Racial Equity Needs Assessment

Report prepared for the Village of Oak Park

July 2025

Agenda

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INTRODUCTION

Great Cities Project Team

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Great Cities

Selected Participatory Research & Planning Projects

Strengthening Public Institutions

Provide strategy driven leadership and development programs to 20 suburban and central IL municipalities to operationalize diversity, equity, and inclusion into organizational decision-making and practices.

Racial Equity Landscape

Conducted a statewide landscape scan of racial equity organizations and the equity climate across Illinois, with a focus on Black communities in the state.

Latino Research Initiative

Work with Latino/a communities to provide data, a research training program, workshops, programming, and research reports.

Participatory Planning

Co-created 9 participatory plans with communities across Chicago area, including on quality of life, economic development, environmental justice, and commercial corridors

GCI Impact Highlights

- Co-created and implemented over 450 community-identified projects.

- Developed 250+ partnerships with community-based organizations, institutions, and government agencies.

- PB included as a policy recommendation in the Chicago comprehensive plan.

- Created CPS Opportunity Index tool to equitably distribute resources to communities most impacted by inequity and disinvestment.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Village of Oak Park Racial Equity Needs Assessment

Mixed-Methods Research Design

Community Profile

- Demographic snapshot
- Background and contextual research in local media and resources
- Goal of ensuring that findings are well informed and grounded in community context

Internal Assessment

- Assess needs based on experience and perceptions of senior directors inside Village Hall
- Aims to gain perspective into institutional barriers, assets, and resources
- Analyze those for use in achieving more equitable outcomes

External Assessment

- Assess needs based on experiences and perceptions of residents and other stakeholders
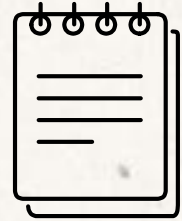- Public community engagement, including listening sessions, volunteer commission feedback, and public survey

FINDINGS
Internal and External
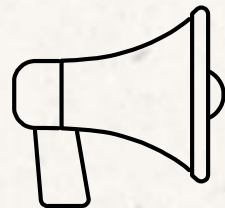Needs Assessment

Cross-Cutting Findings
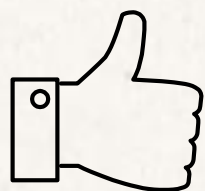
Acknowledging harms and changing the narrative

Data collection for shared governance

Internal communications and team building

External communications

Collaboration and knowledge sharing

Acknowledging Harms

- Racism exists and manifests in Oak Park
- Community members regularly experience racism and discrimination
- North vs. South Oak Park
- "Everyone" knows that Oak park is a diverse, welcoming community, but does not give voice to the reality of that falsehood or recognized community divisions and disparities

… and Changing the Narrative

- Public acknowledgement, ideally in partnership with other governmental partners and community anchors
- Talking openly about the harm – both at the Board table and in other discussions with commissions and nonprofit partners

Data Collection…

- There is no one data repository for all Village Departments to draw on, and publicly available data is limited and outdated.
- Governmental and community partners collect and analyze their own data.

