As conversations around the world included the topics of COVID-19, racial equality and hate crimes, we looked for ways that as a Chamber of Commerce, we could not only support the movements and conversations that were happening, but most importantly show support for our minority members. As a staff and with our Board of Directors, we discussed at length programming and promotions that could go beyond a simple statement on our social media channels.

With the help of Leadership Connect of West Central Indiana and Launch Terre Haute, both organizations are housed under the Chamber umbrella, we announced an “Inclusivity Panel”, along with spotlights of minority owned businesses on social media and our website. As conversations around the world centered on equality and inclusion, we felt that it was necessary to be innovative about representing all businesses and organizations within West Central Indiana.

Communicating with our members about the spotlights was amazing and the feedback we received was encouraging. Statistically, many business owners and members of Chambers of Commerce are white males. During this promotion we drew attention to minority business owners and community leaders, both male and female.

[The first Inclusivity Panel was hosted via Zoom in August 2020](https://www.terrehautechamber.com/inclusivity-panel-discussion-recap-photos-and-video-link/) and is featured on our YouTube Channel. The virtual event was attended by over 45 people virtually. Mayor Duke Bennett, staff members and members of the Leadership Connect Inclusivity Task Force attended in person.

Panelists included:

* LT Thompson, Co-Owner of Wellness Box Inc.
* Stan Miles, Plant Manager at Novelis (also a Chamber Board member)
* Chris Tooley and Mark McLaurine II, Co-Owners WingStop Terre Haute
* Dr. Rana Johnson, Indiana State University Associate Vice President of Inclusive Excellence and Title IX

We hosted [a second panel in October 2020](https://www.terrehautechamber.com/leadership-connect-of-west-central-indiana-inclusivity-panel-discussion-2/).

In preparation for the first panel, we worked with Dr. Rana Johnson to formulate questions and topics that would respect the panelists, while also addressing tough topics. As an all white staff, we were grateful for the guidance from Dr. Johnson. These topics and questions were used for both panels, while some topics and discussions came up organically as discussions flowed.

Questions included:

* To be answered by the moderator: What are the goals/objectives of the Terre Haute Chamber and Inclusivity Task Force … what would we like to see accomplished- what is the timeline?
* What is your earliest memory of being made to feel different?
* Describe an event (discrimination, microagression, prejudice) that you transitioned into a teachable moment.
* What can each of us do to begin to address social injustice? How can we use the dialogue today in our place of employment, in our communities, in our homes?
* What are the takeaways from the panel discussion?
* What are the next steps?

One of the most poignant and emotional moments came during the first panel discussion. LT Thompson is a former local football player, owns his own fitness company and is an all around fit, “tough” and (emotionally and physically) strong man. While recounting a time when he was targeted and discriminated against at a hotel swimming pool, he became choked up and visibly emotional. He spoke about the humiliating and shocking event, along with the heart wrenching discussion he had to have later that evening with his young son about racism. There was not a dry eye in the room and the shock from a mostly white audience was apparent. It was in that moment that so many of us felt that these moments were giving each of us knowledge and a small perspective. Overall the events were valuable for ourselves, our members and our community.

Both virtual events were free for the community to attend and coverage from the local media was excellent.

Our partner Launch Terre Haute also extended the idea of inclusivity panels to entrepreneurs, their main audience. A [Black Entrepreneur Panel was hosted in February 2021](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfN65-ysOTg) and a [Women Entrepreneur Panel was completed in March 2021](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFobLgOCNcM).

In June 2021 Launch Terre Haute will host a LGBTQ+ Entrepreneur Panel. Marketing materials highlighting Launch Terre Haute and the Chamber of Commerce are being organized for community events including Juneteenth and the grand opening of the Terre Haute Pride Center.

Chamber President Kristin Craig also worked to support and highlight women leaders in the community. [As part of the Terre Haute Women’s Conference, Craig interviewed a panel of women about their experiences in the workplace, inspiring stories and advice to other women in business](https://youtu.be/4GHk0ZvIX1w).

Branching out from the first two panels which highlighted black business owners and community leaders, our team is now organizing a similar business spotlight series as part of Asian America and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. We will also host a Q&A session with one of our AAPI members (scheduled to be recorded this week).

While we’re proud of the work and conversations that have begun, our innovative work for inclusion is not finished. As a staff and Board of Directors, we are continuing to find ways to include all businesses and people within our membership. We have the ability to offer “a seat at the table” and we take that seriously and with honor. We plan to add a page to our website that showcases these efforts and continues the conversation, awareness and education.

**New Programming in 2021**

* [**Inclusivity Panel**](https://www.terrehautechamber.com/inclusivity-panel-discussion-recap-photos-and-video-link/)
* [**Inclusivity Panel 2**](https://www.terrehautechamber.com/leadership-connect-of-west-central-indiana-inclusivity-panel-discussion-2/)
* [**Black Entrepreneurs Panel**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfN65-ysOTg)
* [**Women Entrepreneurs Panel**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFobLgOCNcM)
* [**Women in Business Panel**](https://youtu.be/4GHk0ZvIX1w)