

Community Listening Session – Madison Summary Report

Overview: On September 21, 2016, over 25 participants attended the first Invest in Wisconsin (IIW) Community Listening Session held at Threshold, a community gathering space on Madison’s eastside.



Sponsored by generous support from the JPMorgan Chase [PRO Neighborhoods initiative](#), IIW 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 Madison-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. Here is a summary of what we learned:



- What is going well?
 - Informal systems and infrastructure exist that offer communication channels and socioeconomic support, e.g. African American barbershops, Hmong Co-ops
 - Viable local resources, e.g. CDFIs, chambers, churches, university and tech colleges
 - Community spirit of innovation and collaboration related to entrepreneurship

- What could be better?
 - Access/exposure to financial education, capital and resources
 - Connections between urban and rural areas
 - Supporting the social imagination – the idea that communities have viable ideas and native systems in place to address their needs – of local people
- What are opportunities for growth?
 - Farmers’ market and cooperative models utilized to bring rural goods to urban centers
 - Relationship building across geography, socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity
 - Issues of equity addressed within the current system/paradigm; creating space for alternate currencies and ways of being
- What are barriers to improvement?
 - Access/exposure to capital and supporting cash flow requirements of niche businesses
 - Infrastructure: reliable transportation, internet, and basic resources
 - Fear of failure – narrow margins

Next Steps: Community listening sessions are being scheduled throughout Wisconsin in IIW’s 5 hub cities: Madison, Appleton, Eau Claire, Green Bay and Racine. **The next session will be held in Appleton at Fox Valley Technical College on October 18th from 9-11am.** Additional information will be posted shortly on the IIW website. Summary reports – like this one – will be shared 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 again in 2017 and 2018, as IIW’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 IIW, please contact us at info@investinwisconsin.org. We look forward to hearing from you!