… for Shared Governance

- Reciprocity in data sharing can improve decision making, and a shared repository can inform decisions across the Village both internally and externally.
- Data-driven decision making can drive goodwill when it leads to adaptations and pivots, especially when residents see their opinions reflected in outcomes.
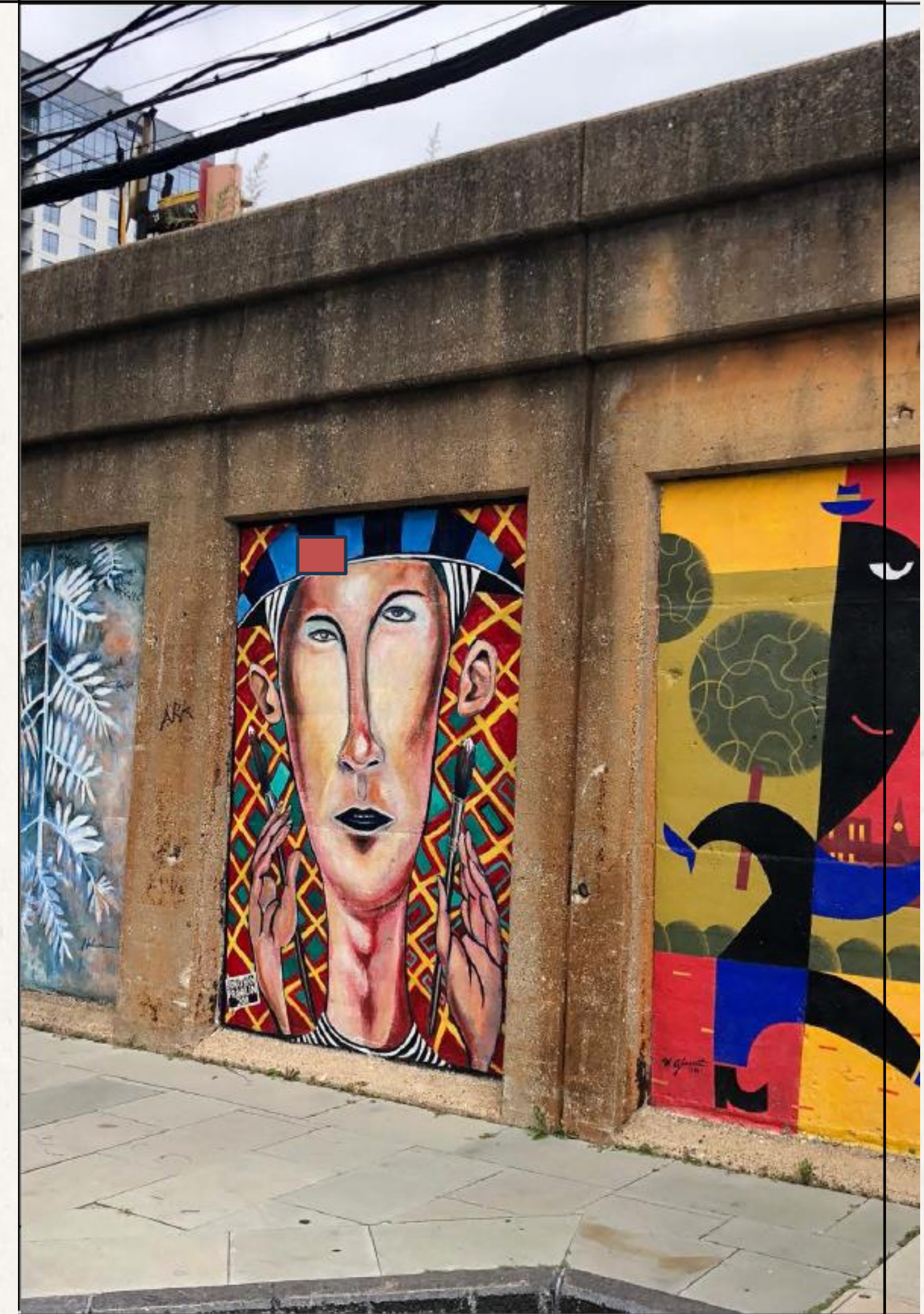
Internal Communications

