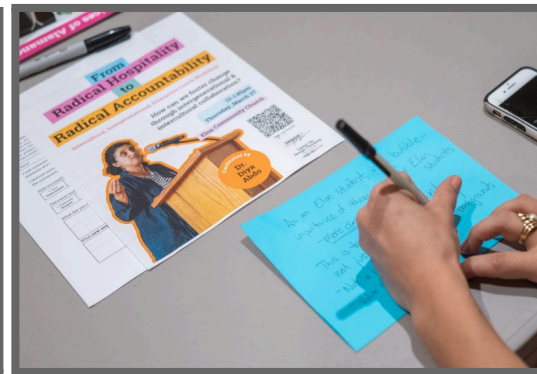


# Stories of Alamance County 2024

## *Spaces of Spiritual Diversity*

The “Stories of Alamance County” project aims to build bridges of dialogue across lines of racial, religious, geographic, and generational division and to create spaces of understanding, healing, community, and action. This project uses community-based oral history interviewing, tours or local community spaces, digital storytelling, and public engagement to explore hidden histories and untold stories of Alamance County, while building new connections and envisioning new possibilities.



*“Thank you... for doing this.... It is not the first time doing this. I’ve lived here for over 30 years. I have watched a lot of growth and progress... when I sit in this room and I see you have students recognizing some of our newest community members and our oldest community members... helping us to see how they are coming together to create this tapestry... it gives me HOPE that one day Alamance County will be welcoming to all people... you are planting SEEDS for that right now. So thank you so much!”*

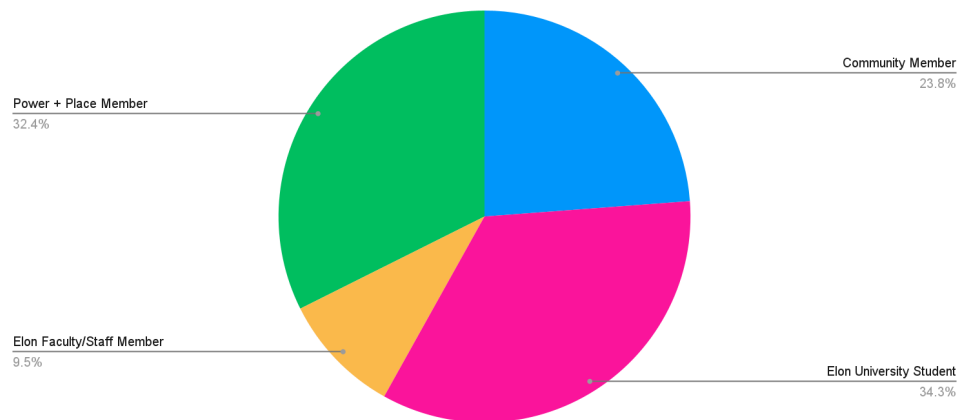
— Community Member Reflection On the Screening & Dialogue

Since 2018, the Power + Place Collaborative has been collecting oral histories from community storytellers across the county, and sharing their stories in diverse public settings using digital and visual media. The Collaborative is a partnership between the African American Cultural Arts & History Museum, Burlington City Recreation and Parks, and Elon University. This year’s collection of interviews and digital stories is the 6th iteration of this project.

## Who attended?

Over 140 residents of diverse backgrounds from across the county attended the Public Screening and dialogue, including community members (25%), Power+Place Storytellers and collaborators (32%), Elon students (34%), and Elon faculty and staff (10%). Approximately three-quarters of attendees came from across the county and one-quarter from outside of Alamance County.

