

A Racial Equity Framework for Howard County:

Launching a Comprehensive Approach



2022



Calvin Ball
County Executive

Howard County
Office of Human Rights & Equity



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are all living off the taken ancestral lands of Algonquin and Iroquois peoples, on whose traditional territory we stand on. We acknowledge them as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. We acknowledge the resilience and strength that all indigenous people have shown in this county and worldwide. We carry all our ancestors with us, and we are continually called to be better as we lead this work.



A Message from Howard County Executive Calvin Ball

Howard County is a regional leader in diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. This equity framework is timely as our nation recovers from the global COVID-19 pandemic in addition to the overlapping, unparalleled racial reckoning in U.S. history, marked by crisis and polarization. This report is a data-informed, people-driven guide to launch and reaffirm Howard County's commitment to a diverse and welcoming community.

In recent years, Howard County has made tremendous strides to advance our community. For the first time in history, Howard County was one of only four counties in the nation to receive the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Culture of Health prize for our holistic and comprehensive approach to health and wellness. Specifically, Howard County was identified for its inclusive, data-informed policies prioritizing access for all residents from all backgrounds.

Also, just this year, the National Association of Counties recognized our county as Top 5 in the nation for receiving 43 awards for innovation in programs. This record-breaking number adds to the four-year total of 81 awards. Many of these awards were focused on eliminating barriers for residents in the midst of the pandemic such as the "Why I got Vaxxed" campaign, the MLK Pop-up Food Pantry, homeownership, and several digital access programs.

While Columbia has received the "Safest City" designation every year that I have served as your Howard County Executive, and we have been lauded as a Best Place to Live in Maryland for people with disabilities, we cannot stop our work until all feel safe, included, and

accepted throughout our County. In addition to our partnership with the African American Community Roundtable, we also strengthened our infrastructure to work on important policy and practice changes through the establishment of the LGBTQIA+, AAPI, and La Alianza Commissions.

This report gives us valuable information on the experiences and perceptions of our employees and residents. It also provides us with opportunities for improvement so we can forge a stronger community and quality of life. I hope that you will use this framework to bring awareness and collaborate on key policy measures.

Thank you to the Office of Human Rights and Equity, the leadership of Administrator Yolanda Sonnier and Equity & Restorative Practices Manager Dr. Denise Boston, and all our partners for bringing this to fruition. This is an exciting launch to the critical work ahead.

Sincerely,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive



From the Office of Human Rights & Equity

Despite decades of efforts by government, public, private, and social sector organizations, racial inequities are still prevalent. The uneven impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic across different communities crystalized the disparities that exist within counties and jurisdictions. It is time for a more intentional and systemic approach to equitable development, and Howard County is well positioned to be a model of racial and social equity and collective stewardship. County Executive Ball has been deeply committed to a thriving equitable community sustained by an inclusive network of thoughtful and intentional leadership as well as expanding opportunity for all.

Throughout this report and in our work, we decided to use the acronym EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) because leading with Equity matters. Ensuring that our practices and policies are equitable is essential to the sustainability of our investments in diversity and inclusion. EDI is a daily exercise, practiced in personal conversations and in public spaces. It happens in our living spaces around kitchen tables, on Zoom, in classrooms and playgrounds, in boardrooms and in our workspaces. It prioritizes social supportive ties and centers the representative leadership, voices and organizing of Black, Brown, Indigenous, Disabled, and LGBTQIA+¹ residents. Our transformative movement must be as empathic and unrelentless as our fight to eradicate COVID-19 and all of its potential variants.

Guided by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), we determined we would lead with race and as GARE states “with the recognition that the creation and perpetuation of racial inequities has been baked into government, and

that racial inequities across all indicators for success are deep and pervasive.” We want to express our sincere gratitude to the Equity Advisory Council (EAC) which convened in May 2021. The EAC supported the Equity Assessment and has continued to work on equity and inclusion matters pertaining to Howard County Government employees.

OHRE is proud to lead this endeavor, partner with you in meeting our goals, and working intentionally as we build toward a vision of equity and community mindfulness. The full realization of this work depends on our collective efforts. This is not the work of a few of us; this is the work of all. We welcome you to join us in this continued endeavor.

Sincerely,

Yolanda F. Sonnier
Administrator

Dr. Denise Boston
Equity & Restorative Practices Manager

¹Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Ally (see full definition in Terms, page 27)

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Executive Summary

A Launch to Equity

In August 2020, County Executive Calvin Ball announced the creation of a new position, the Equity and Restorative Practices Manager (hereinafter ERPM or Equity Manager). This position, which would join the Office of Human Rights (OHR), represented a significant first step towards achieving the Ball Administration's goal of making Howard County a more inclusive and equitable community for all. With the introduction of this new position into OHR, legislation was introduced by County Executive Ball, and subsequently passed, to officially rename the office as the Office of Human Rights & Equity (OHRE).

County Executive Ball shared that the Equity and Restorative Practices Unit (ERPU) shall identify any practices or procedures needed to ensure inclusion, identify any policies needed to ensure equity, recommend and implement training and competency-building, and develop strategic community partnerships. County Executive Ball further asserted through restorative practices, the Equity Manager will help the Howard County community in strengthening relationships and building social connections.

The Guiding Framework

Leveraging the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and other resources, the ERPU developed an approach for the work performed in support of this Racial Equity Framework. GARE promotes: "Focusing on racial equity provides the opportunity to introduce a framework, tools and resources that can also be applied to other areas of marginalization."² In developing the framework, the County focused on racial equity, which is consistent with the GARE model.

This Racial Equity Framework is presented in three parts:

- Part I: Racial Equity Assessment
- Part II: Data Analysis and Findings
- Part III: Recommendations and Action Plan for Building Equitable Communities

Part I: Racial Equity Assessment

The ERPM sought to administer an internal and external Racial Equity Assessment (hereinafter REA or assessment) to ensure that Howard County Government's (hereinafter County) work culture, policies, practices, and procedures were aligned with its commitment to serving Howard County's diverse community. The assessment was also to gather information from community members. This assessment was meant to be the foundation towards eliminating racial and social disparities, and moving toward a more inclusive, just, equity-informed government and community. County leaders, staff, and residents participated in the inaugural REA.

The goals of the Assessment were two-fold. The first goal was for the assessment to serve as a benchmarking tool to evaluate organizational practices and the current state of progress towards equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the County. The second goal was to identify and include Howard County community residents' lived experiences and perceptions of belonging, inclusion, and quality of life. The purpose of this second goal was to inform the broader movement for racial and social justice, particularly as these relate to County Government and public-serving entities.³

² Government Alliance on Race and Equity. "Why Lead with Race." Last modified 2022. <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/about/our-approach/race/>

³ Curdina Hill & Ann Curry-Stephens. "Organizational Change and Racial Equity: Implication for Capacity Building Practice for Organizations and Networks." Published 2017

To achieve this, the ERPU implemented the following approach:

1. Developed racial equity-based surveys with multiple translations for enhanced accessibility. Surveys were circulated widely, and the resulting data analyzed;
2. Researched best practices in other government jurisdictions, as well as recommendations designated by GARE;
3. Partnered with community organizations to assist in the promotion of the REA county-wide;
4. Developed a REA promotional video and shared via social media platforms;
5. Hosted seven focus groups with targeted communities to include a diverse array of perspectives and experiences from different racial, ethnic and social economic backgrounds; and
6. Proposed recommendations within this Equity Framework that the County can incorporate to address the opportunities for improvement identified through the REA.

Part II: Data Analysis and Findings

As a result of the surveys, focus groups, and data analysis performed between May and October of 2021, the following are highlights of the County's findings:

Staff and Leadership Input

- There is an opportunity for increased diversity within all departments and at all levels.
- There is a desire for a shared understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Both systemic bias and underrepresentation of racial and ethnic leadership were identified by respondents as likely overarching drivers of racial inequities throughout the County.

Community Input

- Five main areas were cited as the biggest challenges in achieving equity in the County: education, housing, health, employment, and adequate access to resources.
- There is a desire for departmental and public conversations pertaining to racism and racial equity.
- Accessibility for nonnative English speakers was identified as a significant obstacle for the County to address. There is a strong demand for linguistically diverse employees, liaisons and volunteers across public serving entities including County Government, County Council, and educational entities including Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS) and Howard Community College (HCC).