- A lack of relevant information and communications within Village Hall can drive actual or perceived disparities in employee discipline, salary, workload and responsibilities, leading to reduced employee engagement, performance and retention.
- A lack of communication with volunteer commissions, impacting their understanding of roles, responsibilities , resources and services.
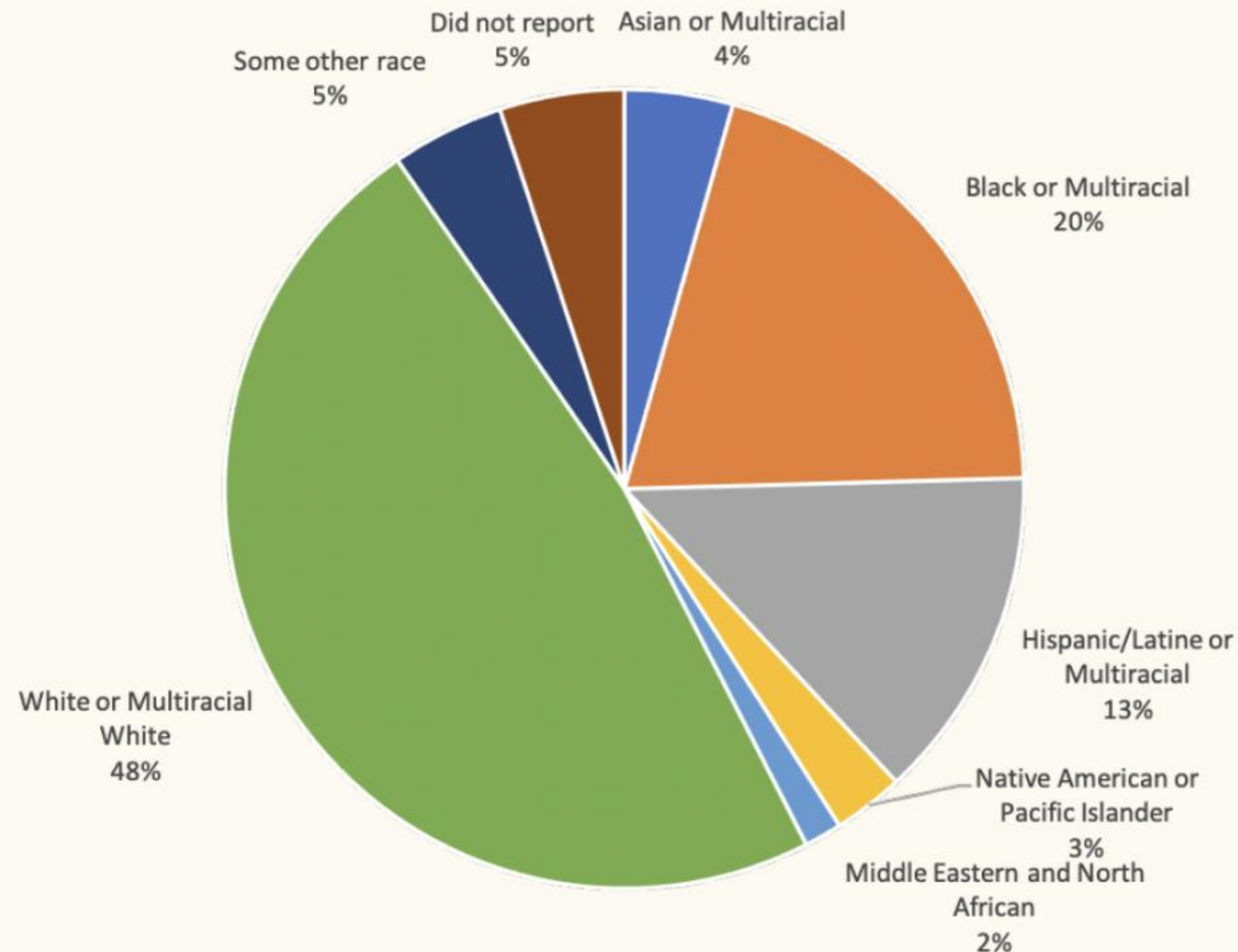
... and Team Building