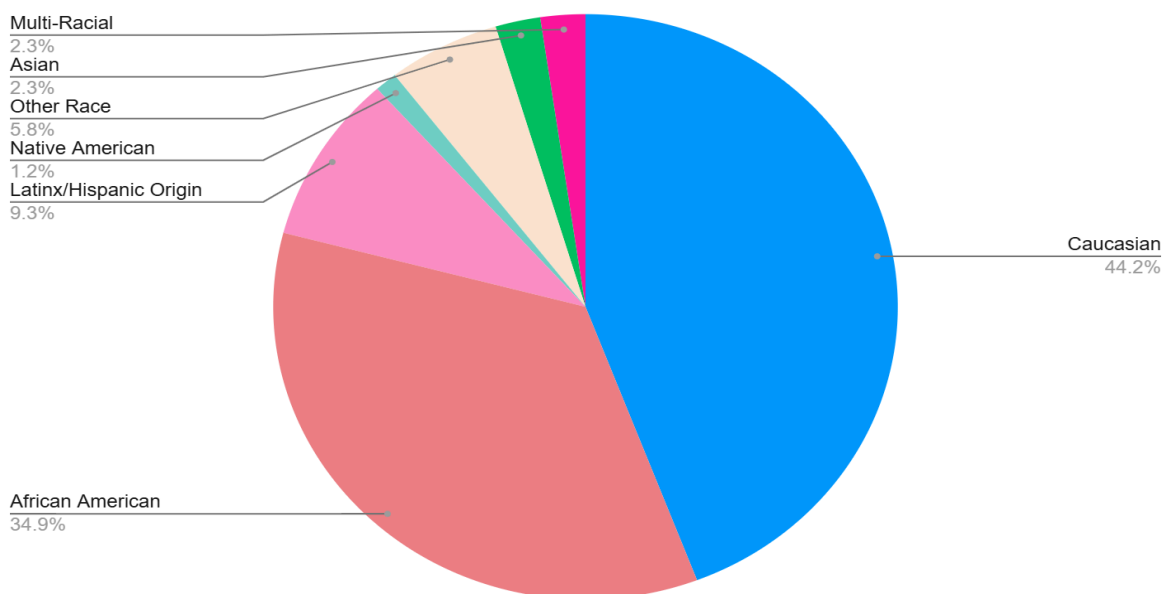
Affiliation of Attendees



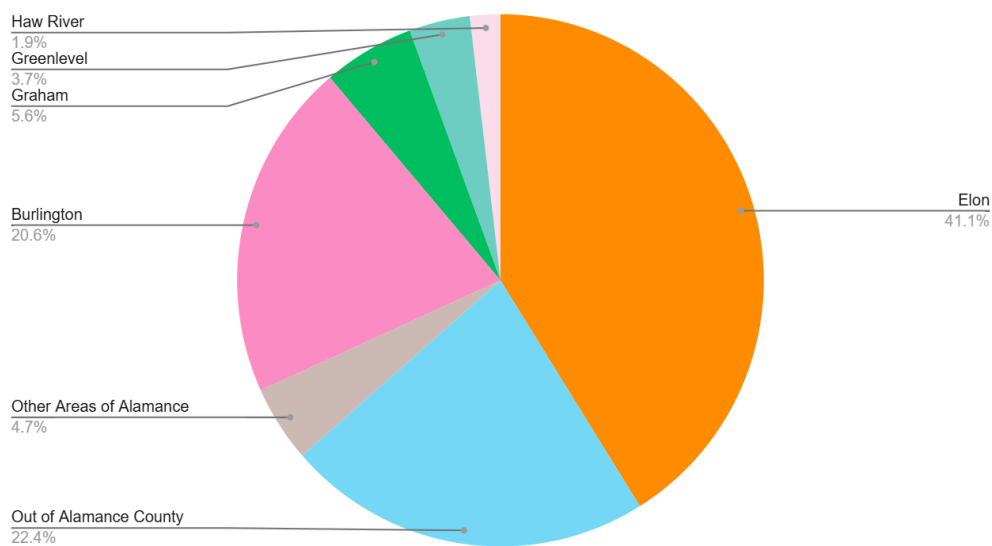
In addition, twelve Community Resource Tables also highlighted a range of resources from across the county, and included Alamance Public Libraries, Preservation Burlington, Church World Services, Alamance County Social Services, Empodera-Te Latina Organization, CrossRoads, the Second Harvest Food Bank, TRIO-EOC, Impact Alamance, and others.

Overall, those in attendance represented a rich cross-section of Alamance County, encompassing diverse racial, ethnic, national, and faith backgrounds, linguistic differences; as well as multiple generations.

