



Hoosier INsight: Listening Sessions and Capacity Building

Executive Summary

The Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) is currently engaged in an initiative to identify key issues facing women and learn what is needed to build capacity for women's progress. The hope is to establish a plan of action that can be shared by individuals, public agencies and community organizations throughout Indiana. The first phase of this initiative was a series of regional listening sessions and online survey designed to facilitate conversations with citizens across Indiana to categorize critical issues affecting women regionally and statewide.

The dialogue helped ICW to initiate discussion, prioritize challenges, and develop key partnerships with stakeholders to create a coordinated effort to move Indiana women forward. Its purpose is to create an environment where public deliberation on women's issues can occur. The findings compiled from these listening sessions and accompanying survey can serve as a guide for next steps that will mobilize community stakeholders from all sectors to find positive, meaningful and lasting solutions to challenges that are uncovered. There is a fundamental need for women of Indiana to be heard. So, Indiana and the Commission is taking the time to listen and to understand the perceived community needs in a collaborative and supportive way, to build trust with its constituents, and identify and link with regional partners.

Similarly, individuals and communities will have the opportunity to identify their own needs through civic participation. By creating opportunities for citizens to have greater input on a particular issue or situation, the process will empower them to recognize that their participation has the potential to have an impact. During *Hoosier INsight*, women have conveyed their desire to be part of the solution! They have demonstrated the ability to work together to find common ground on issues important to them and have produced innovative ideas and clear solutions on what is needed to move Indiana women forward.

Beginning with a pilot session in February 2011, ICW held seventeen listening sessions in ten communities across Indiana. In all, 275 people participated. Three types of sessions were conducted and structured to engage women and men from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. Eight (8) public sessions with participants from the general public were held in Allen, Bartholomew, Marion, Porter, St. Joseph, Tippecanoe, and Vanderburgh Counties. Two (2) sessions were conducted on university campuses in order to engage faculty and young women, ages 18-24. Those campuses were Indiana

University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) and St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana.

Six (6) sessions were conducted with individuals associated with low-income programs. Four (4) of these sessions were coordinated by local organizers of the Circles™ National Campaign, which works to transform communities by building relationships that inspire and equip people to end poverty. These sessions were held in Bloomington, Evansville, and Muncie, as well as in Scott County. Two (2) other sessions in this category were held at similar organizations. In Indianapolis, ICW staff presented at Dress for Success, an organization focused on economic independence of disadvantaged women by providing professional attire, a network of support and the career development tools to help women thrive in work and in life. In South Bend, staff members also presented at St. Margaret's House, which is a day center that works to improve the lives of homeless and transient women and children by providing individual attention to their immediate needs, breaking the bonds of isolation and helping them acquire skills to better their lives.



Red = Listening Session Locations
 Green = Participants/Respondents
 Yellow = No identifiable participation

During the listening sessions, participants were asked to identify multiple issues facing women in Indiana. After issues were listed, the group was asked to determine the top one to four issues facing women in order to explore those topics more thoroughly. Once these issues were chosen, the participants either stayed together as a single group or broke up into two to four groups of 8-10 people to continue the discussion on the components of each issue. Participants were asked to consider a series of questions to brainstorm ideas for action that would address the issue in Indiana. The questions were structured around five categories: 1) framing the issue; 2) understanding what is already in place; 3) identifying what other organizations should be involved; 4) suggesting what community actions could be taken to solve this issue; and 5) deciding what could be next steps.

An online survey was developed to supplement the work of the statewide listening sessions by providing additional feedback from individuals who were not able to attend or from individuals who may wish to comment on additional issues not discussed during the listening sessions. Eight hundred twenty-five (825) respondents began and 422 respondents or 51.2 percent completed the survey. Of those who provided county information, eighty (80) counties were represented by the responses. However, because over half of the respondents did not answer the question regarding their county of residence, we are confident that we received responses from every county.

Neither the listening sessions nor the survey were intended to be used for a statistically-significant analysis of the current issues facing women or an academically based qualitative research study. Both mechanisms were designed to provide individuals with the opportunity to comment openly and freely on the issues important to women.

Because the conversation during the listening sessions and the responses from the survey were structured to be open-ended and free-flowing, discussion topics were grouped under overarching categories. To determine the top five issues, the following criteria were used to review the data:

Top 5 Issues

Health-related issues
Work-based issues
Care Giving
Leadership
Violence against Women

- Number of times an issue was listed and number of “votes” it received during the listening session
- Number of times the issue was chosen as a topic during the discussion portion of the listening sessions
- Frequency of occurrence the issue was mentioned in the survey

In all three criteria, the top issues were: health-related issues, work-based issues, care giving, leadership and violence against women.

