws against discrimination, followed by more *enforcement* of laws against discrimination (41.1%) and more publicity about Morgantown’s efforts to become an inclusive community (40.0%).

What are the Lessons Learned for the HRC?

- Even though some respondents did not understand the word “inclusive,” the majority of respondents understood the term in broad terms and not restricted to race.
- There is room for improvement in increasing awareness of Morgantown’s efforts to become a more inclusive city.

- While the majority of respondents indicated no experiences with exclusion, respondents called out to several important gaps in Morgantown’s level of “inclusivity,” particularly in terms of disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, but in a breadth of areas.
- Despite the small percentage of survey respondents of color, many respondents identified a need for improvement in racial support and understanding.
- Respondent recommendations called out for more jobs with livable wages and more accessible and affordable housing, reflecting a recent Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) report indicating Morgantown’s above-national-average housing prices and living costs (14.2% and 5.6%, respectively; available at: <http://be.wvu.edu/bber/publications.aspx>). Affordable housing is a particular concern for individuals living in poverty (36.7% in Morgantown; U.S. Census information at the city’s website at: <http://www.morgantownwv.gov/about/census-info/>), who are homeless, and/or who are disabled. In fact, in 2012, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) level for a one-bedroom apartment in Morgantown (\$558/month; Technical Assistance Collaborative) represented 102% of the average monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payment for Monongalia County (\$547/month; Social Security Administration). For a two-bedroom apartment, the FMR (\$660) represented 121% of the average monthly SSI payment.
- Supporting a variety of actionable approaches to make Morgantown a more inclusive city, respondents provided critical feedback on possible next steps.

How will the Results of the Survey be Utilized by the Human Rights Commission?

The information gathered from the survey will be utilized by the Commission for the purpose of providing one foundation for the preparation of an Inclusive City Plan. This plan will be important for the Commission in preparing multiple year goals and objectives as well as action steps for the work of the Commission. After preparation the Inclusive City Plan will be presented to the Morgantown City Council for approval.

The data will be utilized for planning specific education events and program initiatives in collaboration with various community and State organizations. The information will also be shared by the Commission with the State Human Rights Commission and with member cities of the West Virginia Municipal League.

It is anticipated that the information from the survey will be useful to the Morgantown City Council as it makes decisions which impact the diversity in the City population.

Credits:

Organizing Survey Design and Overseeing Survey Process – Bob Jones;

Placing Survey on Survey Monkey, Promoting Availability of the Survey, Managing Monthly Reports – Susan Sullivan, Public Communications Manager for the City of Morgantown;

Guiding Development of Survey, Distributing Survey to Survey Partnering Organizations, Monitoring Progress – All Members of the Human Rights Commission;

Partnering Organizations for Survey Distribution –

Bartlett House

BOPARC Senior Center

Boys and Girls Club

Christian Help

Community Living Initiatives Corporation

Community Breakfast - Presbyterian Church

Community Coalition for Social Justice

Community Kitchen at Trinity Church

Empty Bowls

Fairness West Virginia

First Ward Neighborhood Association

Friendship Room

Jerome Park Neighborhood Association

Morgantown Area Youth Services Project

M/M League of Women Voters

M/M Transit Authority

Mon County Board of Education

Mon County Senior Center

Mon Preston Labor Council

Neighborhood Coordinating Council

North Central West Virginia Center for Independent Living

Rape and Domestic Violence Center

South Park Association of Neighbors

Suncrest Neighborhood Association

WVU Center for Black Culture and Research

WVU Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

WVU Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transsexual Office;

Data Entry – Bob Jones, Lynn Castro;

Preparation of Summary Report – Donna Leigh Spencer;

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Taking Time to Thoughtfully Complete Surveys – 657 Residents of the City of Morgantown.

WE THANK EACH and ALL!
Morgantown Human Rights Commission