Race of Attendees

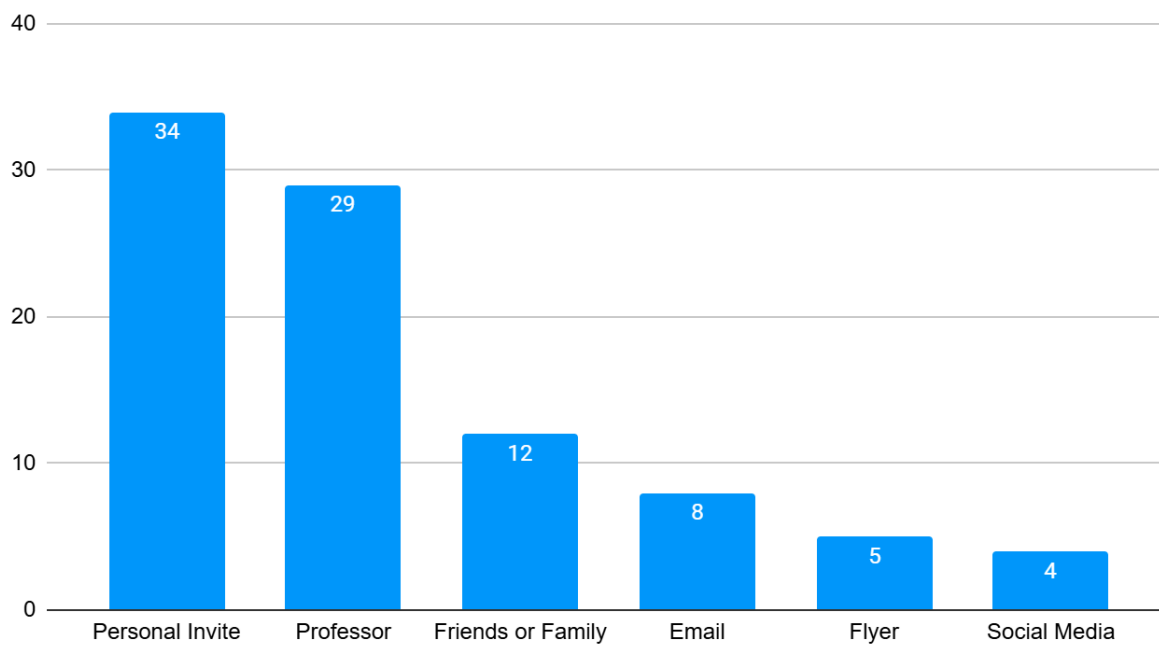


### Attendance by Region

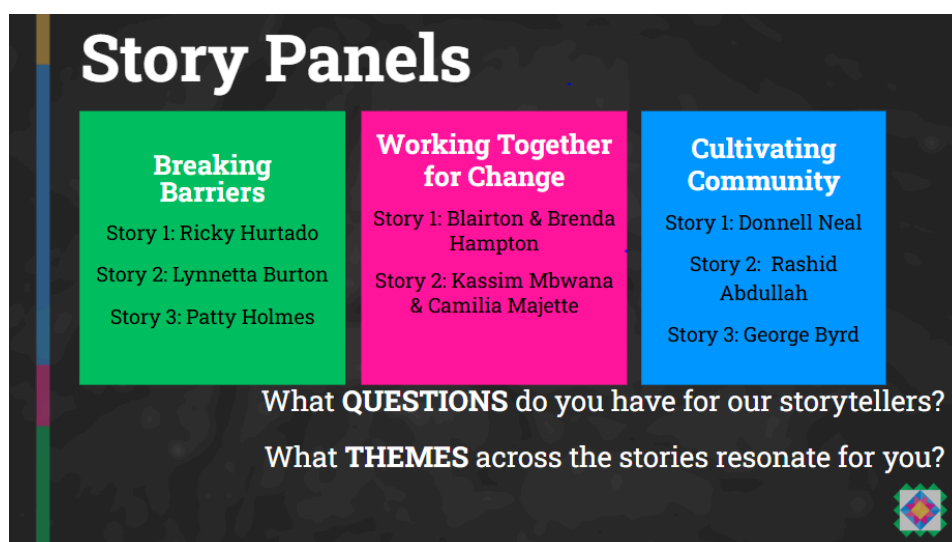


It continues to be clear that relational connections and personal invitations are essential for cultivating bridge-building opportunities. When asked how they learned about this opportunity and why they chose to attend, most attendees indicated it was through personal connections.

### How Attendees Heard About the Event



As community members arrived, they were invited to preserve and archive materials that were important to them at a “History Harvest” stall, to engage with community resource tables, and to connect with one another in round-table dialogues. After a formal welcome from President Book, community members screened and discussed stories emphasizing themes of breaking barriers, working together for change, and cultivating community. Between story panels, attendees were encouraged to share their thoughts via small group dialogue facilitated by students and storytellers. A summary of the insights emerging from these conversations is noted below.



***When asked what barriers exist in our communities and how we might break barriers attendees noted...***

political, racial, economic, cultural, educational, transportation, language, and relational barriers, emphasizing that those in power do not reflect the diversity of county residents.

They also noted that sharing diverse stories is an important step towards breaking barriers. As a way to move forward they recommended we work to more honestly

- Foster connections across differences,
- Reach out to ask for and extend help,
- Move towards trust,
- Consider ways we can begin to act collectively.

