

Deepening Community



500 VOICES:
A COMMUNITY
ASSESSMENT

500 Voices

A Community Assessment

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This chapter is really for the “geek” in all of us. It is filled with the results of surveying over 500 people: some in small groups and others online. If many of the themes from these survey responses resonate with you after you have read the book, it is for a good reason. Many books shaped *Deepening Community*- but, the results of this survey deeply influenced the ideas you have discovered in this book.

I have become curious as to what the general ethos is about community. What are people thinking about community? How would they describe their experience? I wanted to ask a lot of people to join in my inquiry.

Our Tamarack learning community has grown to more than 10,000 people. The staff decided that the most active 2,000 members would be a perfect group to ask about their experience of community. These are people who are well informed and think about community daily, most as professionals. They have the ability to harvest deep insights and wisdom from their efforts to make their cities and neighborhoods better places to live. I wanted to know if they really care about the place of community in their personal lives and how they think about it. Our goal was to gather a lot of information and then “boil it down” to more easily understood ideas. At Tamarack, we sometimes call this, “maple-syruping” ideas. We were thrilled when a quarter of them took the time to fill in the survey or meet with us in small groups to work through the questions.

Designing the Survey [For the “uber geeks”...]

The topic of community is broad and complex, so I wanted to create a survey that would reflect the questions I personally had about it. I did not want to create a scientific experiment. Instead, I wanted people to share feelings about their sense of community, their personal definitions and ideas. I wanted to evoke their inner wisdom. I did, though, want to be able to report these results back to them and make their ideas public – to gather the collective wisdom into one place and give it living form.

We decided to use a survey technique called a Common Meaning Questionnaire, which is described in more detail in my book *Community Conversations*. This method is loosely based on Eidetics, a process founded by systems researcher Henry Evering that relies on Socratic principles. Using questions that build upon one another, it assumes that every individual possesses innate knowledge, a unique way of seeing things, and the ability to find solutions by cooperating with others for mutual benefit. The questions help people express their meaning and their perception of words and concepts.

In our survey, a word or concept was introduced in each question, leading to a larger concept. For example, the first three questions of the survey were: “What does ‘community’ mean to you?” “What does ‘benefit’ mean to you?” “What does ‘the benefit of community’ mean to you?” This is a form of Socratic questioning that evokes the participants’ thoughts sequentially,

allowing them to build on previous answers or ideas. Respondents to our survey were asked to answer with the first thought that entered their heads and were encouraged to write brief, point-form answers.

In reviewing a participant's answers to specific questions, the researchers then deconstructed the building blocks of a statement and examined multiple-meaning statements for the larger concepts we are exploring. This is a unique approach that allows us to explore words and concepts that people hold in common. By having participants write down the meaning behind the words, themes of common understanding emerged from the data. We were then able to quantify the number of times participants express a certain feeling or concept.

The Survey Questions

Using an online survey limited the number of questions we could ask. From previous experience, we knew that people are unlikely to finish a survey that takes more than 15 minutes to complete. After much consideration, we agreed on seven areas of inquiry that we would explore with the participants: the meaning of community, belonging and identity, the most profound experience of community, what builds community and what breaks it down, fear in community, and when they most feel a sense of community. We created questions in the Socratic sequence described earlier. In most cases, the third question in each series was the one in which we had the most interest:

1. *What does "community" mean to you?*
2. *What does "benefit" mean to you?*
3. *What does "the benefit of community" mean to you?*

4. *What does "belonging" mean to you?*
5. *What does "belonging to community" mean to you?*
6. *What does "identity in community" mean to you?*

7. *What does "experience" mean to you?*
8. *What does "experiencing community" mean to you?*
9. *When do you most profoundly experience community?*

10. *What does "building" mean to you?*
11. *What does "community building" mean to you?*
12. *What builds community for you?*

13. *What does "breakdown" mean to you?*
14. *What does "community breakdown" mean to you?*
15. *What causes community to break down for you?*

16. *What does "fear" mean to you?*
17. *What does "community of fear" mean to you?*
18. *What do people do when they experience fear as a community?*

19. *What does "feeling" mean to you?*
20. *What does "community feeling" mean to you?*

21. When do you most feel a sense of community?

Collecting the responses

We had debated about the best method of collecting responses for the survey. E-mailing it to the subscribers of Tamarack's on-line publications was considered, but the work of organizing the returned responses seemed challenging. We found that the web-based tool Survey Monkey, which formatted and presented a professional and easy-to-use survey, as well as organized the responses for analysis, was extremely helpful.