Several underlying themes were viewed as fundamental components of any issue and should be considered as this process moves forward. In order to make any lasting systemic shift, participants and respondents indicated that societal attitudes and cultural mindsets must be changed. Agencies, organizations and individuals committed to moving women’s issues forward need to create a movement that empowers all women to make the change happen. Participants and respondents called for a cooperative, coordinated and collaborative effort to address any issue. Organizations supporting women must be networking and communicating with each other so that they can find common ground and support women more effectively and efficiently.

Participants and respondents remarked that there was a real need for more resources because there was a lack of information women receive and a general lack of knowledge about where to find resources. Creating a centralized and comprehensive mechanism to give women access to all types of information, resources and referrals became a general suggestion for action in all discussions.

Other comments expressed a need for women directly affected by these issues to participate in deliberation. More importantly, there was a sense that women felt a need to be heard in the debate on women’s issues but currently were not. Many participants and respondents recognized that women had a **responsibility** to be engaged in the process; however, they needed the tools, resources and information to make informed decisions and be effective in advocating for their own needs. Finally, there was a general sense that these issues were not necessarily women’s issues. Instead they were community and family issues. Therefore, participants felt that men must be engaged and needed to join the conversation.

Health-related issues were ranked first as discussion topics during the listening sessions and ranked second as responses in the survey. With regards to health-related issues, several discussion topics were considered. However, the two primary health-related themes discussed throughout the project were: access to quality affordable health care and reproductive health issues, including the lack of funding and/or threats to women’s ability to access reproductive health services.

Reproductive healthcare became a significant aspect of access to affordable quality healthcare with participants becoming extremely passionate about the concurrent debate occurring in the Indiana General Assembly.

Those without health care coverage do not find any support – they simply go without appropriate care.

–St. Joseph County Respondent

The expectation is to work like a man but be home like a mother.

–Spencer County
Respondent

Work-based issues were ranked first as responses from the survey and ranked second during the listening sessions and discussions. A large majority of survey participants selected economy security as the most important issue that they believe needs attention within their own community. From the range of answers received, it appears that there was not a single definition for economic security, but rather several

explanations. For some, it was a matter of employment, for others, it was the availability of social services, access to childcare, job training, or finding balance between work and family life. Furthermore, women in Indiana continue to face workplace discrimination in advancement opportunities and pay equity. These issues then affect a woman’s current lifestyle as well as her future retirement.

Discussions during the listening sessions on work-based issues varied widely between groups due to the many facets of issues that exist in the workplace. Discrimination, gender and pay equity, job-related training and work/life flexibility were all important work-based issues. However, the two primary work-based themes discussed during the listening sessions were: high-paying and high-skilled jobs and gender equality and pay equity. Finding high paying jobs in critical industries was viewed as a primary concern at several listening session. During discussions, some groups focused on jobs in general while others focused on specific industries, such as non-traditional jobs, e.g. manufacturing or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) careers. In addition, gender equality in the workplace and pay equity were important aspects of this group of issues.

Everyone can provide all types of justifications, but the bottom line is that women are financially disadvantaged. And when life gets complex, women have fewer resources available to lean on - and the social services may favor women, but they also are designed to support subsistence level improvement without impacting the inequities that are built into the system.

–Marion County
Respondent

Care giving issues were equally important to both listening session participants and survey respondents. The central theme for participants and respondents was access to affordable quality child care, including care for second and third shifts and after-school supervision for older children. Comments tended to focus on the concern that this issue was fundamental to all other issues

We have to stop looking at child care as a woman's issue. It is a family issue. It is an economic issue. It is a community issue.

–Allen County
Respondent

because if individuals cannot find quality childcare for their children, they cannot find a good paying job, receive education or training to help them advance in their careers or maintain their households. Early childhood education options were also identified as a major component of childcare as well as other related discussion topics such as education on appropriate parenting skills especially for teenage mothers, care of elderly parents and sandwich generation issues.

Another central theme for participants and respondents was promoting more opportunities for more women to step forward as leaders in elected offices and other policy making positions. An important underlying theme of conversations was the perceived lack of women supporting women. In addition, other related topics included highlighting women as role models, mentoring, and opportunities for leadership development.

It is important to work on getting women involved in the decision making opportunities/leadership positions that are available in our state. Do what you are able to do to get them in positions of authority as women understand the issues facing us.