Part III: Recommendations and Action Plan for Building Equitable Communities

Respondents mentioned a variety of actions they think the County can take to advance equity and address racial and social inequities:

Recommendation 1: Government, public and community leadership should set the tone and vision on EDI efforts.

Recommendation 2: Human Resources and hiring practices across public-serving entities should be updated and aligned with adopted working definitions for EDI and ongoing professional development training opportunities and cross-cultural relationship building should be provided to all employees.

Recommendation 3: Housing affordability, which was cited as the top equity gap of concern to the community, should receive significant attention from the County and its leadership.

Recommendation 4: Government, public and community leadership should increase opportunities for more cross-cultural resident engagement and more equity-focused communication outlets.

Recommendation 5: County Government, County Council, educational entities (HCPSS and HCC) and Howard County Library Systems (HCLS) should sponsor targeted opportunities to increase awareness about racial equity for youth.

History and Timeline of Racial Equity Initiatives

2018	The Local Children’s Board (LCB) convenes an Equity Committee charged with developing a baseline report using qualitative and quantitative data to tell the story of opportunity across race, ethnicity and income levels in Howard County.
2019	<p>The LCB report is presented to County Executive Ball.</p> <p>The report concludes that racial and socioeconomic equity should be given significant considerations when planning and developing policies and practices that impact public services, programs and initiatives.</p> <p>The Department of Community Resources and Services leadership continues to deepen understanding of equity and racial inequities through trainings, workshops, and speaker events.</p>
2020	<p><i>August-</i> County Executive Ball announces a new position, the Equity and Restorative Practices Manager, and the renaming of the Office of Human Rights (OHR).</p> <p><i>September-</i> Council Bill 48-2020 is introduced to rename OHR to the Office of Human Rights & Equity (OHRE).</p> <p><i>October-</i> County Council approves CB 48-2020</p> <p><i>December-</i> CB 48-2020 takes effect</p>
2021	<p><i>January-</i> Dr. Denise Boston is hired as the inaugural Equity and Restorative Practices Manager (ERPM); the Equity and Restorative Practices Unit (ERPU) is formed.</p> <p><i>May</i> – The Equity Advisory Committee (EAC) was established</p> <p><i>May – September</i> - Launch of Equity Assessment and Focus Groups</p> <p><i>June</i> - Equity Program Coordinator is hired.</p> <p><i>September</i> - Resolution 146-2021 is introduced, reflecting the County’s intent to become a member of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity.</p> <p><i>October</i> - Howard County Government becomes a member of GARE.</p>
2022	<p><i>April</i> – OHRE and DCRS present on Howard County’s EDI work at the national GARE Annual Membership Meeting in Portland, OR.</p>

Overview of Racial Equity Framework

Purpose

This framework builds upon the County’s history and national recognition for civic pride, embracing diversity, as well as the creation of innovative, effective, and creative problem-solving practices. The COVID-19 pandemic along with the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and countless other African Americans and the hateful and often violent targeting of Asian Americans have illuminated long-standing racial and ethnic disparities across the country and Howard County as well.

This framework focuses on addressing racial disparities within Howard County’s systems and social dynamics, because everyone should have an opportunity to thrive and attain optimal living and working experiences and should not be disadvantaged because of their social position (e.g., class, socioeconomic status, geography) or identities (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation).

Promoting and sustaining a work environment where staff can thrive and achieve personal and professional growth is central to this Racial Equity Framework. Within this area lies guidance on advancing diversity and inclusion in leadership positions, and access to professional development training opportunities, as well as creating a Racial Equity Core Team. These steps will build a pro-equity organization and a workforce that best represents the community it serves with an equity lens.

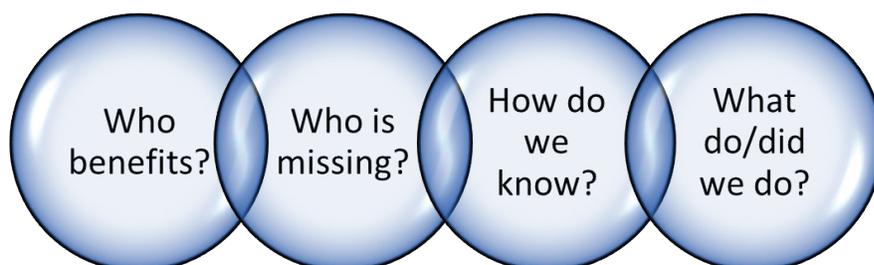
Drawing on Best Practices

This Racial Equity Framework is consistent with the GARE model in focusing on racial equity first. GARE’s work reflects a racial equity framework that is clear about the differences between individual, institutional, and structural racism, as well as the history and current reality of inequities. This framework applies to all marginalized racial and ethnic groups. GARE further asserts race can be an issue that keeps other marginalized communities from effectively coming together. This approach recognizes the inter-connected ways in which marginalization takes place and will help to achieve greater unity across communities.

Racial Equity

When racial identity cannot be used to predict individual or group life outcomes (e.g., wealth, income, employment, criminal justice, housing, health care, education, etc.) outcomes for all groups are improved (GARE).

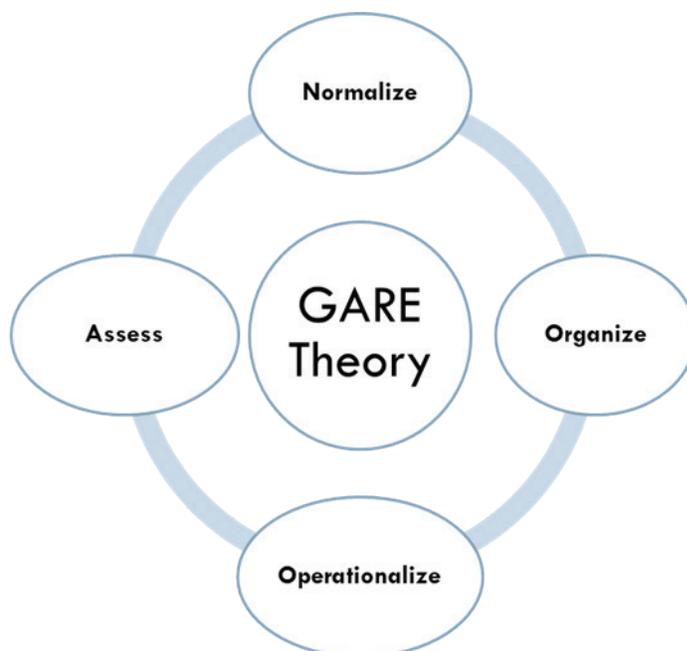
This framework establishes overarching goals and objectives to advance racial equity through the County’s policies, practices, and activities. It includes applying a racial equity lens to guiding this work by asking the questions:



According to Race Forward, a nonprofit racial justice organization and home to GARE, equity work is not just an initiative, it is a long-term endeavor that requires both courage and stamina. By viewing decisions through a racial equity lens, the County can begin to close gaps and eliminate disparities, raise expectations about what improved outcomes could look like for all people, and create deliberate systems and supports to advance racial equity and address complex problems. This framework will help shift mindsets, behaviors, and practices toward achieving a more inclusive and equitable workforce and community.

Applying the GARE Theory

The concepts of Normalize, Organize, Operationalize and Assess will undergird this Racial Equity Framework. GARE has developed this theory to leverage as a tool in thinking systemically about equity. These are four approaches and national best practices that equity activities will fall into, and all are important to achieve comprehensive systematic change. These concepts are interrelated and not meant to be applied linearly.



Normalizing

The goal of normalizing racial equity within an institution means to normalize talking about equity so that over time it becomes an organizational norm that leads to results, such as through modeling and tone setting by leadership and employee dialogs and training events. The objective of this work is two-fold:

1. Ensure the commitment of every individual, whether leader, manager, supervisor, administrator, or staff, to meaningfully engage in raising awareness of disparities.
2. Commitment to having the conversations, engagement, and education needed to share information about disparities, which exist due to race and inequities.

Organizing

Organizing for equity means building infrastructure and capacity to implement equity practices and supported structure to advance racial equity to include personnel and resources that become a defined and integral component of the organization and system.