We tested the survey and solicited feedback from Tamarack staff and a few other key respondents. We sent an e-mail to 2,000 of Tamarack's e-newsletter subscribers, asking them to fill out the survey and provided a direct link to it. The results started pouring in.

Initially we had thought that we might get around a hundred responses. In all, we received responses from 491 people! This was a totally overwhelming and gratifying response rate, confirming for us the degree of interest in this topic. I later surveyed many more people in small groups, so that we would have a pool of more than 500 respondents. Unlike surveys we had done in the past, which averaged a five percent return rate, this one generated exceptional enthusiasm. Some respondents emailed me directly, to share their excitement and their ideas and personal insights about community.

Analysis

Our challenge was to quantify qualitative answers. This required the painstaking review of every response – all 300 single-spaced pages of them. We downloaded all the results into an Excel spreadsheet and then gave each question its own spreadsheet. We then formatted the responses and deleted blank answers.

We then analyzed all the responses, one question at a time, looking for patterns and similar themes. We worked together to sort out categories and groupings. While the building-block questions in each series were necessary to get respondents' thoughts prepared for the questions that followed, they did not provide much useful data and so they were not included in the analysis. Once the themes were established, each response was categorized by placing a number "1" in the column of whichever themes applied. The "1s" were added up and converted to a percentage to determine the relative weight of each category. The percentages do not add up to 100, since one person's response could have contained more than one theme and would have been calculated in all the categories that fit.

The process of analysis we chose is somewhat subjective, and we recognize the limitations of this method. We did all the analysis in house, so the lens through which the responses were viewed was consistent, but limited. We tried to be very methodical and follow a rigor in our analysis, but the categories we chose to report and the percentages they generated might have been slightly different if another person had analyzed them. We do, though, feel that the results provide a good overview of how people feel about a particular issue. We welcome your feedback if you are interested in looking over the raw data, which are posted in detail, both with and without our categories.

One interesting overall result is that many responses divided along two lines: emotional (feeling or being) and tangible (doing or touching). For example, in the first question – “What does ‘community’ mean to you?” – about half the responses included some aspect of belonging/emotional attachment and the other half focused on working together/being connected. There were also several instances in which one person answered in both ways, and the response would have been tabulated in both categories.

The consistency of this pattern made us wonder whether different personality types answered this survey in different ways. Are people who are “Sensing” on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (<http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/>) more likely to give a hands-on answer as opposed to the “Feeling” people who might be more concerned with belonging and fitting in? This would be an interesting area for future research.

The Survey Results

It is most helpful to review these results as information and not as statistics. Please remember that there are no winners here; a higher percentage only indicates that this concept was mentioned more frequently. Also remember that we grouped these in a way that we thought would be helpful to the reader, and so the categories are somewhat subjective.

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Community and its Benefits

Question 1: What does community mean to you? *“Being part of something bigger ... it supports individuals and families, offers friendship and guidance, opens a whole new world of opportunities and experiences, and provides a safe place where we never feel alone. It is waving to neighbors from my garden, kids playing kick the can or a game of pick-up scrub, working together at group functions, supporting neighbors in need (or receiving support when in need), or merely sipping wine with a group of neighbors who happen to walk by.”*