—Monroe County Respondent

During the listening sessions, violence against women included all types of violence. Specific topics were abuse, dating violence, domestic violence, human trafficking, neglect, rape prevention, sex offenders, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking and other general violence against women. The roots of the issue were seen to be based on a patriarchal society of power, control and violence in general. Participants believed that there was a need to be a shift in societal attitude away from an acceptance of violence.

More of a network within each & every community between law enforcement, health providers, schools, and domestic violence service providers is needed. More men need to be involved to address the issue.

—Hendricks County Respondent

A full compilation report and a summary report are available that provides more detail on all five issues. In addition, there is a summary report for each listening session. The information and results highlight critical issues and concerns of women in Indiana. The initial results assessment presents many of the same issues that have been discussed in national reports; however, it is apparent that information pertaining specifically to women in Indiana is needed. The information and suggestions from the five primary topics (health-related concerns, work-based concerns, care giving, leadership and violence against women) can serve as a guide for next steps to help our

communities better address these critical issues and to mobilize community stakeholders from all sectors to find positive, meaningful, and lasting solutions that can move Indiana women forward.

In order to continue this dialogue and follow up on suggestions presented in this report, the Indiana Commission for Women will facilitate a statewide debriefing effort that allows key community partners, leaders and key stakeholders the opportunity to react to the project's results. Its format will provide a public forum in which participants synthesize the results into a statewide plan of action that can be shared with community organizations, public agencies and citizens across Indiana. Those who attend the debriefings will help to further prioritize the suggestions for community actions and next steps into five to ten recommendations for action to address the five pressing issues identified through the listening sessions. During those meetings, participants will help answer questions about what realistically can be done, who should be the lead group, and what are the metrics to be used to determine if the actions have been accomplished.

It is evident from the first phase that Hoosier citizens want to work with the Indiana Commission for Women and with each other to frame the dialogue on how to make lasting changes so that women can live, work and raise a family. There is a need for more effective and efficient communication and collaboration between organizations committed to moving Indiana women forward. There is a need for gender-specific statistics and data on specific populations such as girls, immigrants, incarcerated women, single women, senior women, and women veterans to be compiled

into quantitative reports on the status of women and girls in Indiana. There is a need for a centralized and comprehensive mechanism so that women can be connected with the services, resources, referrals and opportunities that already exist in Indiana. Project participants believe that both women and men have a responsibility to be engaged in the process and that community organizations and public agencies have the responsibility to provide the needed tools, resources and information so that citizens to make informed decisions and be effective in advocating for their own needs.

About the Indiana Commission for Women

The Indiana Commission for Women is committed to ***the full participation of women in all aspects of society*** in order to make Indiana a better place to live, work and raise a family by removing barriers that may hinder that participation. Its mission is to understand the needs of Indiana women and their families, and to work strategically both within government and in our communities to help bring about positive change. The agency is committed to ***moving Indiana women forward*** by amplifying women's voices in the public sector, by raising awareness of their needs and concerns, and by celebrating their contributions and successes.

The Commission is charged by statute to provide many services to Indiana women on a wide range of topics. Through its efforts, the agency encourages citizens to become more aware of the overall issues women face in Indiana and assists women in becoming better connected to the opportunities and resources available to them in their communities and throughout the State of Indiana and more engaged as leaders in resolving challenges that they face.

Disclaimer

Any report prepared on the *Hoosier INsight: Women's Issues Listening Session and Capacity Building initiative* is presented as an account of key issues, challenges, and suggested solutions described during public discussions and an online survey sponsored by the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) and supported by local partnering organizations in conjunction with this initiative. The compilation of this report should not be considered in any way as an endorsement or promotion by the Indiana Commission for Women, by the State of Indiana or by ICW's partners and supporters. Opinions expressed are strictly those of session participants and respondents and not necessarily those of the Indiana Commission for Women, of the State of Indiana or of its partners and supporters. Recommendations presented in any report, together with input received from other sources, may or may not inform the creation of a plan of action to address the issues and challenges discussed as well as potential ICW initiatives, programs and services. Furthermore, ICW may use information obtained from these meetings and from the results of this initiative to offer suggestions to other agencies, organizations or entities better suited to address particular issues and/or challenges uncovered during this initiative in order to facilitate maximum cooperation and collaboration between ICW and other entities. The Indiana Commission for Women and those associated with the agency do not assume any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any comment made or of any third party's use or results of such use of any information contained in this summary report.