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Town Hall a positive start for journey we all can join

This week's Tucson Regional Town Hall is the first step in a journey toward what the Tucson area can be and wants to be.

About 160 folks — an eclectic mix of elected officials, business owners and operators, nonprofit organization executives and volunteers — spent Sunday through Wednesday in intensive discussions aimed at drafting a report that will be a starting point for one regional vision.

Some participants — like the elected officials — were invited, but most were selected from applications by the Arizona Town Hall staff, a 45-year-old private, nonprofit organization that conducts two similar statewide events each year.

By our estimate, the participants spent almost 5,000 hours, about 28 hours each, removed from their everyday responsibilities, with their cell phones and personal digital assistants turned off. In the retreatlike setting of Loews Ventana Canyon Resort, they worked in groups, talking, listening and offering their answers to some of our region's more complex questions. Eventually, they chiseled out a 41-page report that should not be misconstrued to be an action plan. That's among the next important steps and requires broader input.

The process has been criticized for having too many of the same ol' names on the list.

It is unfair to categorize the participants, or any individual. Many participants frequently have their names in this newspaper and on corporate and nonprofit letterheads. However, they are multi-dimensional. They are parents, coaches, hikers, cyclists, arts enthusiasts, and they live in neighborhoods. In fact, 13 of the participants mentioned neighborhood-association involvement in their biographical sketches.

The discussions and the messy process of group-editing the report and reaching consensus on each word and statement made it clear that familiar names did not mean familiarity. It was obvious that many participants had not sat at the same table and listened to one another in years.

The relationships established and the new regional understanding can be turned into action for our community.

We hope the participants share what they learned and experienced with their constituents, at volunteer groups, in workplaces or in the Little League bleachers.

The Town Hall report is being finalized and will be available to the community in early June. Town Hall participants and a broader group will develop action and implementation plans, based on the report and other information, such as the "Community Voices" surveys.

That those who did not participate in this week's session must not become marginalized, but rather should embrace the report in June, offer their constructive criticism and join the journey.

The Tucson Regional Town Hall was a productive, albeit imperfect, process. Now the heavy lifting begins.

For more information on the Town Hall, to download the background report or to register to be a Community Voice, go online to tucson.com/townhall

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Watch the video

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