While leadership is critical, changes take place within departments/offices and infrastructure that creates racial equity change agents, collaborating with a network of partners: institutions, business, education, philanthropy, among others, and center the work on impacted communities.

Operationalizing

Operationalizing includes all the elements that allow EDI principles to be fully integrated into day-to-day operations, which include budgeting with an equity lens, creating accountability mechanisms, and ensuring engagement by both Howard County staff, leaders, and the community.

Assessing

The purpose of this stage is to assess the County's performance regarding advancing EDI in the workforce and community objectives, to track and measure outcomes and strategically manage long-term systemic impact on organizational and cultural change.

Implication for Howard County

Howard County will utilize and apply these concepts over the course of the upcoming years. However, this report is intended to be a "living document," with opportunities to identify new actions and commitments over time. The County understands that the work of advancing EDI requires continual listening and learning and will lean on the assistance of OHRE, ERPU, EAC and internal and community partners in developing an Equity Strategic Plan.



LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON
RACE & EQUITY

Racial Equity: Getting to Results



Part I: Racial Equity Assessment

Scope and Purpose

To develop a more complete picture of the organizational and community climate in relation to racial equity, the ERPU developed a REA to serve as a guiding document for data gathering, analysis, and equity-centered operational programming. See Appendix: Table 1. Scope of Work, Activities and Expected Outcomes which summarizes the ERPU’s approach.

This section summarizes findings from the REA, which was comprised of surveys and focus groups conducted from May through September of 2021. The REA provided opportunities for people of diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds across the county to respond to EDI matters concerning County work culture; organizational practices and procedures; and community engagement. They also provided suggestions related to where the County should focus its EDI priorities.

Methodology

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using SurveyMonkey web-based surveys. These surveys were specifically designed for each of the following assessment groups: County Government Leaders, Staff, and Community Residents. The questions from the surveys were adapted from the GARE Employee Survey for Local Governments, Racial Equity Roadmap as well as best practices from the field. The community survey was conducted in English, Korean, Spanish, Mandarin, and Traditional Chinese; responses were self-administered and voluntary.

Qualitative data was also collected to provide context and insights to supplement the quantitative community data and will be utilized in achieving the goals and objectives of the REA. The seven community focus groups were facilitated in-person and online.

The surveys were circulated to internal government departments and offices; community partners; non-profit organizations; commissioners, work group members, libraries, Grassroots Crisis and Intervention Center, Howard County Department of Corrections and recreational centers. Flyers were handed out at community events and posted in locations throughout the county with a QR code that led to the surveys.

Example of Survey Questions

Question: Do you feel comfortable talking about race openly with others?

Yes	Sometimes	No	Don't Know
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Question: Do you believe there are racial equity gaps in jobs, health, housing, and other areas in Howard County?

Yes	No
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Question: How high of a priority should it be for government to address racial equity gaps in jobs, health, housing, and other areas?

High Priority	Average Priority	Low Priority
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The REA was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1: Leadership Equity Survey was comprised of 24 questions and sent to directors, administrators, and managers with the County. This survey was conducted in May 2021.

Phase 2: Staff Equity Survey was comprised of 24 questions and sent to the Howard County Government workforce, including leadership. This survey was conducted in June - July 2021.

Both employee surveys were conducted to establish a quantitative baseline for the employee’s perception of EDI attitudes and practices at leadership and staff levels.

These anonymous surveys evaluated employee’s perceptions in four themes:

Theme 1: Attitudes toward EDI and organizational culture

Theme 2: Inclusion

Theme 3: Belonging

Theme 4: Racial Equity

Phase 3: Community Resident Engagement consists of both quantitative and qualitative assessment. Between June 2021 and September 2021, the ERPU administered online surveys across Howard County, and conducted seven cross-cultural community focus groups. The purpose of the community resident engagement through the survey and focus groups was to understand perceptions of belonging, accessibility, inclusion, and racial equity from community residents. The equity surveys, along with focus group data will help nurture a more equitable community for all Howard County residents.

TABLE 1: Summary of REA Respondents

Phase	# Completed
Leadership Survey	93
Staff Survey	823
Community Survey	553
Seven Community Focus Groups	46

Data Aggregation

The ERPU worked collaboratively with the Office of Budget and the Department of Planning and Zoning who performed data transcription for ease of use and visualization. Using Microsoft’s Power BI software, analysts developed insights from the data and created visualizations. This collaboration also helped to increase accuracy by transforming the raw survey data into relationship driven databases.

Risks & Limitations

The most material risks associated with this assessment were 1) low response rate in the community web-based survey; and 2) its heavy reliance on individual perceptions and self-administered survey information without a facilitator to answer questions or lead discussions to clear up any possible misconceptions. While the survey was conducted in multiple languages, there was still no interpreter to further explain questions or give additional context.

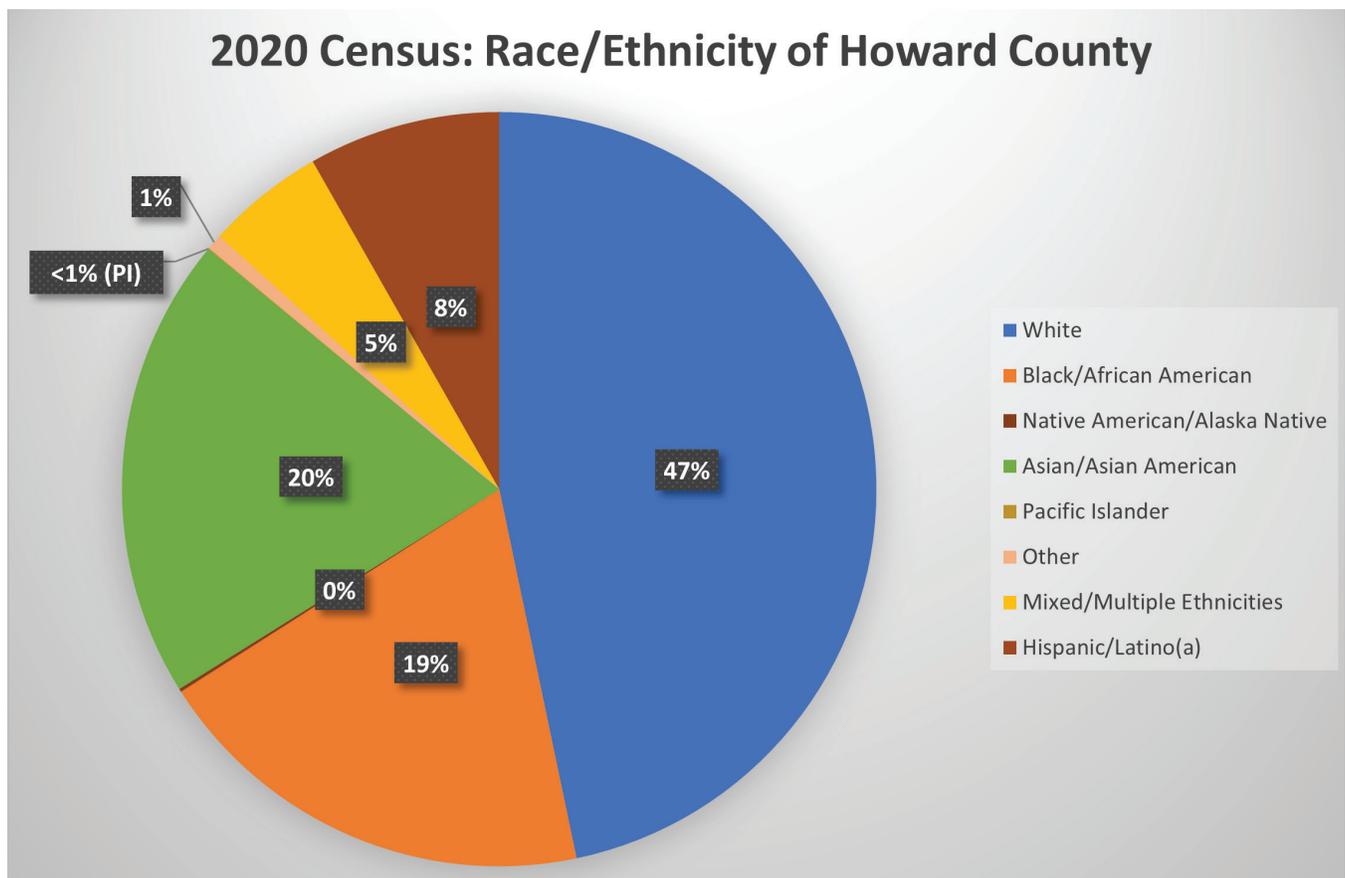
Part II: Data Analysis and Findings

Racial Demographics and EDI in Howard County

An Overview of Howard County's Racial Demographics

With a population of 332,317, and a majority minority with only 47% reporting as “white only,” Howard County’s diversity is an ultimate strategic strength⁴. Diversity is critical to building a more equitable community along the lines of education, health, and socioeconomics. Each resident is unique and provides their own perspective and lived experience to the Howard County community. This diversity of ideas, cultures, and people must be respected and reflected in the County’s words and actions as it seeks to further progress in its role as a steward of diversity, inclusiveness, and equality.

