

CHANGING PLACES

ENGLISH GALLERY GUIDE

“Diversity is often described as the differences between people but I think the most rewarding moment is not when you realize you’re different, but when you realize how many things you have in common.”

Jose Hernandez-Paris, Diversity Specialist
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

The numbers can be overwhelming. More than 60,000 newcomers arrive in this area each year. They come from all over the U.S., and more than 100 different countries.

One exhibit could never fully capture this vast new diversity, or the many changes it has sparked. Instead, we focus on 5 challenges created by growth and change – challenges that confront all of us.

As you meet the people featured in the exhibit, we hope you will try to step into their shoes – to “change places” with them. We also hope that as you learn about their lives, you will reflect on your own, and think about the ways that you are addressing the same challenges they face.

As you reflect, please share as well. Each section has a post-it station where you can write your thoughts. You can record your experiences in the video talkback booth at the end of the exhibit. Or just strike up a conversation with someone else in the exhibit.



what do i keep, what do i change?

What parts of your cultural heritage have you kept? What have you let go of?

Our changing world requires us all to take stock of our cultural heritage. Whether we come from a distant country, or have lived in one place all our lives, we must decide which customs to keep, which to let go of, and which to change.

This section illustrates some of the choices made by families from India – this area's second-largest immigrant group. Drawing on many influences, Indians from multiple generations are fashioning rich cultural identities that combine old and new. These creative combinations shape their ceremonies and celebrations, as well as their daily lives.

If you were asked to select something – an object, a tradition, an idea – that speaks to your own cultural journey, what would you choose?



umm, what did you say?

When have you had problems communicating in Charlotte?

Communicating with others is one of the greatest challenges we all face.

This section describes several communication challenges – language, gestures, styles of speaking. Explore a little, thinking about yourself as well as others.

How close can you get to the mannequin before you feel uneasy?
Are you more “Northern” or “Southern” in your communication style?

Can you recall an experience where you were misunderstood, or misunderstood someone else? What strategies do you use to deal with communication difficulties that you face?





the sounds and tastes of home

Which places in Charlotte help you feel "at home"? Why?

La Paloma. Asian Corners. Taste of Buffalo. Bar-B-Q King. This area is full of culture-based businesses that reveal a lot about our community. Growing diversity. A common entrepreneurial spirit. The pull of the familiar sounds, tastes and voices that can help newcomers feel "at home" in a new place, and encourage all of us to learn about new cultures.

This section features a small store called a "tienda" – a favorite spot for many of the Latinos who make up this area's largest immigrant group. Like other immigrants, Latinos often find a sense of home in the shops that sell food, music and other products from their many places of origin (although most Latinos speak Spanish, they come from a broad range of countries and cultural backgrounds).

What gives you the sense of "home?" What are your "comfort" foods? What would someone else learn about you from the places you shop, the food you buy, or the music you listen to?



getting past "us" and "them"

Who judges you without knowing you? Who do you judge?
How can people get past "us" and "them"?

While none of us wants to stereotype others, all of us do. Media accounts, political pronouncements and daily conversations all swirl with false images and ideas, which make it hard to see each other clearly. These images affect how we treat each other, how we feel about ourselves, and what our community can accomplish.

As our community has grown, the challenge has multiplied. Even as people strive to overcome old biases, new stereotypes are taking shape around Muslims, gays, "gangsters," Latinos, Northerners, suburbanites and many others. In this section, we show some of these stereotypes – and some of the ways that residents are working to build the ties of friendship and understanding that can overcome them.

Which of these stereotypes strikes a familiar chord? What can we do as individuals, as organizations and as a community to get beyond them?



working together

In what ways do you reach across cultures?

Working together across cultural lines can be an especially large challenge. But for many in our area, a commitment to shared goals has helped in the hard work of acknowledging and addressing cultural differences.

This section highlights the diverse congregation that fills the services at Steele Creek Church of Charlotte. Back in the 1980s, Steele Creek's members started building bridges between blacks and whites. As the area diversified, they began to reach out to the many new people moving to the area. In the process, they have learned much about the importance of leadership, sharing and relationship-building.

How have you managed to reach across cultures? What gets in the way?
What works?

