

RACIAL EQUITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PREPARED FOR THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK BY
UIC GREAT CITIES INSTITUTE





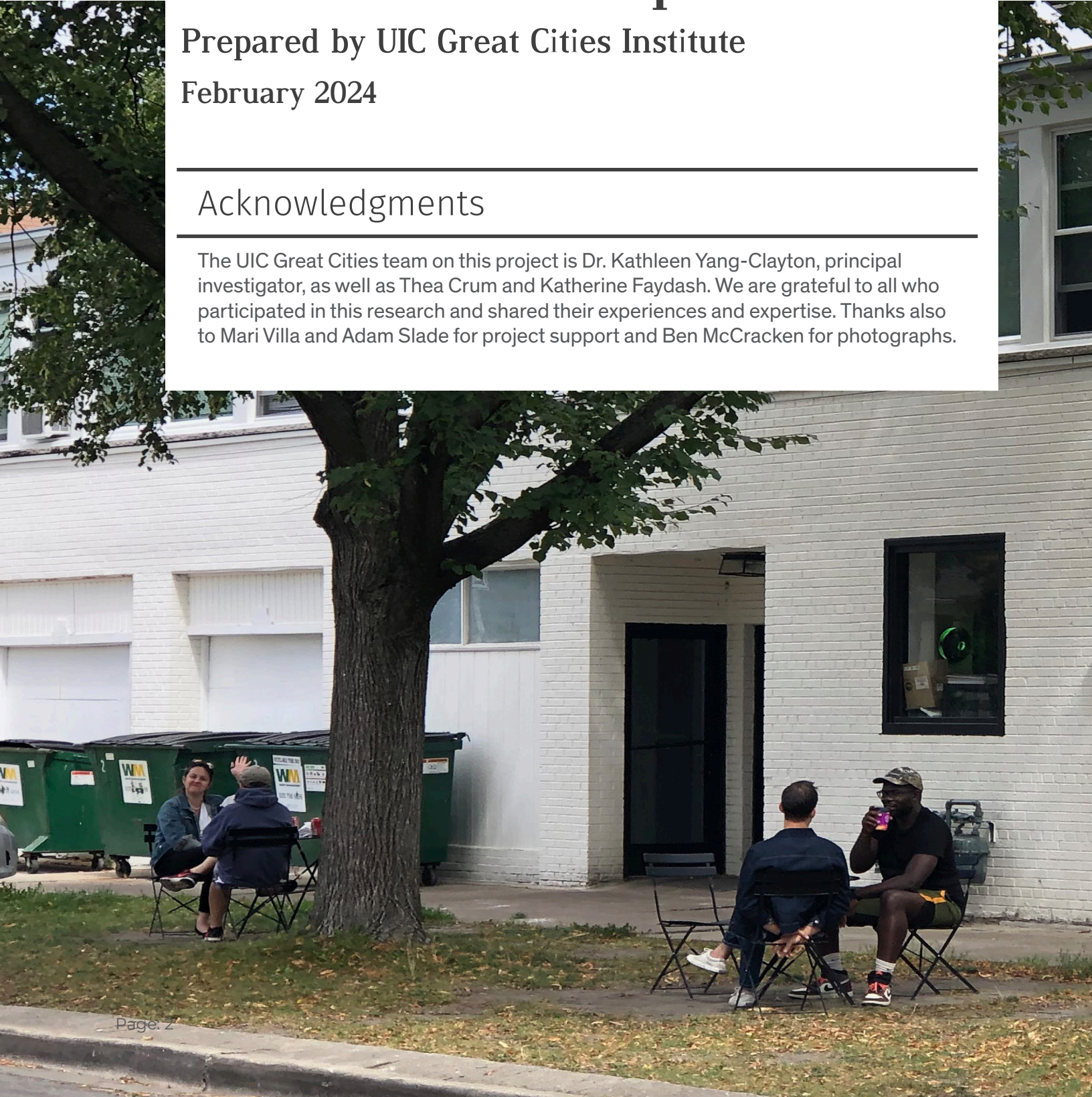
Racial Equity Needs Assessment Report

Prepared by UIC Great Cities Institute

February 2024

Acknowledgments

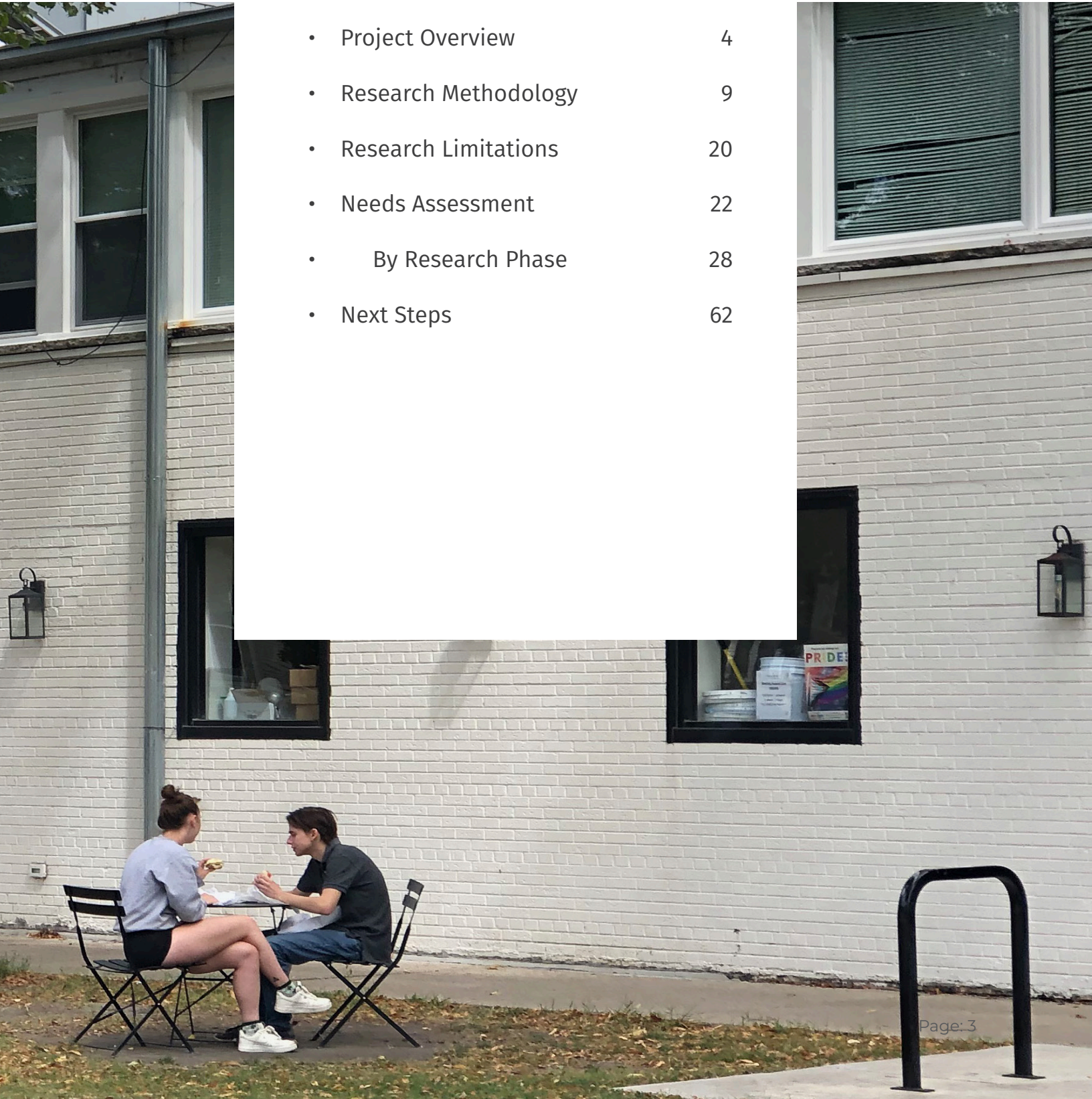
The UIC Great Cities team on this project is Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton, principal investigator, as well as Thea Crum and Katherine Faydash. We are grateful to all who participated in this research and shared their experiences and expertise. Thanks also to Mari Villa and Adam Slade for project support and Ben McCracken for photographs.