FIGURE 1



Howard County: Lauded for EDI Efforts

Howard County, and locations and entities within, often retain national acknowledgement and ranking as one of the healthiest, happiest, and most highly educated communities in the United States.⁵ Between 2018 and 2022, Howard County was honored with 81 Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties. In 2021, the County was also awarded the 2020-2021 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s (RWJF) Culture of Health Prize, one of only 4 recipients in the nation. RWJF states that, “The Culture of Health Prize honors and elevates communities at the forefront of advancing health,

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171)

⁵ Visit Howard County Maryland, Awards and Other Recognition, [Awards and Other Recognition Received by Howard County and its Residents \(visithowardcounty.com\)](https://www.visithowardcounty.com)

opportunity and equity for all.”⁶ Howard County was awarded based on its EDI efforts, for acknowledging the necessity for EDI and committing to face the deeper challenges of access to jobs, healthy food options, and affordable housing.



Racial Diversity in Howard County Government

Howard County Government actively seeks a diverse staff. The County has a longstanding commitment to workforce diversity and inclusion to promote a culture where individuals feel valued for the unique contributions and different perspectives they bring to operations. Having a workforce that reflects a diverse population allows the County to better connect with, understand, and deliver meaningful services to communities.

As of February 2022, the County employed 3,067 individuals in the following position categories:

- 2,486 Classified/career positions
- 111 Appointed (105) and elected positions (5)
- 350 Contingent/temporary positions
- 57 Grant-funded positions
- 63 Part-time benefitted positions

TABLE 2: County Wide Racial Demographics- 10-Year Change

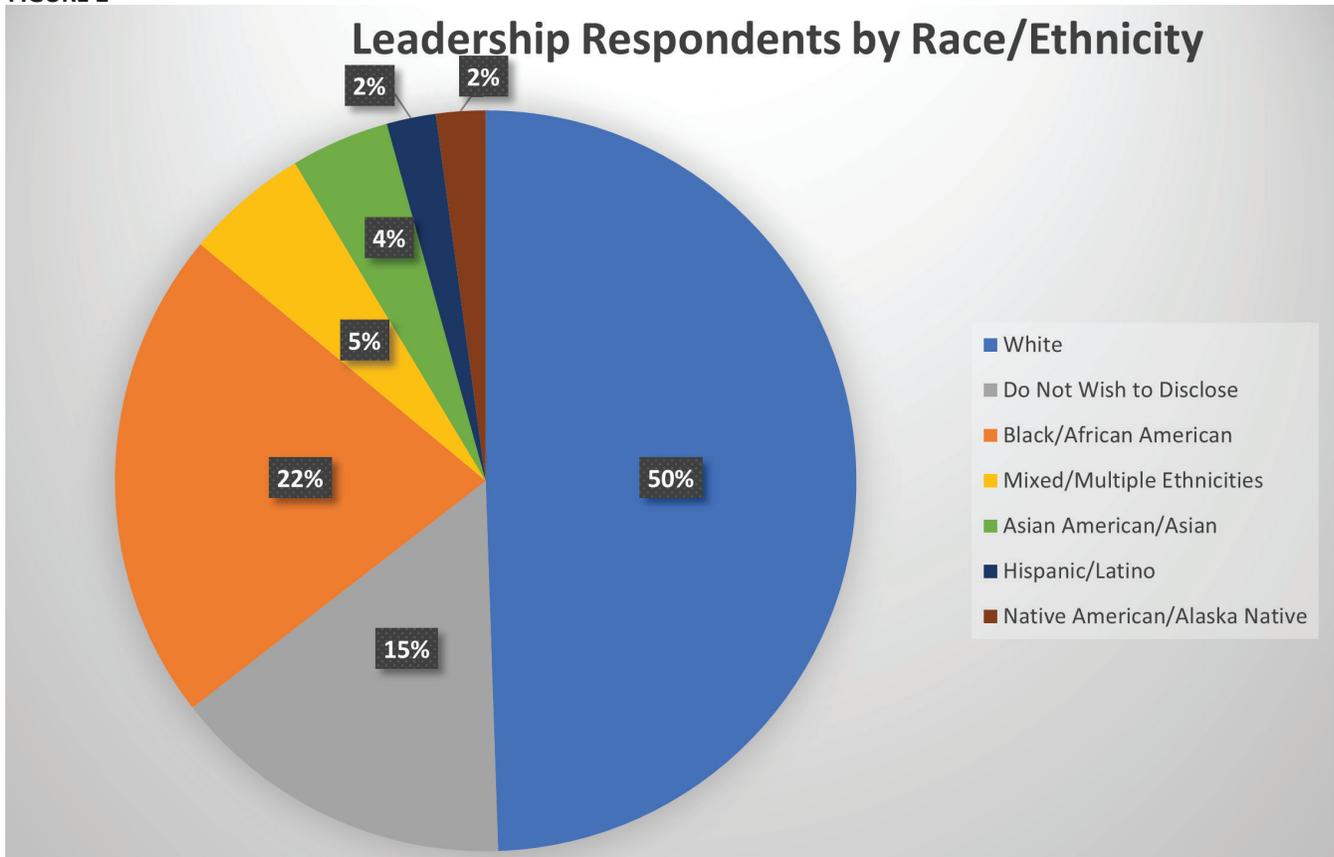
Race/Ethnicity	2012		2022		10-year Change
	# Employees	% Employees	# Employees	% Employees	(as % of employees)
Black/African American	626	22%	647	21%	1% decrease
American Indian/Alaska Native	5	>1%	6	>1%	<1% change
Asian	83	3%	122	4%	1% increase
Hispanic	44	1.5%	91	3%	1.5% increase
Two or More Races	31	1%	92	3%	2% increase
POC	789	28%	958	31%	3% increase
White	2,062	72%	2,109	69%	3% decrease
Total	2,851	100%	3,067	100%	

⁶ RWJF Culture of Health Prize: Recognizing Communities Working Toward Better Health - (RWJF <https://www.rwjf.org/>)

A. Leadership Racial Equity Survey

The leadership survey consisted of 24 questions including self-declared demographics. The ERPU received a total of 93 responses from County leadership. 15% of the participants did not disclose their race or ethnicity. A simple majority of the responses (49%) were from white employees, with 22% identifying as Black/African American, 5% as Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups, 4% as Asian American/Asian, 2% as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2% as Hispanic/Latino(a). Apart from white respondents, participation rates closely mirrored the composition of the workforce. For the purposes of this introductory assessment, non-white respondents were aggregated as “people of color” (POC) within charts and tables.

FIGURE 2



Results showed that the dominant themes were diversity, decision-making and racial equity. Table 3: Emerging Themes summarizes key input. It is evident that there is commitment and additional opportunities across government to increase EDI initiatives. While the leadership respondent group identified very few EDI departmental concerns, they expressed a need for the following:

- Timing constraints and urgency
- EDI training
- Access to EDI resources and funding
- Better communication on equity
- Increasing diversity within the departments at all levels
- Equity-based policies and procedures

These findings also indicate that most leaders who participated in the survey agree there is strong leadership support and departmental value of and commitment to diversity.