All the responses to this question indicate that community is a good thing that offers people benefit. I always find it striking when all the comments to a survey question are positive. Belonging and acceptance are key feelings expressed. We gave mutual connection and shared goals separate categories, but in many ways these concepts are similar and, when combined, are the most frequent experience of community. To combine the feeling of belonging and acceptance with the tangible act of working together and sharing goals best describes the most common definition of the respondents’ experience of community. The tangible place where people live and feel a sense of connection is also an important description of people’s experience.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Belonging/acceptance	54%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety, comfort, familiarity, collegiality, mutual support and help • Inclusiveness, support, working together, living in harmony, equality
Mutual connections/working together/sharing resources	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection, support, lovingly pushing, common purpose/stake, regular interaction
Shared goals /common identity	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A close-knit group of people with something in common who choose to be in relationship
Physical place/geographic	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive networks - can be physical (geographic community) or virtual (affinity community)
Sense of home	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home, friends, networks
Something bigger than the self	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place where things are pleasantly familiar, safe, and welcoming; a circle larger than self or family • Being a part of something bigger than myself

Question 3: What does "the benefit of community" mean to you? *“A sense of belonging, a beautiful place to live, strong friendships and supports for all when they need it with the opportunity to give back when they can. A true community means everyone is using the talents*

and gifts they have to contribute to a greater whole and they have the freedom to ask for support when they need it so that we have a society that relies on each other rather than [government and] institutions for our help. The benefit of a real Community means everyone has real support when they need it, the way they need it and at the time they need it. It means that the community decides on its own needs so that solutions are found that truly reflect the nature of the problem and address it in a more complete and effective way. It means we have stronger and healthier families.”

The responses to this question were realistic and not naïvely optimistic. Most people understood that “the benefit of community” meant some form of connection to others – an aspect of give and take that often resulted in mutual gain, and a sense that for community to have some benefits, you must give something to get something. Several responses included the idea of a greater good, or the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Less often, respondents referred to the emotional aspects of belonging, inclusiveness, safety, and feeling at home. Only a few people mentioned the physical/geographical benefits of living in a community, such as opportunities for recreation and a clean environment, which surprised me.

Category	Percent age	Descriptive Examples
Inter-connected relationships, helping others helps us	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I give to community, I receive from community • Having social needs met; connecting with others in a meaningful way
Positive outcome – the greater good of the community	38%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact of being part of something bigger, with greater resilience • The whole community gains something • Whole is greater than the sum of its parts
Inclusion/ diversity/ belonging/ safety	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel that I belong, and I have a place that I fit. • Inclusion of all, acceptance, adaptation, and tolerance
Working together to improve physical community	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results of working together with people in my community. It can be as simple as my neighbor picking up my mail while I'm away or as big as having a major roadway shifted so that the neighborhood deals with less noise and air pollution.
Access to services/ recreation	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living in surroundings that support optimal health and well-being - from all perspectives (physical and social) • Provision of elements necessary for living, shopping, learning, and earning.
Other	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charity; Quality of Life

Community and Belonging

Question 4: What does “belonging” mean to you? *“I know where I want to be seen as a legitimate part of the group. When people smile when I arrive and ask me something beyond ‘how are ya’ I have a basis to belong.”*

A strong consensus emerged on this question that belonging means being a part of something, feeling included and connected. Sixty-five percent of the time respondents answered in this way. The emotional aspect of belonging – the feeling of acceptance, being valued, and “fitting in” – was given as an answer by 44 percent of the respondents.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Being a part of/ included/ connected	65%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a part of something beyond myself • Belonging means the experience of connectedness • It's not a word I think about much, so as I reflect quickly I realize that "belonging" is something I do naturally, reflexively. If I don't belong, I don't hang around long.
Feeling of acceptance/ being valued	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being at home - an assurance that one is accepted. The "longing" bit in "belonging" sometimes puzzles me... is it a longing for the ability to just "be"? • Being accepted, being real, who you are without fear of exclusion • When you belong you have a feeling of being needed by others, feel useful, secure, comfortable
Sense of purpose/ similar values in common	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing/contributing to a cause with other like-minded individuals, working towards a common goal • Sense of purpose, part of something bigger • Respect of ideas, shared interests/values, inclusion, compassion, shared passion
Recognition for contribution/ skills	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having others recognize my strengths and value them • A feeling of contributing to a group and that the contribution is recognized
Other	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity • Ownership • Community

Question 5: What does “belonging to community” mean to you? *“It means feeling wanted and feeling comfortable within a particular group of people who you care about and who care for you.”*