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Project Overview

“We must look to our institutions as we look to ourselves.”
 —Oak Park Housing Center annual report, 1981

The essence of Oak Park includes its rich historical heritage, diverse cultural representation and activities, and, for many, a strong sense of community cohesion. Its tree-lined streets, architectural landmarks, and educational institutions also contribute to Oak Park’s reputation in the region as a nice place to live. The village has a wealth of community resources, not least of which are engaged residents and an active network of programs and organizations of all types working to serve the community and make a difference in the world. Many

residents are vocal and proud of these community characteristics. Oak Park also has a long history of volunteerism, activism, and accessible local government, and that history has been grounded in equality and equity since at least 1973, when the Village of Oak Park became one of the first municipalities in the country to draft a diversity statement.

Much real effort and striving over generations have contributed to making Oak Park a welcoming place for many

Project Approach

The GCI team and Village DEI Office communicated openly and collaborated to advance the research project and make any adjustments as needed. This report is the outcome of that research and collaboration, informed by a broad variety of voices and perspectives found among Village staff, residents, and other stakeholders.

We are pleased to share this report, which reflects our understanding of the racial equity needs in the Village of Oak Park. Given the depth of research and information, the variety of perspectives shared, and our commitment to directly incorporating the contributions of people who participated in this research, we hope these findings help inform the continued advancement of racial equity as the Village works to create transformational change and fulfill its vision.



Advancing Equity & Inclusion

people. As far back as 1981, the Oak Park Housing Center wrote in its annual report on life in the community:

“Racial diversity” is a term easily tossed about—we often discuss living in a racially diverse community and feel a sense of pride in Oak Park’s successes. Yet, we know there are no guarantees for continuing these successes. . . . We—the few communities that are intentionally diverse—are fragile and must be constantly nurtured. What should we be doing? What we are now doing and more! We must look to our institutions as we look to ourselves.

Even with that awareness of the need for equity and inclusion, Oak Park today is still not a welcoming place for

all, and not all residents feel a sense of belonging in the community. There are significant economic divides, including by household income, between homeowners and renters, and in quality of life or social vulnerability. These can have cascading impacts on which resources and opportunities are available to Oak Parkers, and which residents feel a deep sense of belonging in the community. There can be difficult, internal contradictions for those who believe in and work for racial equity but face individualized decisions that affect themselves or their households—sometimes decisions that can lead to inequitable actions and outcomes.

Many nonprofit organizations and local government have been working in the area of equity, but it is not always easy for programs to advance



“I want everyone in Oak Park, no matter their ethnicity, to have the best most fulfilling life they are capable of, and I recognize that their have been systemic barriers to achieving that goal.” —Survey respondent

when power sharing is required. There have been policies, studies, and actions undertaken in the village—by the Village government and other community anchors and entities—that were designed particularly to explore, advance, and achieve racial equity in Oak Park.

Despite all of the efforts, many residents still experience racism here—interpersonal and structural. Many more have witnessed its impact on their families, their neighbors, and the people they serve. Because of that, there is much more that can be done to continue advancing racial equity and bringing about transformational change in the Village of Oak Park.

To help the Village assess racial equity in Oak Park, UIC Great Cities Institute (GCI) undertook a needs assessment. To that end, GCI developed a three-part mixed-methods research design that included the following:

- A data-driven community profile, to provide a snapshot of demographics in the Village, and background research, to ensure that findings are well informed and grounded in community context.

- An assessment of community need based on the experiences and perceptions of senior directors working inside Village Hall, with an eye to gaining perspectives into institutional barriers, assets, and resources that can be used in service of achieving more equitable outcomes.
- An assessment of community need through public community engagement and based on the experiences and perceptions of external stakeholders and residents.

This research was conducted from May 9, 2023 to January 31, 2024. GCI scheduled regular check-ins with the Village Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in order to report out on updates, progress, preliminary findings, and challenges in the research.