More specifically, attendees also said we should

- Create a platform for the stories to have more viewers and the attention they deserve,
- Do more to engage Indigenous history.



***When asked how the stories show people working together across lines of difference and what change is needed in the community...***



Attendees noted that the stories showed people working together to cultivate life skills across the county, that a willingness to listen can transform, and that faith can provide the courage to build bridges across differences. They also recommended we each realize small, brave, boundary-spanning actions can foster systemic and long term viable transformations and that we can each leverage our relational connections to bring diverse expertise and skills to the work that needs to be done. Attendees also noted that City Council members attend Power+Place screenings and dialogues.

*"The different demographics regarding age groups in this room and the panel of storytellers... this is an important interaction going on. One thing that stuck with me... I remember being a kid and learning about the civil rights movement... pictures in black and white... in my brain it was something that happened so long ago... watching these stories put that into context for me... it was not that long ago. It's really powerful and shows how much work we still have to do as a community and a society."*

- Student Participant reflecting on the evening

When asked where they find community and what kind of community they wanted to live in, participants said they found community in diverse places across the county, but noted that "it is the people" that make the community. They also noted that safety, trust, and care are essential.

***When has your perspective changed because of your interaction with someone of a different background?***

Attendees explained that having conversations with people from different backgrounds reminds them that there is so much of the world that falls outside of their direct understanding, that there are more shades of gray than anyone could ever see. However, they also emphasized the great value in gaining a different kind of understanding of unfamiliar communities. Interactions with cultures outside of their own also remind them of their own individuality, but also our commonality. It clarifies that people belong to different social and cultural groups, but that we are also each our own distinctive selves and should never be categorized to the point of stereotyping and generalizing.

***What did we learn?*** At the end of the evening, participants were invited to share their thoughts on which stories most resonated with them and what they planned to take with them into their future. Many took to the microphone to share their thoughts, highlighting themes of unity across difference, faith, and resilience:

- *"What resonated for me...I see diversity, inclusion, I see unity in this room and all the hard work everyone put into ensuring we got that perspective"*
- *"Faith in each of these stories was important - no matter what religion you come from... one thing I will take away from this is how faith can unite people across our differences. It takes time and it takes storytelling like these amazing videos to break down barriers and get to know people"*
- *"One thing that stuck with me... I remember being a kid and learning about the civils rights movement... pictures in black and white... in my brain it was something that happened so long ago... watching these stories put that into context for me... it was not that long ago. Its really powerful and shows how much work we still have to do as a community and a society."*
- *"I feel these stories in my heart... I noticed they all had challenges, but they had resolve... they did not quit... they kept digging... don't stop. Keep going."*
- *"I am so proud of the student's work. As an alumni this is a dream... Trying to make diversity matter. Trying to make engagement matter."*
- *"This is the first time in my entire life I feel I am in a community with everyone in this room."*



These quotes from the event highlight powerful themes of unity through diversity, faith as a source of resilience, and the importance of historical awareness in creating community. Attendees expressed admiration for the event's ability to foster inclusivity and connection across differences through storytelling, and they were inspired by the hard work of students and the progress achieved by the community storytellers. Alumni and longtime residents recognized the efforts of Elon students and faculty in contributing to a sense of shared belonging and planting seeds for a better, more inclusive Alamance County

Additional feedback via an end-of-event survey was collected. This information is summarized below:

- All respondents said they met someone or ***made a deeper connection with someone of a different background*** at the event and learned about an organization or initiative in the community they had not known about before.
- They also expressed overwhelming positivity toward how successful they felt the event was in ***fostering community belonging***, noting it increased their awareness of ***diverse faith traditions*** across Alamance.

**When asked what they valued most about the event**, respondents said it was especially meaningful to learn from diverse community members, including immigrants and residents with family roots in the county. They also valued the openness and vulnerability of storytellers.

**For what steps they want to see taken next in this project, respondents encouraged**

- Action-oriented events where participants explore how they can get involved and “stand up for our neighbors”
- Reaching outside of Alamance
- Making it clear how we can share these stories more widely
- Continuing to grow the storybank
- Interviewing indigenous Alamance County community leaders
- Including updates to stories to share how individuals have continued to make a huge community impact.
- Ease towards collecting and sharing stories about the painful part of Burlington’s history: the riots. “It is a deep wound in this community that needs gentle attention if it is to heal. Those people present in the event (students at Williams High School) are now in their 70s. Eye witness accounts will soon be gone.”