For more than half of the respondents, belonging to community meant some form of connection, being a part of something larger than themselves. Others referred to the emotional bond that belonging to community can give you – a place where you are accepted, safe, and valued. Another fairly significant response highlighted the aspect of mutuality, in which people referred to helping others and being helped themselves. Having things in common was the final category. Naturally, people are more likely to feel that they belong when they feel an affinity or likeness with others around them.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Being connected	53%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being alone; being part of a larger entity • Being an active member of my community • Feeling a sense of connection with others • Being part of a common purpose with a group of others
Emotional bond	37%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance and inclusion • More than just family; sense of place, safety, greater than the sum of its parts, camaraderie, quality of life • My spot in the universe to be safe and accepted • Being accepted as a member, recognized as a member, and valued as a member
Mutual benefit/accountability	27%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing in the rewards and contributing to one another's well-being • Knowing others, interested in the wellbeing of the community, working for the good of the group
Having things in common	23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing similar beliefs, respect for one another, showing pride in what we have • Being part of a group of people who share something, like an identity, a place, economic means (like money, etc.) • Both geographically in a place and spiritually in shared values and perspectives
Other	1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a community includes me, I belong to it, I guess. Although I don't like the idea that "belonging" implies ownership. The community doesn't own me, nor I it.

Question 6: What does “identity in community” mean to you? *“Living in a place where two things are going on at the same time: 1) I have an individual identity, and 2) I have a community identity – and how both of these evolve over time through community (global) responses to change.”*

The responses to this question fell into three main categories. When considering identity in community, many people wrote about the relationship between the self and the community – the fact that participating in a community could influence who you are as an individual. An almost equal number of people referred to a sense of belonging and self-identity. They wrote about feeling recognized for their contributions and about a feeling of reciprocity within their community. Somewhat fewer people referred to the connection/shared vision and values within a particular community. These responses tended to focus on commonalities of certain community groups, such as cultural, religious, sports, etc. The high response in the “other” category seems to indicate that quite a few people were confused by the question and answered ambiguously.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Relationship between self and community	38%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How a person feels within a given community; or how a person's or group's identity is perceived by others outside the community; or how a community collectively shapes its own identity • Having a recognized role in the community/group that receives or offers benefit
Belonging/ being known/ self-identity	35%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People recognize you for your deeds in your home, school, neighborhood, job, associations; there are so many facets of a person and they come through in so many different ways in different communities you belong to • That sense of self derived from belonging to a community or group
Connections/ shared vision/ commonality	19%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing a sense of purpose or cultural norms from common belief/value system • Sharing similar values, working towards common goals
Geographic	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature or make-up of that place where you feel at home. All the history, character, culture of the place you live • The flavor a community has, what makes the community unique
Other	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are communities with whom I identify, but I don't really get this question • Not much. Sounds jargony.

Experiencing Community

Question 8: What does “experiencing community” mean to you? “‘Becoming’ and ‘being’ in relationship with others.”

Most people experienced community as a reciprocal relationship of give and take. Many people mentioned very simple experiences, such as waving hello to a stranger while walking their dog or shoveling a neighbor's driveway, as ways in which they experience community. Helping or being helped in a time of crisis was also mentioned quite a few times. Some people experienced community through being involved and working together towards a goal. Yet others described community as a feeling of belonging and welcome. Two people specifically mentioned experiencing community from the outside – the exclusiveness, cliques, and discrimination that can happen. There were a few puzzled responses from people who either didn't like or understand the question and these were placed in the “Other” category.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Shared group experiences/ exchange of resources	64%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being part of a "happening" - even when neighbors gather to corral a loose dog • To receive a benefit or provide a benefit to someone or a group of people within your community • Taking part of what the area has to offer - restaurants, events, landmarks, walking trails
Being involved/ working for a goal	28%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being involved in a group that shares same interests, values • Getting involved with others to address common issues • Working with others towards a goal
Sense of belonging/ familiarity/welcome	23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling something bigger around you that makes you feel like you belong • Feeling a sense of belonging, identification with and acceptance by a place or group of people.
Learning/being changed	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being impacted and changed by those around you. • Allowing myself to move through and be changed by community, and to understand that I change community by experiencing it.
Other	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This phrase makes me think of a false dichotomy. To speak of "experiencing community" is similar to speaking of experiencing yourself.