TABLE 3: Emerging Themes – Leadership Racial Equity Survey Responses

Questions/Topic	Response Summary
Is there a shared commitment to EDI among staff and senior leaders?	76% of the respondents stated that there is a shared commitment to EDI among leaders and staff and 22% of POC respondents did not believe there was a shared commitment within the organization.
Are senior leaders committed enough to expend resources and time for the work?	54% of the respondents believed that there was a commitment to the work. 52% of POC and 35% of White respondents answered, “Don’t Know”.
Do people understand this work may impact organizational change?	40% responded Yes, 15% no, and 45% did not know
On a scale from 1 to 5, 5 being extremely diverse, how racially diverse is Howard County Government as an agency?	46% answered “3-Reasonably Diverse” with 23% responding “4-Very Diverse”. When the same question was posed about respondents’ individual departments 33% answered 3, 28% answered 4, and 28% answered “2-Slightly Diverse”.
What are your department’s greatest diversity and inclusion priorities?	Hiring was at the top of the list of the greatest diversity and inclusion priorities. This was followed by “providing opportunities for everyone to grow and advance” and “training” came in last place. 42% did not know or were not directly aware.
Howard County Government Leadership is equipped to participate in conversations around inequities and institutional racism.	When aggregated by race, 42% of White respondents somewhat agree and 35% of POC respondents somewhat agreed. 13% of White and 13% POC somewhat disagree.

B. Staff Racial Equity Survey

The survey consisted of 24-selected response questions including self-declared demographics, and the ERPU received a total of 823 responses from staff. This represented a response rate of 27% relative to the whole of County staff. 40% of respondents identified as white. 20% of respondents identified as Black/African American. 8% identified as Mixed/Multiple Ethnicities, 4% as Asian/Asian American, 2% as Hispanic/Latino(a), and 1% as American Indian/Alaska Native. 20% did not disclose their race/ethnicity and 6% identified as Other. Similar to the Leadership Racial Equity Survey, the Staff Racial Equity Survey tracked closely with the County workforce, apart from White respondents.

Figure 3 reflects staff participation disaggregated by race.

FIGURE 3

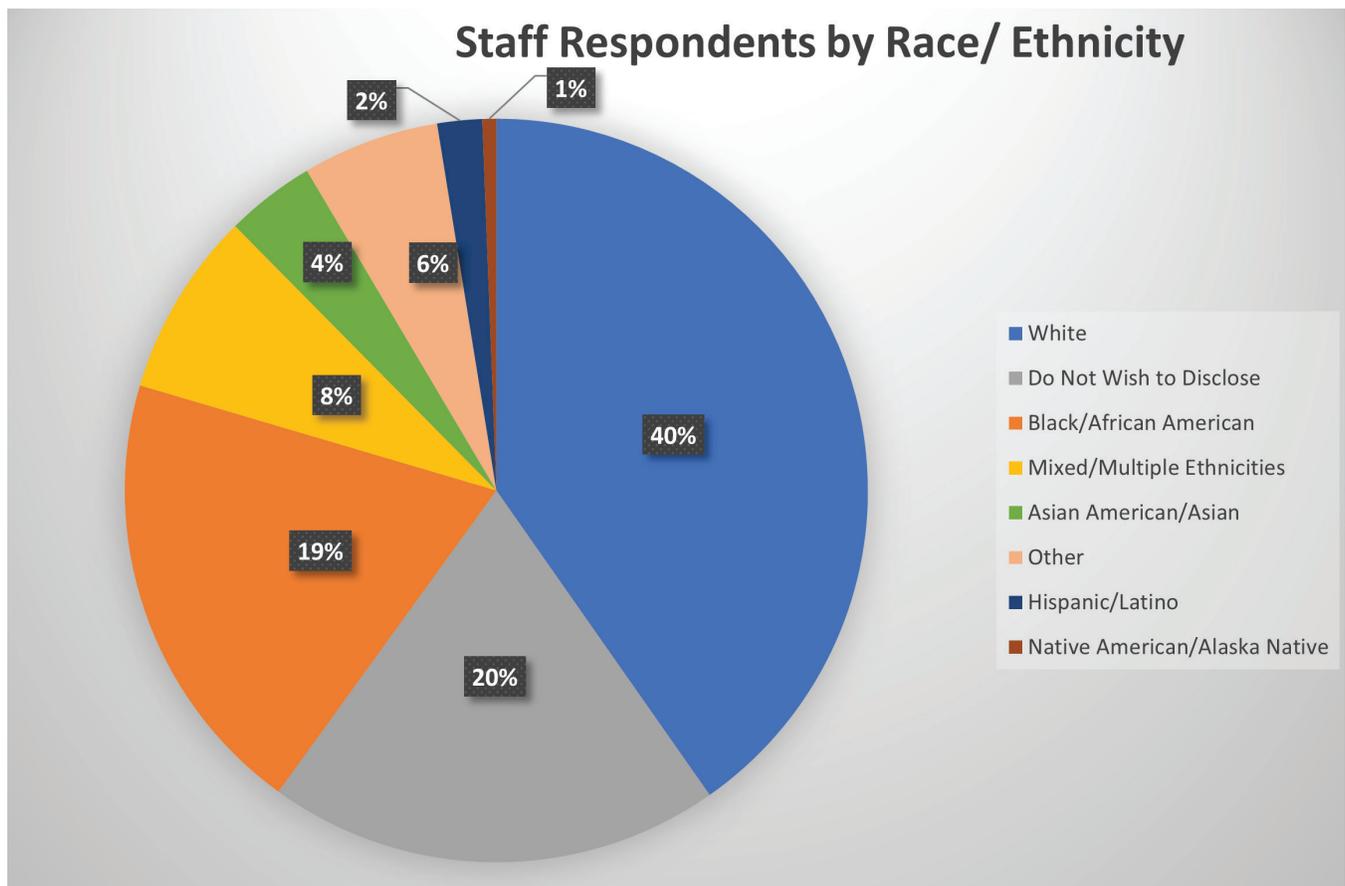


Table 4: Emerging Themes summarizes staff input on 24 questions. It is important to note staff consistently answered “No” or “I don’t know” to questions, which reflects areas in which there is opportunity for the county to grow, expand its EDI efforts, and/or create an intentional promotion of the efforts and policies that have already been established. Key areas of greatest EDI priorities were the following:

- Recruitment and retention
- Promotional and career advancement opportunities
- Increasing diversity
- A shared understanding of EDI
- Inclusion of ALL voices

Staff respondents mentioned a variety of actions they think the County can take to improve equity in the workplace. These actions included, but are not limited to:

- With training, all managers have an opportunity to understand and recognize implicit and explicit biases.
- Managers should consider inviting individuals from underrepresented groups to the table when decisions are being made.
- A strong EDI plan should be adopted at an upper management level and promoted throughout the organization with transparency, engagement, and accountability.
- EDI training should be mandatory and provided to existing staff. In the future, EDI training should also be included as part of orientation for new hires.

TABLE 4: Emerging Themes – Staff Racial Equity Survey Responses

Questions/Topic	Response Summary
Is there a shared commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion among staff?	67% of the white respondents stated that there is a shared commitment among staff whereas only 41% of People of Color (POC) respondents agreed. This represents a 26% difference between POC and White respondents.
How thoughtful and deep is the commitment of equity and inclusion among senior leaders?	52% of White respondents felt that there was “Strong” commitment compared to only 35% of POC respondents, a difference of 17%.
Management regularly seeks my input and advise, including questions regarding work climate and culture.	46% of POC respondents (a majority) “Strongly Disagree” with this statement. The majority of White respondents, 32%, “Somewhat Agree”, while an additional 25% (second most) “Strongly Disagree.”
Are you valued and supported in your department?	84% of white respondents and 64% POC stated “Yes”, a 20% gap.
Does your department have intentional and effective approaches to developing equity-centered decision making?	The majority of respondents (53%), regardless of race/ethnicity, responded “Don’t Know”. POC respondents were 45% “Don’t Know” and 32% “No”. White respondents were 54% “Don’t Know” and 28% “Yes.”

C. Community Racial Equity Survey

The Community Racial Equity Survey was comprised of 30 questions. Information regarding the purpose of the survey and how to take the survey was circulated by electronic mail, social media, through community partners, and flyers with a QR Code which led residents to the survey. Surveys in paper format were provided for community residents at Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center, the Howard County Department of Corrections, and upon request.

This survey was conducted in July and August of 2021. Respondents to the survey were given the choice of electing responses from yes, no, strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, and I don't know.