- Address any institutionalized rules and policies that marginalize and exclude staff – empower employees and volunteer commissioners to build new structures of inclusion and belonging
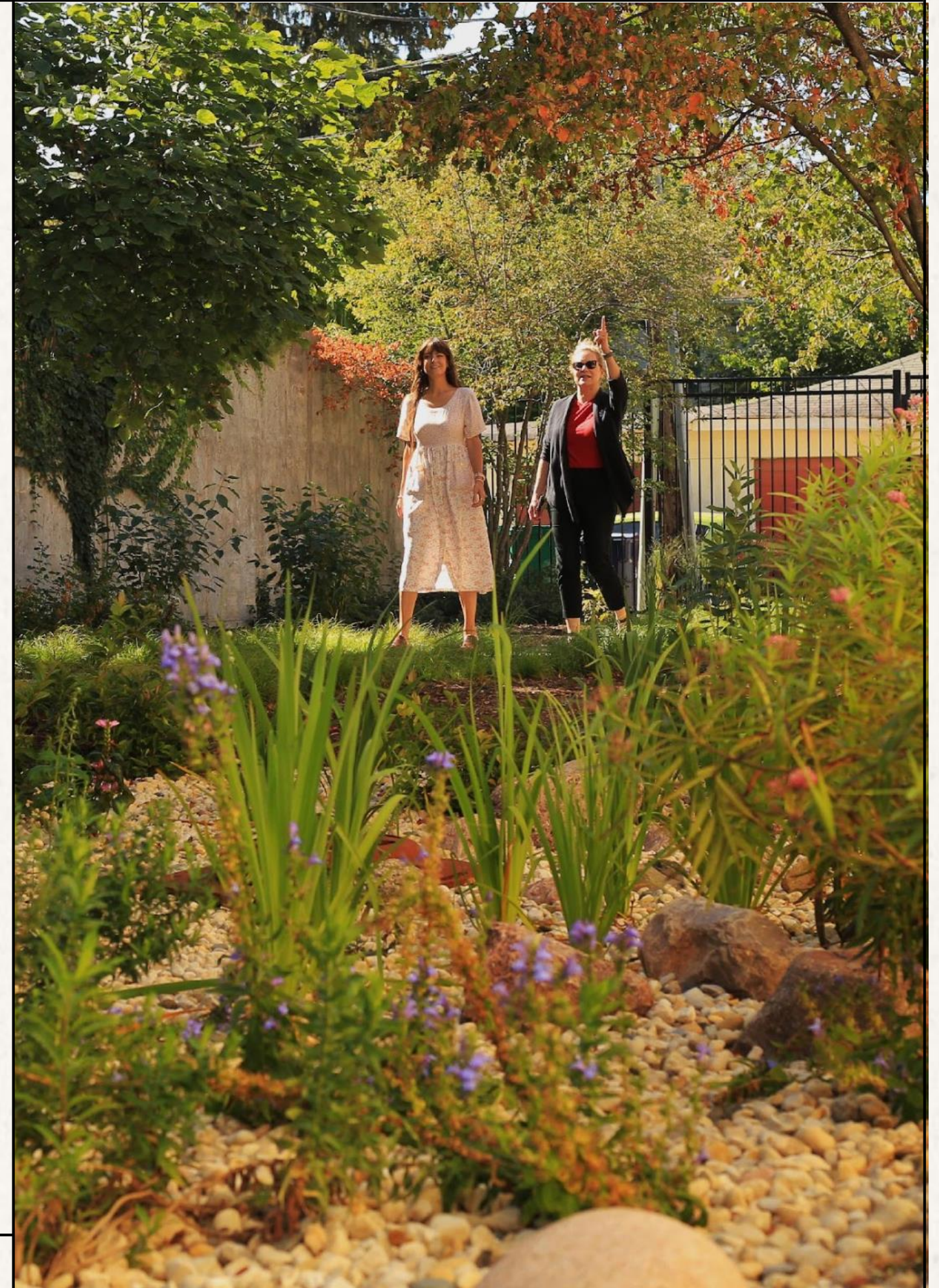
SURVEY

Survey responses by race

Categories at left include any category respondents chose, as they could check multiple boxes. "Some other race" offered a write-in option. Several respondents who chose that option wrote in "human" (or similar), indicated the survey should not ask about race at all, or specified an ethnicity (e.g., Eastern European).

External Communications

- Build on existing communications and outreach to increase participation in and enthusiasm for Village efforts and initiatives
- Reach Oak Park residents who are not heard or traditionally represented at Village Hall

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

- Work with nonprofit and government partners to advance racial equity – collaborate to define terms and outcomes, learn about and understand partners' processes and successes, share experiences and set goals together.
- Collaboration and knowledge sharing are a rising tide that lifts all boats

Operationalizing Change

Short Term

- Improve clarity in roles and responsibilities & increase awareness among staff
- Increase equitable access to programs and services
- Report out to stakeholders and back to community and other partners on equity progress

Medium Term

- Promote awareness of racism and disparities
- Establish mechanisms to integrate and celebrate racial equity work
- Interpret and analyze racial equity data and progress in the Village in a way that is easily accessible and digestible

Long Term

- Increase Oak Parkers sense of belonging and inclusion

Continuous Improvement

- Data was collected in 2023
- The Village has continued to develop and/or refine policies and, programs over the past two years that may address or impact those internal or external needs captured by the assessment in 2023.
- The Village must continue regular evaluation and re-evaluation of internal and external needs.