Question 9: When do you most profoundly experience community? *“When I am involved in influencing transformation or change in the community. Working together with others toward the common good.”*

People most profoundly experience community in two ways – through relationships with family/neighbors/colleagues and through being involved and working towards a common purpose. Of somewhat lesser importance was participating in community events or activities (being more of a passive recipient than an active organizer. Several people mentioned aspects of mutuality – the act of giving and receiving as well as the phenomenon of how a community can rally together in the event of a crisis or a celebration. A few people mentioned the feeling of belonging, of synergy and of acceptance that accompanied their most profound experiences of community. Often these moments were spontaneous and unexpected.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Relationships: neighborhoods/ family/work	42%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family, friends and through meeting strangers in my neighborhood by walking the dog
Working together/ being involved/ common purpose	38%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I am involved in influencing transformation or change in the community; working together with others toward the common good
Participating in activities/ community events	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singing the national anthem at a local hockey game! or on Remembrance Day at the cenotaph
Giving/receiving	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When something bad happens and I don't have to face it alone; when something good happens and I can share it
Crisis	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural disaster, emergency measure, a rally in support of something
Achievement/celebration	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieving a positive result that contributes to the betterment of an individual or the community as a whole
Faith community	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in weekly devotions at work and worshiping in church with others
Good feeling/synergy	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I am interacting with others in a way where I am fully comfortable, feel fully accepted and liked for who I am
Other	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coming back home from being away When I am still and listen and watch

Building Community

Question 11: What does “community building” mean to you? *“Community building means to me adding value to my community. Adding value to community means making a community a better place for everyone who lives there or participates in it.”*

Here again we see responses to community building in two distinct and yet complementary ways. One set of responses was specific and tangible – working together, creating something. The other set of responses was more emotional – connecting people, building relationships. Aside from these two areas of response, there were very few variations. This might suggest a real consensus on this question.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Working together to improve community/ capacity building	56%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working together towards a shared vision • Creating something that will make the community stronger, more sustainable, better able to treat all its members/citizens equally and supportively
Connecting people/ networks/ sense of belonging/emotional attachment	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships, trust, and the feeling of joy that comes with mutual contributions • Intentional effort to create and maintain connection and relationships that are critical within community
Being a part of a greater whole	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Community building" means consciously relating and acting in ways that build up a sense of belonging and oneness within a group, being part of a whole greater than myself
Geographical/ physical place	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place where community functions, such as school or community centre
Inclusiveness	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place where people gather to contribute to a safe, secure, and supportive environment; hopefully an inclusive environment
Other	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Galvanizing, assembling • I guess community building is a dance that has no steps and changes the next time you decide to dance. If you have the right partner, you learn together how to find the rhythm. Trust, skill, relationship, trust. • I hate this term - it de-emphasizes the human-environment, human-human interrelationship.

Question 12: What builds community for you? *“Co-creating with colleagues, friends, and family that definitive ‘space’ for ‘exchange’ which characterizes, moves through, transforms, aligns and raises up our knowledge of ‘wellness’, and ‘touches’ those possibilities and opportunities outside of ourselves in a way that inspires others to participate and integrate where they see a ‘fit.’”*

The answers here were rich, mainly because this is an area where many of the respondents have spent much of their professional and personal lives. Nearly half of respondents felt that some kind of active involvement with others most builds community for them. This is a broad category, stretching from the initial conceptualization of a problem (needs assessment) to the planning of a solution, to physically working together on a project. Some people need to work together; others just need to *be* together to experience community.

Many of the respondents said that spending meaningful time with people most builds community for them. For some, community is most felt when people feel an affinity with others in their community – either due to shared values or shared goals. For others, inclusiveness, tolerance, and the freedom to be themselves most builds community. One final aspect that builds community that was mentioned by 16 percent of respondents is community infrastructure – the events and activities that bring people together. These included aspects such as community centers, recreation, culture, music, church, and of course, food!