Collectively, 553 survey respondents completed the online survey with 14 who did not respond to the residency question. The responses to the survey aimed at exploring the challenges to achieving racial and social equity in Howard County. Of the 553 respondents, 542 provided an answer to the question of race/ethnicity; 45% of respondents identified as White; 21% as Black/African American; 6% as Mixed/Multiple Ethnicities; 6% as Asian/Asian American; 3% as Hispanic/Latino; less than 1% as Native American/Alaska Native; and 19% did not wish to disclose.

FIGURE 4

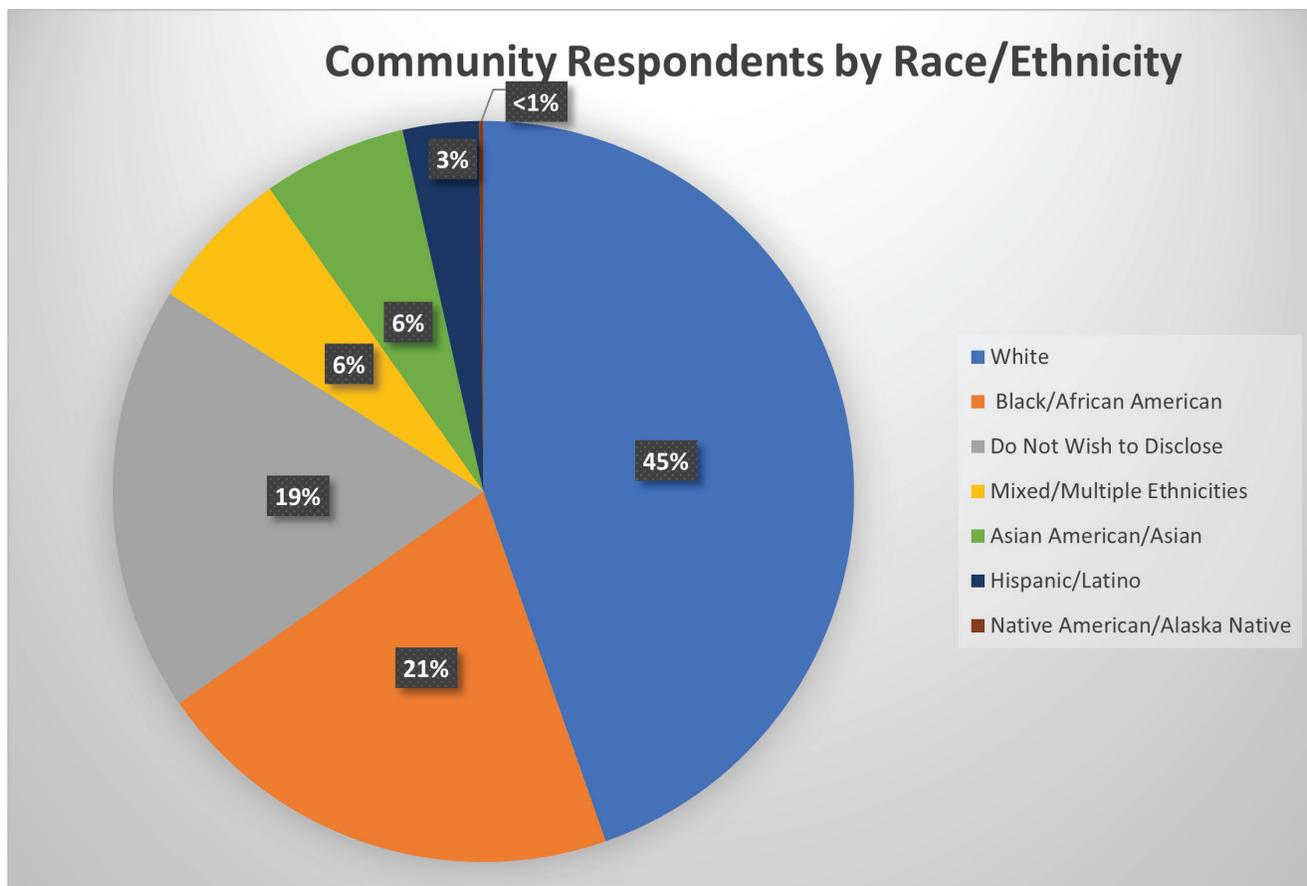
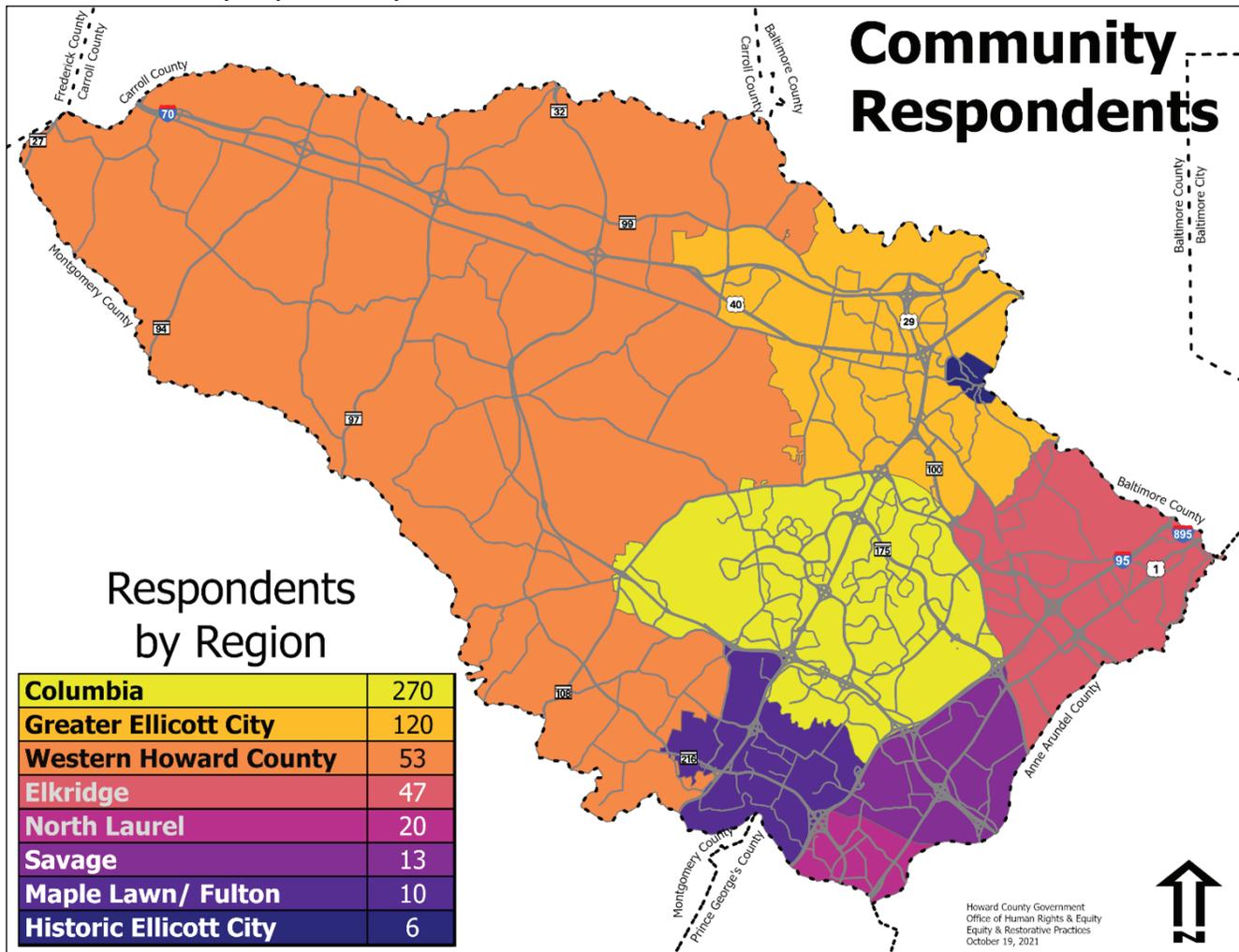


FIGURE 5: Community Respondents by Location



Most Important Factors for an Inclusive Community

In response to the question “What do you think that the County is doing well in terms of making sure everyone is included in economic, social, and political life?”, respondents shared open-ended responses that were coded and categorized into themes. Additionally, the greatest strengths in some communities were identified as an area of barriers in other communities, for example, housing, jobs, health, communication, and education.

