

## Community Listening Session – Racine Summary Report

### Overview:

On December 9th, 2016, over 25 participants attended the last in a series of 2016 [Invest in Wisconsin](#) Community Listening Sessions, which was held at the IMET Center at Gateway Technical College in Racine.

Sponsored by generous support from the JPMorgan Chase [PRO Neighborhoods initiative](#), Invest in Wisconsin is comprised of four leading community development financial institutions (CDFI) throughout Wisconsin – Community Assets for People ([CAfP](#)), First American Capital Corporation ([FACC](#)), Forward Community Investment ([FCI](#)) and Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation ([WWBIC](#)).

Our mission is to support economic opportunities for low-income and people of color in rural Wisconsin and to measure the social impacts of our work. The listening session offered a critical venue for formal and informal leaders in the Racine area to share ideas, suggestions and hopes for what a thriving rural Wisconsin could look like with access to capital to grow and nurture business and organizations.

### Key Learnings:

Participants were engaged in conversations around 4 key questions; all related to the overarching goal of supporting economic opportunities for low-income and people of color in rural Wisconsin. At the end of the session, participants voted on their top priorities from our discussion around how Invest in Wisconsin could offer support moving forward. Here is a summary of what we learned:

- What is *working well* to support small business start-up and growth in the Racine region?
  - Several established organizations provide education, mentorship and training to entrepreneurs such as SCORE, SBDC, WWBIC, Launch Box, and offices of Workforce Development described as having a “portal” for information.
  - Resources and information related to small business development are shared between local municipalities. Local networking is believed to be strong and collaborative in nature with the consensus that “we need each other” in order to thrive.



- What *barriers exist* to supporting small business start-up and growth in the Racine region?
  - There is a need to link small business resources to people in communities. While services to support entrepreneurship are judged to be robust, there may be a lack of awareness among community members that they exist. Mentorship, leadership training and business education were highlighted as needed for rising entrepreneurs.
  - While jobs may exist in the region, there is a lack of skilled workers available to fill them. Job specific training for skilled trades was highlighted as a need.
  - The regional culture with regard to entrepreneurship was described as generally risk adverse with a desire for an “attitudinal shift” toward increased support for innovation. There was also a stated need for additional corporate philanthropy to support this shift.

- What community resources (organizations, individuals, services and infrastructure) are *working well* to support a thriving Racine region?

- Several local organizations were named as providing critical social and community resources that support healthy communities including: the YMCA, VA, HALO and neighborhood development services.
- Educational institutions such as Gateway Technical College, UW-Parkside and RUSD, were said to offer critical opportunities for professional development, internship opportunities and skills training.



- What community resources (organizations, individuals, services and infrastructure) are *needed* to support a thriving Racine region?

- Several services including childcare and afterschool care, as well as increased regional public transportation (bus and trains), were highlighted to support the mobility of working families.
- Services were said to be located in more metro areas



creating logistical barriers to access for rural residents. The need for creativity – such as virtual services – as well as the importance of keeping resources current and easily accessible was mentioned.

#### **Next Steps:**

Community listening sessions have been completed in all of Invest in Wisconsin's hub cities throughout the state: Madison, Appleton, Green Bay, Eau Claire and Racine. Summary reports – like this one – are shared with participants and on our website after each session, and a comprehensive report of key learnings and next steps will be disseminated in early 2017.

Additional listening sessions will be held in 2017 and 2018, as Invest in Wisconsin's work continues to progress through our community conversations and capital is invested in the businesses and organizations that will create lasting impact.

#### **Stay Connected:**

We are excited about the work ahead of us and welcome your feedback along the way. To offer comments about this report, the listening sessions, or other aspects of Invest in Wisconsin, please contact us at [info@investinwisconsin.org](mailto:info@investinwisconsin.org).

We look forward to hearing from you!