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Working together: civic duty/ voluntarism/caring about the community/ shared decision-making	49%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of shared responsibility, and mutual contributions of time and effort from others
People: communication/ relationships/ familiarity	37%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty, authenticity, meaningful dialogue, greater understanding, common experience, working for “we” not “me,” fun, respect, appreciation
Shared values/ common goals	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared commitment to something, someone or to a common purpose
Community Infrastructure: church/ recreation/ culture/ music/ food/	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and events that bring people together
Inclusiveness: tolerance/ feeling valued/ freedom of expression	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being open to new experiences and celebrating diversity
Mutual support	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from and reliance on others
Good leadership/passion	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong leadership, passionate people, positive environment
Awareness/ listening/ learning	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing, knowledge exchange
Other	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t know

Community Breakdown

Question 14: What does “community breakdown” mean to you? *“When the feeling of belonging is no longer there and people feel as though they are working against each other to preserve what is theirs rather than together to preserve common values.”*

The responses to this question overwhelmingly pointed towards the lack of positive interrelationships as being a key factor in community breakdowns, including issues of power and control. A lack of connection and common understanding between people leads to mistrust, apathy, self-interest, and isolation – all of which were also specifically mentioned. A few people tended to look outward to external factors as the source of community breakdown. They pointed out decreases in social services and the negative impact of some government or corporate influences, which are more concerned with the bottom line than the needs of people. Eight people made a positive comment about community breakdown, considering it an opportunity for renewal and new direction.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
No relationship/ no common purpose/no trust/disintegration of connections	62%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People having no interest in working towards a common goal or looking out for one another
Destructive relationships/ power/control	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of participation, unwillingness to work together, political posturing
Silos/isolation/self-interest	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers going up, lack of communication, segregation, isolationism, "survival of the fittest" mentality - wilderness versus civilization
Degradation or lack of services/resources/ environment	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collapse of the system
Violence/crime/loss of safety/fear	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose of sense of security in community • People not getting along, crime, drugs, police and court involvement, increased poverty and marginalized people
Apathy/burnout	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one wants to take responsibility for anything or do anything...it is always someone else's fault.
Opportunity to move forward	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chance to reflect and take stock of what happened and why, then to move forward • Time for renewal
Other	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good time to move • Something has gone awry

Question 15: What causes community to break down for you? *“Value dissonance, lack of benefit, increase in adversity with no experience that would [outweigh] the struggle to remain cohesive or committed. There is a series of events that destroy trust, credibility, or the original benefit... and those that were drawn to the community for that benefit do not evolve to another stage.” Also, “Feeling that if I didn’t show up for something, no one would notice or care.”*

Close to one-third of the respondents to this question considered apathy, selfishness, and a busy lifestyle as the factors most likely to cause community to break down. The next highest response mentioned isolation and a lack of connection. The third highest response described a lack of trust, caring, and hope. All of these responses reflect the actions and attitudes of individuals within the community. A smaller number saw community breakdown as more external – a lack of resources, a crisis or a jarring change of some kind. Twenty-three percent of people mentioned leadership issues – leaders consumed with greed, leaders that are weak or ineffective, and leaders that don’t consult with their constituency before making decisions. A lack of shared vision and a lack of communication also ranked quite high in the responses.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Selfishness/apathy/ busyness	30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of commitment from others; people feeling overwhelmed and pulled in too many directions and not able to follow through with commitment
Lack of connection/ isolation	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isolation, lack of inclusion for all
No trust/hope/caring	23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judgmental attitudes; loss of trust and clear, agreed-upon direction
Misuse of power/ poor leadership/ competition	23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A disconnect between the those with power and those without
Lack of communication	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient communication, people making decisions without consultation, not being listened to
No shared vision/values	19%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People not working together towards a common goal
Lack of resources/ inequities/ poverty	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When needs exceed resources Loss of economic capacity, poverty
Conflict/hostilities/crisis	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outward (violence towards others/environment) and inward (addictions, suicide) violence as a result of being hurt
Jarring change/ resistance to change	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant changes in members' lives or the circumstances surrounding the community
Other	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degradation of the natural environment through misuse or pollution