Engagement Metrics

- 4 listening sessions with 12 stakeholders

- Survey of volunteer commissions and boards with 11 responses

- Public survey on racial equity climate and culture in Oak Park—GCI believes there was good turnout given circumstances of multiple open surveys

  - 557 valid responses, 7 of them in Spanish

  - Distributed by email (520 responses) and QR code (37 responses)—lower QR code than usual given limited ability to flyer

  - All Oak Park zip codes and census tracts

  - Some respondents from across Cook

  - Respondents overwhelmingly said they want the Village to communicate them via Village email blast and social media accounts
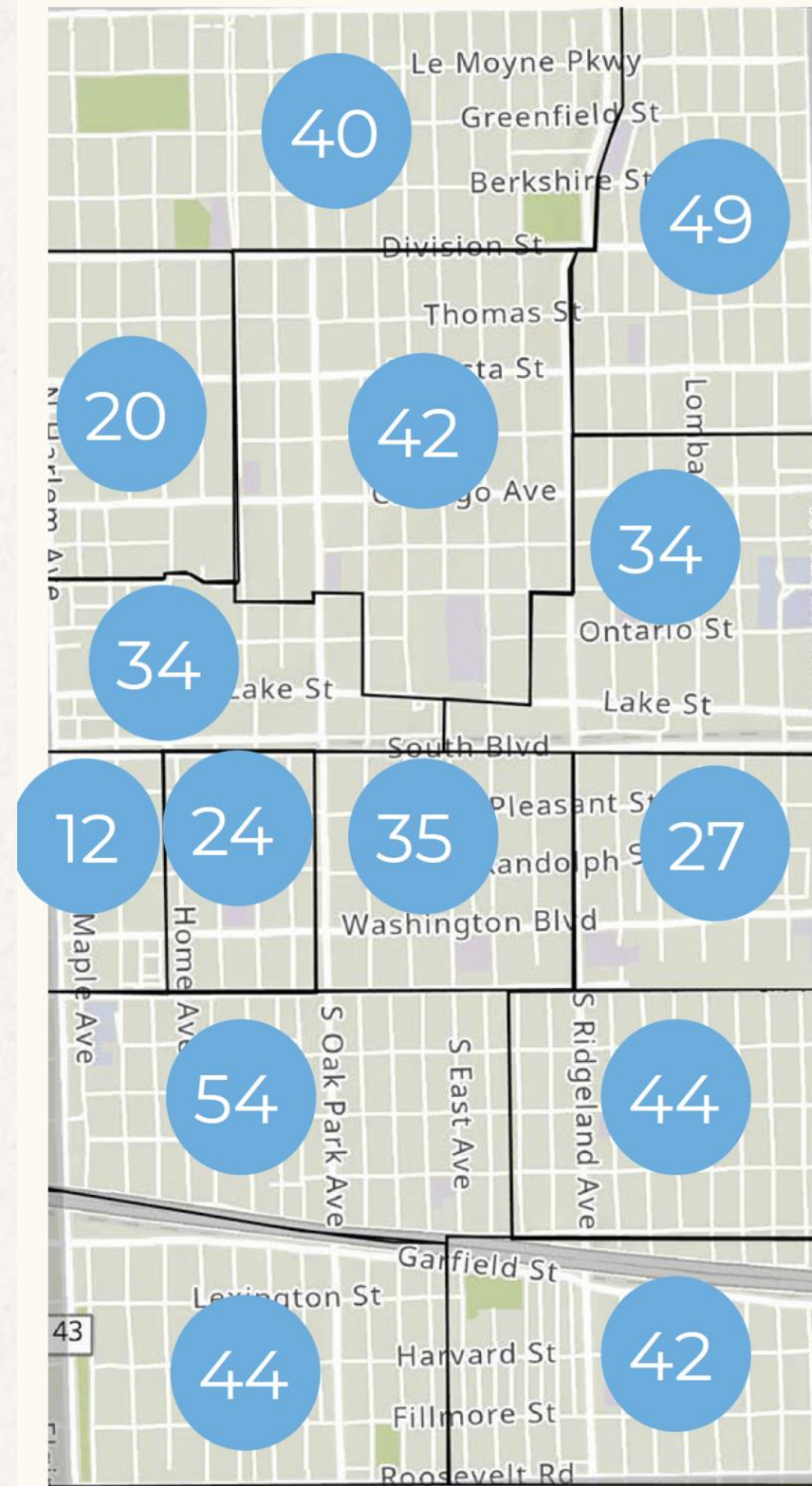
SURVEY