The most common racial gaps were in jobs, health, and housing. Of the 370 respondents who answered the question, the most selected were “jobs, health, and housing” (51%); followed by “jobs and housing” (14%); and “housing” (12%); and in the open-ended question, education was the overwhelming response. As GARE states, “racial inequities exist across all indicators for success, including education, criminal justice, jobs, housing, public infrastructure, and health regardless of region.”⁷ It should be noted that 33% did not answer or thought there were no gaps.

⁷What is Racial Equity? | Race Forward

TABLE 5: Emerging Themes – Community Racial Equity Survey Responses

Questions/Topic	Response Summary
Do you believe there are racial equity gaps in jobs, health, housing, and other areas in Howard County?	69% of all respondents stated “Yes”. POC respondents reflected this belief with an identical 69% selecting “Yes”.
How high of a priority should it be for [Howard County] government to address [racial equity] gaps?	59% of respondents felt the priority should be high and 21% answered that it should be average. For POC, these responses were 67% high and 17% average.
Where do you believe there are racial equity gaps? (Responses limited to Jobs, Health, Housing, and NA)	67% of respondents and 68% of POC respondents answered this question, with the remainder selecting “Not Applicable”. Respondents could choose multiple answers for where gaps exist. 48% of total and 53% of POC identified Jobs. 45% of total and 40% of POC identified Health. 50% of total and 58% of POC identified Housing.
How would you rate Housing Affordability?	67% of respondents answered “Unaffordable” or “Very Unaffordable”. The POC response was identical at 67%.

D. Community Focus Groups

The Community Focus Groups (also referred to as focus groups) were an integral part of the community resident engagement. There were seven (7) focus groups that convened in July and August 2021. The seven (7) focus groups consisted of residents who identified as:

- African American young adult males (aged 18-24)
- Older adults (aged 50+)
- Under resourced individuals
- Indian (Asian)
- Hispanic and/or Latino
- Korean; and
- Chinese

Recruitment

The recruitment of the groups was made possible via outreach through community organizations and community stakeholders (collectively referred to as stakeholder or stakeholders). Stakeholder meetings were held prior to and during the interviewing phase. A critical component was for stakeholders to identify representatives from the respective communities who were willing to share their experiences in Howard County. Working directly with these stakeholders enhanced participant buy-in which further nurtured meaningful interviews. Potential participants received an invitation letter (transcribed, as needed) explaining the purpose of the focus groups, the objective of the interviews, and were provided a demographic assessment to complete.

Participants

The focus groups were comprised of Howard County residents representing various racial and ethnic groups as well as social economic backgrounds. The ages of the participants ranged from fourteen to ninety-two. Attendees were asked to sign consent and demographic forms. At the completion of a single two-hour session, each participant was presented with a token of appreciation for their participation.

Facilitation Technique

Participants were placed in small groups (5-8 residents) and were guided in interview questions led by the ERPM, a trained facilitator. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was selected for its effectiveness in engaging participants and eliciting authentic responses. NGT is a group process involving problem identification, solution generation, and decision making⁸. The focus group sessions were held in a variety of settings, including online for the convenience of the participants due to COVID-19, community centers, conference rooms, county offices, service agencies, and community stakeholder's homes. The participants schedules were consulted prior to finalizing the focus group meetings.

The focus groups were recorded for audio and/or video and for the express purpose of being able to capture accurate notes of each meeting. The names and identifying information of focus group participants are not used in this report for the sake of confidentiality. The facilitator gave a brief overview of the process before proceeding with the semi-structured questions. The questions focused on the residents:

- Quality of life and community experience
- Access to opportunities and resources
- A sense of welcoming and belonging
- Perceptions of racial equity and inclusion

Many of the participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences and listen to others share their lived experiences as Howard County residents. They were also willing and enthusiastic to provide input on diversity and equity, especially as it related to belongingness, inclusion, stereotyping and prejudice, and linguistic barriers. Table 6: Emerging Themes reflects the summarized responses that were received from the 7 community focus groups.

⁸Delbecq and VandeVen, 1971.

TABLE 6: Emerging Themes – Community Focus Groups Responses

Questions/Topic	Response Summary
<p>Why did you move to Howard County?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School system • To be close to family • Low Crime • Job/ Work • Close Proximity to Washington D.C.
<p>What are you experiencing as a resident in Howard County?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the ability to socialize with people of different races • Socio-economic isolation and exclusion • Disparities due to cultural differences on an interpersonal level, rather than systemic • Financial burden based on cost of living • Enjoy proximity to the mall, museums, cultural activities, and diverse neighborhoods • Enjoy natural amenities: hiking/biking trails, state and local parks, outdoor activities • Value recreational activities for children, particularly sports and other extracurricular activities • Deal with microaggressions from residents and law enforcement • Appreciate the funding provided to the school system • Single residents feel isolated, alone, excluded from social gatherings • Appreciate having teachers and from diverse races and cultures
<p>Have you felt valued, welcomed, and included based on your racial, ethnic, or cultural background?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many residents did not articulate any discrimination or feelings of being excluded based on race, ethnicity, or culture. • Many residents expressed discrimination based on socio-economic status, education, and ability. • Racist encounters with law enforcement • Some expressed that they did not move to Howard County for the racial, ethnic or cultural diversity but pointed to that diversity as the reason they stayed • Experienced discrimination based on language barriers • Experienced housing discrimination based on using a voucher
<p>How would you change Howard County?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater access to services for those with disabilities • Improve access to public transportation • Cultural exchange groups, particularly around religion • Greater celebration and recognition of all religious groups • Keep the messaging clear about EDI • More mentors and mentoring opportunities • Address classism • Continue outreach to communities to ensure people are aware of County Government and HCPSS resources and services • Make access to Columbia Association Pools and Activities free or more reasonable • Expand opportunities to buy a house • Increase job training programs • Expand the languages taught as a 2nd language in schools • Improve access to quality healthcare

Part III: Recommendations for Building Equitable Communities

During this REA, the EAC provided valuable guidance in determining considerations based on the emerging themes and findings and subsequently guided the recommendations below. Culture, a clear communication plan, equity training and professional development, building a more equitable workplace and promoting meaningful community engagement all serve as topics/areas the EAC believe Howard County Government should consider. These recommendations are in no way exhaustive of all that the County should examine as it aims for increased equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging. Addressing these recommendations will be a top priority for the County and will send a strong signal that action is being taken not simply on behalf of the community but in response to it.

Top 5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Government, public and community leadership should set the tone and vision on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) efforts.

Recommendation 2: Human Resources and hiring practices across public-serving entities should be updated and aligned with adopted working definitions for EDI and ongoing professional development training opportunities and cross-cultural relationship building should be provided to all employees.

Recommendation 3: Housing affordability, which was cited as the top equity gap of concern to the community, should see significant attention from the County and its leadership.

Recommendation 4: Government, public and community leadership should increase opportunities for more cross-cultural resident engagement and more equity-focused communication outlets.

Recommendation 5: County Government, County Council, educational entities (HCPSS and HCC) and Howard County Library Systems (HCLS) should sponsor targeted opportunities to increase awareness about racial equity for youth.

Conclusion

This Racial Equity Framework is structured around the goals and objectives that emerged from the Racial Equity Assessment. As we apply intentional strategies in support of these recommendations, we are mindful that our efforts must be continuously informed by the experiences and perspectives of those impacted by racial and social inequity.

The County remains committed to seeking feedback from leaders, staff and the community and incorporate this feedback into our ongoing strategy toward equity, diversity and inclusive excellence. Community-centered collaborations help inform our equity-driven work while our public commitment to racial equity helps community partners and stakeholders with strategies and action-oriented programs which increase our mutual effectiveness at many levels.

This equitable organizational framework counteracts the harms of structural and systemic racism and social injustices. Each stage of this Racial Equity Framework is important, and the next stage will culminate into a Racial Equity Strategic Plan. This major planning step is needed to advance EDI work and will serve as a roadmap into the County's efforts towards achieving a more equitable community and enhancing public service.