Community and Fear

Question 17: What does “community of fear” mean to you? *“This has a negative connotation for me. I think of a community that is not inclusive or who is close minded because they are anxious that harm will be done.” Also, “people that come together against something or because of something negative – to face an enemy or negative situation.”*

Approximately half of the respondents felt that “community of fear” meant a collective experience of fear, hysteria, and worry. Rather than community being a supportive place, it was a place where one person’s fear increased the fear in someone else in an ever-increasing negative spiral. Lack of trust and caring was also mentioned quite a few times. Fear often leads people to pull back and entrench themselves, resulting in stagnation and a lack of progress.

Fear can be destabilizing – both through leadership misusing its power and by ordinary people changing their behaviors or beliefs due to fear. When people are afraid, they are more likely to form vigilante groups and endorse human rights infractions (e.g., incarceration without trial) out of their collective fear. The high response rate in the “Other” category refers to a significant number of people who answered “I don’t know” to this question.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Frightened/hysteria/worry/unhappiness	49%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass hysteria, panic, unreasonable responses
Lack of trust/caring/understanding	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living in a state of discomfort, insecurity and distrust
Stagnation/ lack of progress	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective inability to act in a constructive manner, leading to a sense of hopelessness
Misuse of power/gangs	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community of fear is a community that is not effectively managed. • Generally an "in group" that promotes exclusivity, social instability or financial violence or the threat of these things.
Change of belief/behavior due to fear	9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paranoid group, suspicious of strangers, too many surveillance cameras, creation of vigilante groups
Us/them exclusion	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed group of people afraid of others
Isolation	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People living in fear are disempowered to act and isolated.
Other	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It could be a community that uses its situation and its fear to work toward a positive outcome. This takes courage - and many communities are formed from this kind of fear turned to courage.

Question 18: What do people do when they experience fear as a community? *“Install security cameras, drive people away, pass bylaws against panhandlers, poverty, make more rules that are not enforceable, generally create more prescriptive agendas aimed against something rather than for something. Fear stifles creativity. Fear likes technical solutions like computers, cameras, and remote-control solutions so that some entity can decide our fates, rather than humans. What do people do.... well, fear keeps us in our houses and away from the community.”*

Seventy percent of the respondents mentioned some form of withdrawal, retreat, self-preservation, or “flight.” A smaller number mentioned the opposite response of “fight.” Surprisingly, given the negative association many people have with the word “fear,” a good portion of the respondents answered in a positive way, describing opportunities for growth and collective action.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Flight – isolate themselves, build barriers, move	70%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become home-bound and mistrustful • Protect, isolate, build barriers
Fight – violence, anger	22%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People as a community become dangerous, aggressive, violent, and cruel
Distrust/blame/scapegoat	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes distrust and blame something outside • Point fingers, look for scapegoats, move in circles rather than forward
Group together – divide based on differences	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to erode each other, fail to see the good in other people, “draw in the chuck wagons” and avoid new voices or ideas
Strengthen community – rally together	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to collectively fight against whatever they see as the enemy or threat
Panic – act based on fear not reality	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panic, “grasp at straws,” make wrong-headed moves • They talk to others who are afraid and the fear may be further fuelled
Apathy/Ignorance	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succumb to the fear and stop actively participating in the vibrant activities that make healthy communities • Nothing - they don't do anything
Rely on police/government/laws	1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They rely more and more on police, legalistic and technical fixes, rather than consensus building, patience, and discussion.
Other	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't grow

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every reaction in the book |
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Feeling a Sense of Community

Question 20: What does “community feeling” mean to you? *“When you first drive into an area, you can often get an instant feeling – you see kids playing on the streets, neighbors walking and talking, greenery. You see recreation amenities and social amenities – you get a feeling that it’s a caring community.” Also, “people who care for one another, who care what happens to you, who pull together to support one another.”*

People tended to respond to this question in an emotional way, reflecting its emphasis on feelings. The highest number of responses fell into a category of emotional attachment to people and place. Responses in this category were of a very personal nature.

