Denver PRIDE members and partners also participated in interviews in early 2023 about identity, inclusion, and connection within the community. Here's what Denver PRIDE members and partners had to say:

What does involvement and inclusion look like?

- **Everybody is Invited.** Being involved and meaningfully included in the communities you affiliate yourself with presents itself in many ways. For some, being involved meant organizing activities and tabling events that bring the community together.

- **Language.** For others, involvement and inclusion was more about the words we use, whether that be raising awareness about language justice, providing translating services for a variety of languages, or normalizing things such as pronouns in everyday conversations.

- **Opportunities for Feedback.** Regardless of how involvement and inclusion look to some, one commonality of involvement and inclusion was that a community cannot truly call itself inclusive unless it ensures everyone has a chance to provide feedback and allows everyone to have a voice in decisions that could impact the community.

What challenges exist to involvement and inclusion?

- **Barriers and Lack of Resources.** Many barriers and challenges exist today that can make it difficult to meaningfully involve and include everyone in a community. One barrier that was mentioned by members was the lack of resources, whether that be money or time, in instituting meaningful change. There simply are not enough funds or time to see all the changes we want. Additionally, barriers of entry also exist, such as not being able to communicate in the same language, or even physical barriers such as not having a ramp for wheelchair users to use to attend in-person events in certain buildings.

- **Power of the Status Quo.** Sometimes it's difficult to include others due to the social norms our system is entrenched in, and how often and easily things outside of our notion of normalcy are labeled as "weird." Certain voices that are considered normal under our society's values are seen as more powerful and important, which leads to other individuals' voices being drowned out or not as highly regarded. Their opinions are unfortunately not considered when implementing major decisions, such as crafting public policy, that could affect everyone.

- **Lack of Social Awareness.** The lack of awareness around certain issues can also be a challenge in involving and including others. This lack of awareness can be attributed to the fact that it can be difficult to get input from those who are in fact harmed by these lesser-heard issues, as they may not have the same opportunities as others to contribute their voice or opinions.

Why Intersectionality Matters

- **People Have Different Identities.** Intersectionality, or the idea that an individual can hold more than one social identity or aspect to them, was an important concept to many members. There were multiple ways members identified themselves, whether that be through their ethnic and racial identities, gender identity, sexual orientation, job occupation, or even hobbies. Having different identities co-existing can impact an individual in many ways and can make life more challenging for them. It can be a double struggle to hold more than one identity (e.g., being a person of color and also queer): there are more things to be afraid of, whether that be the judgement of others close to them, or judgement from the state (e.g., legislation and public policy, law enforcement).

- **Community Connectedness.** How people identify impacts how they interact with their community, and whether that helps them feel included or excluded with everyone. This was so important as many members voiced that it was a crucial part of their own identity to find others like them and find others that they can feel comfortable with.

- **Discrimination Less Likely.** Often, we label people that are "other" and regard them as a monolith when there are different kinds of "otherness", such as different kinds of religious representation, LGBTQ+ identities, and diversity within certain groups (e.g., American-born versus being born abroad). Discrimination can happen in any community, but the chances of discrimination are less likely when diversity is shown and celebrated. It is crucial that we recognize multiple identities to ensure that no one is being excluded from conversations or the community.

Exclusion and Impacts of Feelings of Isolation

- **Examples of Exclusion:** Excluding others can take many forms. For some, that meant not letting others have a seat at the table to make important community choices. For others, exclusion meant not seeing others like you in your community or being made to feel different than everyone else.

- **Feeling Unwelcome and Unsafe.** Exclusion is problematic in that it leads to a society where people don't feel protected – whether that be they feel unsafe just walking down the street or are afraid to even bring their full selves to the table and can lead to individuals feeling unwelcome and isolating themselves.

- **Results in Adverse Health Outcomes.** Feeling isolated is painful. It can lead to additional feelings of hopelessness and anger at the systems we operate in. Feelings of isolation can also impact our mental health and wellbeing in negative ways; it can result in suicide ideation and attempts, as well as lead to substance use and deviant behaviors such as crime.

Ideal Future

- **Educating Others and Each Other.** An ideal future is one that starts with education: teaching others about inclusivity, ensuring curriculums normalize cultures and traditions from all parts of the world. Education would also include incorporating language justice and racial equity training to create more inclusive and welcoming spaces everywhere. These spaces would provide everyone with the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way and celebrate a wide range of identities and backgrounds.

- **Productive and Welcoming Conversations.** Conversations would also be more frequent and open, particularly conversations regarding community-wide decisions: there would be an opportunity for everyone to be involved and have their voice heard without judgement.

- **Everyone Feels Safe.** An ideal future is one where everyone can fully be themselves and not have to fear for their safety or judgement from others.