The County will develop an intentional Racial Equity Strategic Plan which will engage more residents, staff and leadership in the process to ensure the County is hearing all voices and perspectives in order to develop a comprehensive plan.

This endeavor needs the entire community. It is critical for all stakeholders to fully understand that systemic transformation is a collective community process, and implementation on any of the recommendations, strategies and objectives will take a combination of urgency, perseverance, and intention. It requires equity-centered leadership, a clear strategy and purpose, open discussions and communication, consistent structural inclusion, and the establishment of goal oriented strategic community partnerships.

Terminology

This section provides definitions to minimize confusion over terminology. Definitions listed below are in the Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture; Census; and other resources.⁹ However, this list is not exhaustive of all terms.

Access/Accessibility – the ability of right of a person to get what they need (such as services, entrance, work, education, training, etc.)

Belonging – The feeling of being welcome, included, or part of a group, and the connections the person has with his/her/their physical environments such as home, workplace, neighborhood, school and community; and having a voice and the opportunity to use it and co-create the structures that shape a community

Bias – A conscious or subconscious attitude toward people or association of a stereotype based on their (actual or perceived) identity or background

Discrimination – The act of treating a person differently based on their (actual or perceived) identity or background. Typically refers to negative treatment

Diversity – Refers to a rich mix of differences. It encompasses all the dimensions that make each person one of a kind, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, veteran status, socioeconomic/class status, ability, religion, language, nation of origin, personality, beliefs, experiences and more

Equity – Refers to the distribution of time, resources, and focus in a way that counteracts disparities to create equal access and outcomes. The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented full participation of some groups

Equity Lens – An equity lens is a process for analyzing or diagnosing the impact of the design and implementation of policies on under-served and marginalized individuals and groups, and to identify and potentially eliminate barriers.¹⁰

Ethnicity – An identity based on learned aspects of oneself, i.e., nationality, language, and culture. This identity may or may not be the same as a person's national origin.

Hispanic/ Latino(a) - a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.

Inclusion – Creating a culture where all people feel respected, connected, valued. Everyone thrives in an environment where our inherent worth is recognized, can be safe to express authentic selves and no one belongs to something bigger.

LGBTQIA+ – The community of people that encompasses people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual and "+", to provide a broader umbrella for many others such as allies, pansexual, androgynous, and polyamorous individuals.

Marginalized – Describes people, communities, and identities that have been intentionally disempowered and/or excluded from access and opportunity by laws and policies over the course of many years

¹⁰ University of Minnesota, University Policy Library. "Equity Lens." Available at <https://policy.umn.edu/equity-lens/>

Multiracial – A person with mixed ancestry of two or more races. The term may also include people of mixed-race ancestry who self-identify with just one group culturally and socially.

Native/Indigenous – May also be referred to as First Nations peoples, Native American, or American Indian/Alaskan Native depending on the historical or situational context. Describes ethnic groups who are the earliest known inhabitants of an area, in contrast to groups that have colonized or occupied the area later.

Person/People of Color (POC) – A person/people who has/have physical characteristics that distinguish them from white people

Privilege – Advantage, access, or benefits that result from a person’s membership in a dominant cultural identity group

Race – A social construct created to classify and categorize people based on skin color and other physical, social, and biological attributes

Racial Equity – The process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone

Restorative Practices – A social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making

Underrepresented – Refers to people, communities, and identities that have been less represented or portrayed (in politics, media, etc.) than they are present in the population over the course of time.

Under resourced – Refers to people, communities, and identities that have been provided with insufficient resources.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Scope of Work, Activities and Expected Outcomes

Scope	Activity and Expected Outcomes
<p>EDI Review (Self-Assessment & Discovery) April – September 2021</p>	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, collect, organize, review, analyze, interpret, and assess key equity focused target areas using self-administered web-based surveys with senior leaders and staff within Howard County government. • Collect, organize, review, analyze, interpret, and assess perceptions of equity, access, and a sense of welcoming with Howard County residents using self-administered web-based surveys and focus group interviews with seven sub-populations. • Discuss, validate, and receive feedback on specific assessment findings with the EAC. <p>Outcome To identify and gain a sense of the type of equity-centered actions that need to occur and what event/activities can be included in the data driven Racial Equity Framework as well as future racial equity action and strategic plans.</p>
<p>Formal Presentation of Findings & Recommendations November 2021 – June 2022</p>	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide comprehensive informative presentations of the Equity Assessment findings, recommendations, and objectives going forward (Cabinet, Staff, Community). <p>Outcome Provide a clear understanding of the current state of EDI and where the County wants to be and add clarity about what must be accomplished to achieve the desired vision (specific goals and objectives).</p>
<p>Developing the Racial Equity Framework & Implementation December 2021 – December 2022</p>	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Racial Equity Framework informed by data, findings, recommendations, and critical insights needed to launch new EDI goals, performance improvements, and results. <p>Outcome Identify strengths, gaps, and best practices for the desired level of EDI success; establish a baseline from which to measure and benchmark progress; determine equity priorities, strategies, objectives, programs, and initiatives; ascertain aspects of employees' experiences and where attention should be focused in the future; and pinpoint policies, programs, and practices that may be barriers to racial equity success in key organizational areas.</p>

Equity Advisory Committee 2021-2022

In the spring of 2021, the Equity and Restorative Practices Unit (ERPU) convened the Equity Advisory Committee (EAC). The EAC advised the unit in its work to advance racial equity within county government. The EAC is comprised of diverse members across various departments and offices. The EAC met monthly between May 2021 and March 2022. Thank you to the following EAC members for their generous support and insight.

Equity Advisory Committee 2021- 2022:

Officers:

Dr. Denise Boston, Chair

Office of Human Rights and Equity

Mary Kendall, Vice Chair

Department of Planning and Zoning

Lakisha Williams, Vice Chair

Department of Public Works

Miriam Bennett, Secretary

Office of Human Rights and Equity

Members:

Ernestine Bridges

Office of Human Resources

Kim Eisenreich

Office of the Local Children's Board

Josh Feldmark

Office of Community Sustainability

Quanita Kareem

Department of Housing and Development

Kierra Kimmie

Economic Development Authority

Gary Kuc

Office of Law

Priscilla Kung

Office of Procurement and Contract

Nicola Morgal

Department of Recreation and Parks

Justin Prister

Office of Revenue and Customer Service

Jacqueline Scott

Department of Community Resources and Services

Yolanda F. Sonnier

Office of Human Rights and Equity

Lieutenant Adrienne Thomas

Howard County Police Department

Contributors

The Racial Equity Framework for Howard County reflects our community, and it would not have been possible without the support of community organizations and individuals who took the time to participate in all aspects of this equity-driven work. Thank you to the following organizations, equity change agents and contributors. Many participants allowed us to hold focus groups in their homes and conference rooms, displayed our survey flyers for the public, and provided services and support. All these efforts made a difference, and the County appreciates all you do.

Organizational Partners:

Age Friendly Initiative
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Kappa Phi Lambda Chapter
Association of Community Services
Celebration Church
Chinese American Parents Association
Columbia Association
Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center
Howard County 50+ Centers
Howard County Department of Corrections
Howard County Chinese School
Howard County Library System
Howard County Local Children's Board
Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition
Howard County Health Department, Bureau of Behavioral Health
Howard County Department of Social Services
Indian Origin Network of Howard County
Korean Community Center
La Alianza Latina Workgroup
Language Prose at Luminus Network for New Americans, Inc.
Oaklands Mills Online
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
People Acting Together in Howard (PATH)

Focus Group Champions:

Anthone Bond	Jessa Coulter
Stephen Liggett-Creel	Pravin Ponnuri
Barbara Scher	Charlie Sung
Daniel Tong	

Report Writers/Editors/Contributors:

Dr. Denise Boston, Office of Human Rights & Equity, Assessment Manager & Focus Group Facilitator
Angela Cabellon, County Administration
Jimmy Kwak, Office of Budget
Yolanda F. Sonnier, Office of Human Rights & Equity
James Wilkerson, Department of Planning and Zoning



Calvin Ball
County Executive



Howard County Office Human Rights & Equity
9820 Patuxent Woods Drive, Suite 237
Columbia, MD 21046
(410) 313-6430
OHRE@howardcountymd.gov