The next highest category was more of a collective response: how groups of people share common values or feelings. Quite a few people also associated community feeling with belonging and acceptance. In contrast to the question “What builds community for you?” – to which half the respondents answered along the lines of “working together” – only 7 percent mentioned any active participation as contributing to community feeling. Twenty people understood the question as more external and talked about a “vibe,” or a perception of a community, that could be felt just by passing through.

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Emotional attachment/pride of people and place	37%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being proud of where you live; caring about others; caring about the physical space in your neighborhood
Common feelings/values with others	34%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared sense of life, together • A feeling that is shared among a group of people
Belonging/ acceptance/ being known and valued	19%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A warm sense of belonging, being accepted, loved, cherished
Contribution/engagement/ working together	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working together to make our "place" better; working for the betterment of the people that live, work, learn in the area; working together toward a positive outcome
Having needs met/meeting other’s needs	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people care for each other
Vibe of a community	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A vibe you get in the community, energy level, street life
Other	9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to make community seem exclusive to those outside • The heart

Question 21: When do you most feel a sense of community? *Doing things together with neighbors, eating food together, playing music, helping a neighbor. Really mostly when helping a neighbor in time of struggle.” Also, “sharing and communicating with my friends and or neighbors, helping each other and supporting each other, working together towards a common goal, when there is some dependable leadership, when there is time/money/resources to enjoy casual moments, when the rules/laws are forgotten.”*

The final question of the survey offered a rich variety of responses, describing where respondents most feel a sense of community. It is interesting to note that for this question (as compared with question #1 – “What does ‘community’ mean to you?” – or question #20 – “What does ‘community feeling’ mean to you?”), the emotional aspects of belonging, trust, and safety were mentioned significantly fewer times than the more “active” aspects of working together towards a common goal. I understand this to mean that in order to feel a sense of belonging, a certain amount of work and participation in a community is required. Three people specifically mentioned voting as a time when they most felt a sense of community.

Participation in community events was mentioned almost as many times as having an emotional connection or sense of belonging in response to this question. Comments in this category reflected the need for coming together and having shared experiences to contribute to a sense of community. One respondent pretty much sums it up: “When people reach out, smile, greet, engage, share, are sincere, care for the environment, themselves, and others.”

Category	Percentage	Descriptive Examples
Working together for a common purpose	45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When members of a community are working together for the benefit of one another and our environment
Emotional connection/-belonging	27%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When honest communication occurs. Feeling valued, respected, safe, and loved
Participation in community events	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When people reach out, smile, greet, engage, share, are sincere, care for the environment, themselves, and others
Personal interactions: job/family/friends	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While being engaged with family, friends, and others who are sharing a common positive experience
Times of crisis or celebration	9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At a time of stress, or any emotional challenge Being supported by others in joys and sorrows
Faith groups	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I am held, esteemed, supported, understood, forgiven.
In nature/parks	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In my neighborhood park - well used by people of all ages, for a range of activities
Other	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voting days

Conclusion

Community shapes our identity. It puts things in perspective, helping us to sort out real danger from perceived danger and to make sense of life. A common purpose often brings a common bond, helping us to put the common good above the needs of the self and deepening connections with others who are working to build a better world. For most people, community brings greater physical, mental, and economic health, and increases an overall sense of happiness.

We are “hard-wired” for community, instinctively believing that together we can do and be more than we can on our own. The answers from our research convince me that community is not an entity that you can “have” or “not have.” People experience community on a spectrum of intentionality and intensity, depending on how much effort they commit to relationships, to helping others, to improving their surroundings, and to being open and present to the possibility of meeting someone new – or to starting something new.

Community may seem distant at times, but it is all around us, waiting to be found. I believe that the longing for the experience of community is a deeply held feeling inside of people. Even when we do not feel or see this longing on a daily basis, this desire lies just under the surface, waiting to be evoked. Recognizing the need for community can open us to others who are seeking the same and to possibilities beyond our imaginings.