**When asked for their thoughts on how to further share these stories and spark change, many participants recommended broadening our reach through social media, radio, and childrens books.** They also suggested that stories be shared with ***community organizations*** across and beyond the county to increase awareness, foster interest in facilitating similar events, and “build the circle of influence” of nurturing, curious energy among multicultural spaces. Continuing to build partnerships with diverse community organizations, schools/universities, and religious centers, representing multiple age groups is key. Specific suggestions included:

- Reach out to other counties to do similar work
- Social media
- I love the idea of involving high school students!

- Allowing churches and other organizations to share. Working to bring to community groups that already exist.
- Radio show commercial featuring snippets of the stories
- Social media, colleges, universities, schools, magazines, and articles.
- Would love to create children's book versions of the stories to read with children at the public library or park.
- "With the faith component this year, I think churches might be willing to have presentations. Civic organizations are always looking for speakers for meetings (e.g. Rotary etc). If there is a speakers bureau here, I think they would be an opportunity to expand your audience. I think a special effort needs to be made to share these stories in locations and with audiences around the county to insure this effort extends beyond the Elon bubble. It is in the outlying areas where prejudice is still strong."

**When asked how these stories could be used to create change in Alamance further, participants suggested that:**

- These stories "***just will***" change Alamance, by making these narratives ***more accessible*** to the public in Alamance County, they will create change on their own.
- These stories can create change by being shared with ***local and state legislature*** to impact policy and local government (e.g., Justice United and other organizations. Hillsborough and Orange County need to follow your lead!)
- These stories could also be ***used in schools and colleges as articles and stories*** students can read, discuss, and write about in ELA classes and other courses. It is also important to share these stories ***outside of just social science classes***; everyone should be exposed to them.
- These stories could be displayed around the community to raise awareness about different cultures and cultivate change. These storytellers make Alamance County diverse and unique.
- Aside from healing old wounds, with the upcoming administration uncertainty, these stories could help create a culture/climate of care & protection for marginalized people who may be targeted.
- Power+Place should continue to repeat this project in the years to come! Respondents emphasized ***repetition*** as a key way to get the message of diversity and expression across.





As this event has demonstrated, Power + Place has been successful at creating welcoming spaces where members from diverse backgrounds can come together to engage in dialogue across differences and celebrate the vibrant diversity and resilience of our community, while acknowledging past and ongoing struggles against discrimination and inequality. These stories have allowed for a new, more diverse, and more inclusive narrative about Alamance County to emerge, and one that is more representative of the vibrant cultural diversity our county is home to. Moreover, the story screenings have proven to be rare and important spaces where members of different communities within the county can learn about one another, our unique struggles, and shared challenges. Going forward, beyond helping to tell more inclusive stories of our county, and creating space to surface important community issues, we hope to use this project as a springboard for sparking positive social change that directly addresses issues raised in the stories.

## Support the Collaborative

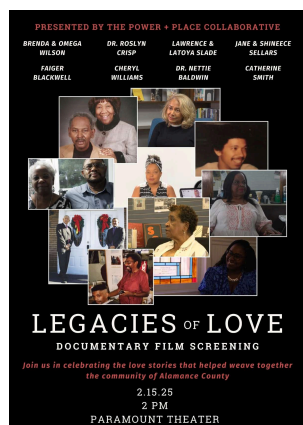
The Power + Place Collaborative is dedicated to sharing the rich and diverse stories of Alamance County. With your support, we can continue to empower individuals and communities through storytelling, foster a deeper understanding of our shared history, and create lasting spaces for connection. Your donation enables us to share and celebrate the voices of our community, ensuring that these crucial narratives are honored and remembered for years to come.

**Scan & Give Here!**



## What's next?

During Black History Month, join us at Paramount Theatre in Downtown Burlington for a public screening of **Power+Place: Legacies of Love** to celebrate the power of love, forged through our inspirational community figures and leaders.



**February 15, 2025**

Paramount Theatre, 128 E Front St Burlington

Receptions with History Harvest: **2 PM**

Film Screening: **2:30 PM**

General admission is free.

Tickets are limited.

**Save your spot now!**



In March join us for an intergenerational community lunch workshop led by Dr. Diya Abdo where we each explore how we can be more radically hospitable and accountable to our community.

**March 27, 2025**

Elon Community Church, 271 N Williamson Avenue

Receptions Open: **12 PM**

Free Lunch: **12:15 PM**

Interactive Workshop Begins: **12:30 PM** General admission is free.

Tickets are limited.

**Save your spot now!**



This program and project was made possible by grants from Impact Alamance, Elon University's Center for Design Thinking, and North Carolina Humanities, a statewide nonprofit and the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