Survey responses by age and income

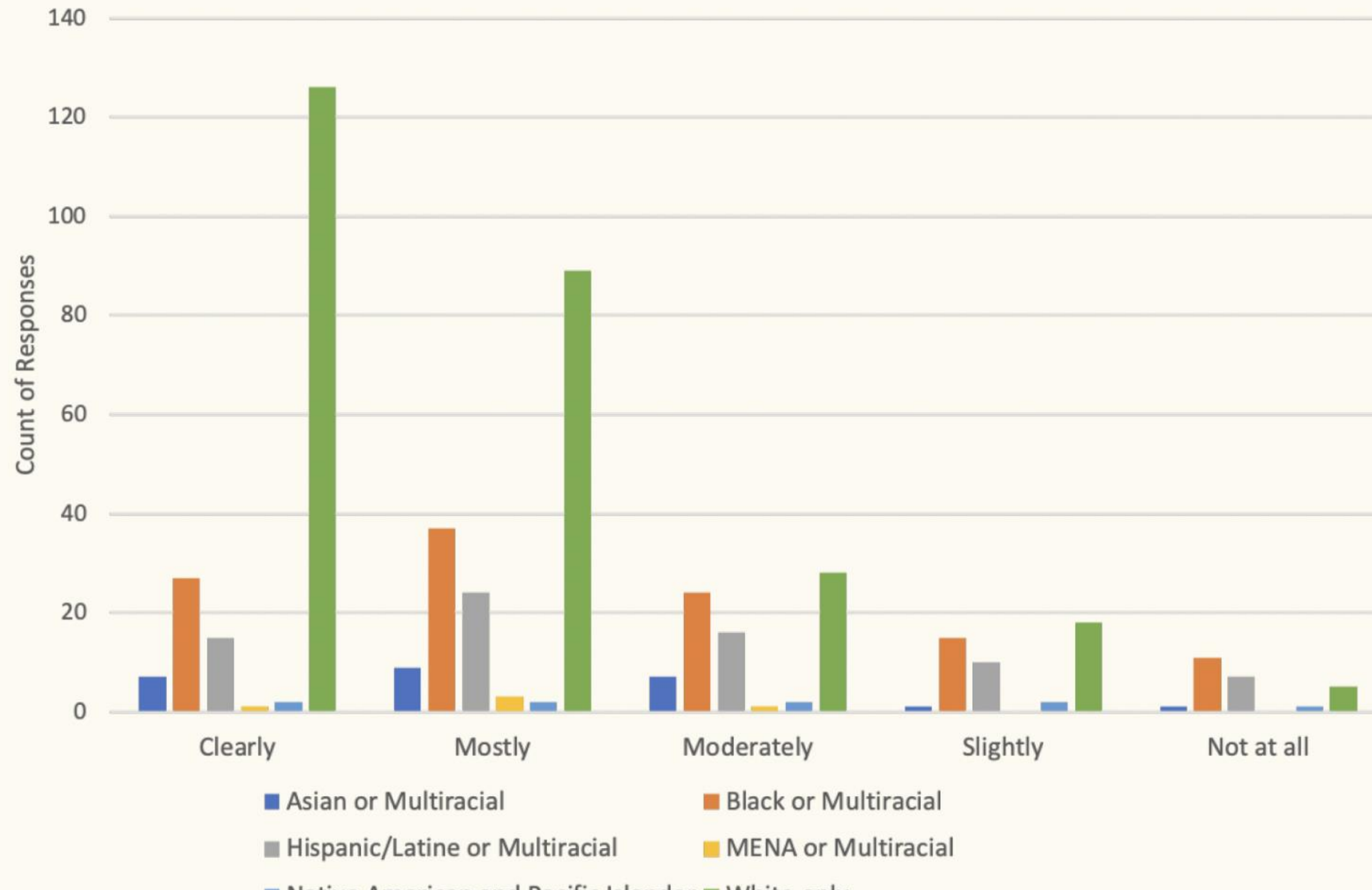Legend: 18-24 years, 25 - 34, 35 - 44, 45 - 54, 55 - 64, 65 years and over
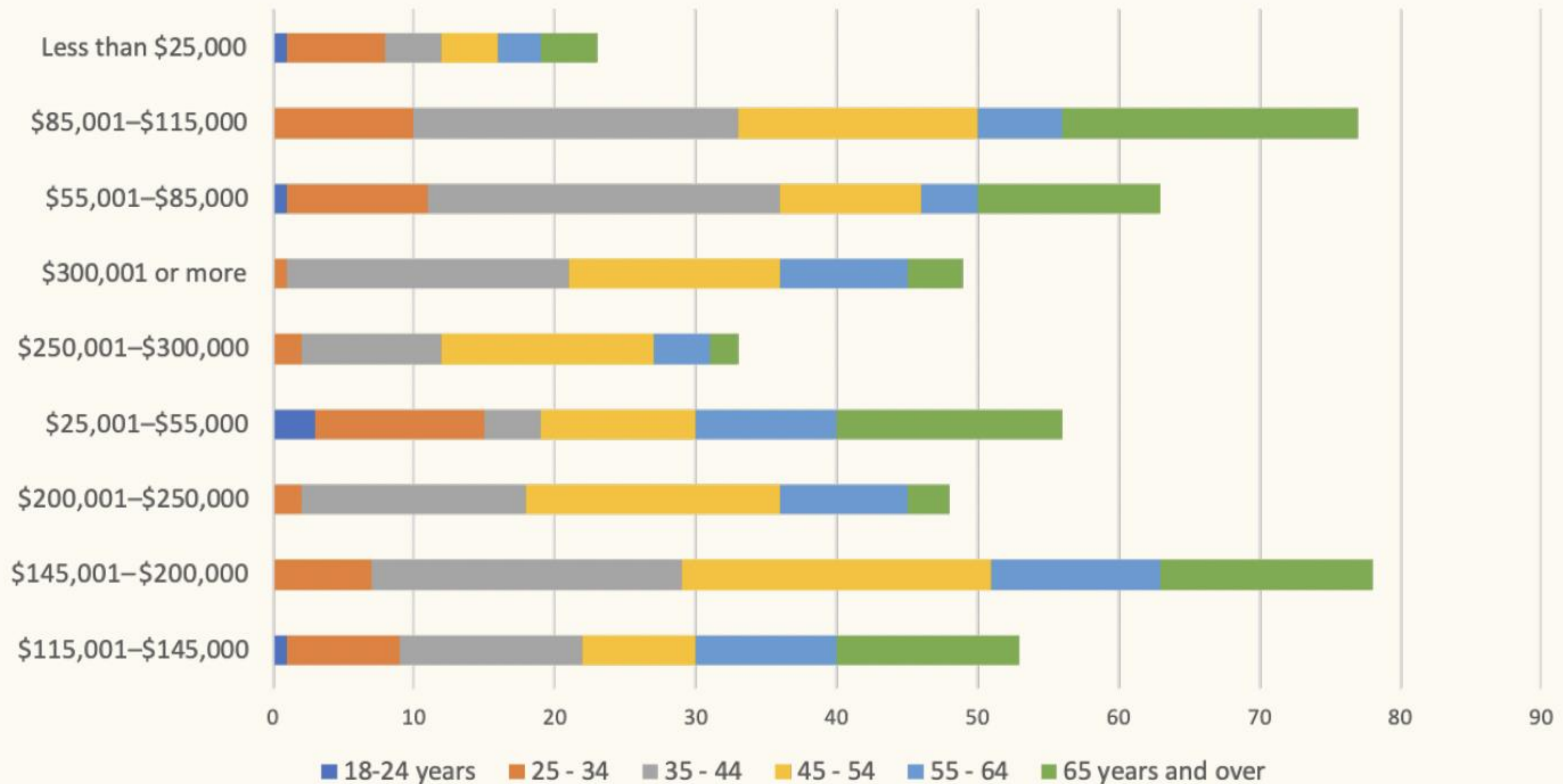
SURVEY

Respondents indicated the number that corresponded to where they live in Oak Park— 29 respondents did not live in the village but provided a nearby zip code; 32 did not respond.

The three Census tracts with the fewest responses are also the tracts with the highest numbers of renters and have high social vulnerability according to the American Community Survey (see profile). Innovative outreach and partnership is needed to reach residents in multifamily buildings.

SURVEY

Responses to "I belong or feel a sense of belonging in Oak Park"

- Asian or Multiracial
- Black or Multiracial
- Hispanic/Latine or Multiracial
- MENA or Multiracial

SURVEY

Number of Oak Park descriptions based on personal experience

Divided by class 130

Collaborative 83

Physically accessible 67

Individual oriented 58

Anti-racist 56

Welcoming 88

Exclusionary 77

Inclusive 67

Unwelcoming 48

Physically inaccessible 24

Not divided by class 22

QUESTIONS

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