Research Methodology

Phase 1: Community Profile and Contextual Research

UIC Great Cities Institute conducted contextual research to ensure that findings would be well informed and grounded in community context. We also developed a community profile to offer a snapshot of equity-related demographic indicators in the community of Oak Park. This included data analysis, as well as archive and site visits.

Data Sources



American Community Survey 5-Year data, 2016–2021 (most recent release at project beginning)

US Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

US Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant Accomplishments and Performance data (through 2020)

Housing market indicators from the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Community Data Snapshot

Village Board meeting minutes and memos

Village ordinances

Village past plans

Village website

Equity statements of Village partners

Oak Park Public Library Special Collections, archives of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center through the 1990s

Wednesday Journal, 2020–2023

Crain's Chicago Business, 2020–2023

Phase 2: Internal Needs Assessment

The principal investigator, Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton, used a mixed-methods approach. All data collection occurred in September and early October 2023. Semi-structured interviews with nine directors, review of administrative documents related to external partnerships, informational meetings with Village Manager Kevin J. Jackson, and two opportunities for participant observation—a quarterly Supervisors’ Town Hall meeting and a Council of Government meeting—added context and observer insight to interview comments.

Interview questions were separated into two categories, designed to probe how directors understand and practice racial equity both internally, through inclusion and partnerships with their employees and other departments,

and externally, with partner organizations and Oak Park residents. All interviews were transcribed. Dr. Yang-Clayton performed a content analysis on the transcripts to develop recommendations.

The initial list of participants spanned senior municipal staff and frontline staff. Due to the emergency declaration that was issued by the Village Manager in the fall of 2023, limited staff capacity resulted in the rescheduling and ultimate cancellation of staff focus groups. While the additional data would have added deeper insights into and detail on the specific concerns of frontline staff, the domains identified through in-depth interviews of senior staff provided extensive coverage of common challenges and concerns that can and should be elaborated on by engaging

Interview Questions



Internal Environment

- What racial equity and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion goals does your department have?
- What are some of the internal barriers to greater inclusion and belonging among staff within your department that may be unique to your department or part of a larger set of challenges across the organization?
- What should the Village government prioritize in pursuit of greater racial equity (for your department and/or with other departments)?

External Environment

- Does your department conduct any engagement with the public? If so, how do you conduct that engagement, what activities do you conduct, and how does that engagement inform how you create programs and policies?
- What would you like the residents of Oak Park to know about the specific work that your department does, and overall what their local government does, in order to expand their understanding of equity? What do you think residents already know?

all staff in the future. Nine interviews were conducted with senior municipal staff and one with an elected official.

Coding Rubric

After speaking with nine senior staff members, the principal investigator synthesized priorities and recommendations by creating a coding rubric, a set of codes researchers use to categorize data by topic in qualitative analysis. Overall, there were 13 domains into which data were categorized: six related to the internal environment and seven related to the external environment. The global recommendations presented later in this report are based on these domains.

The GCI team also interviewed Village President Vicki Scaman and Village Manager Kevin Jackson. Insights and comments from both were used to help frame this entire report. These interviews were conducted in January 2024 and September 2023, respectively. Village Manager Jackson's input guided the development of research questions but was not included as part of the content analysis for the internal needs assessment. President Scaman's interview provided additional context and focus for this final report.



Participating Staff

Robert Anderson, Adjudication Director

Ron Kobyleski, Fire Chief

Alvin Nepomuceno, Information Technology Director

Cameron Davis, Assistant Director, Development Customer Services

Robert Sproule, Public Works Director

Marcella Bondie Keenan, Chief Sustainability Officer

Kira Tchang, Human Resources Director and Assistant Village Manager

Dan Yopchick, Chief Communications Officer

Christina Waters, Village Clerk (elected)

Phase 3: External Needs Assessment

The GCI approach to identify external needs for the broader community in Oak Park, and particularly with respect to Village relationships with the community, was asset driven. We identified Village partners, community anchors, service providers and organizations, and faith-based and social networks like neighborhood groups. The goal was to hear from those who often interact with the Village and those who do not.

The community engagement process ran from September 2023 to January 2024. Originally planned activities were community listening sessions, interviews and polls with members of Village commissions and advisory boards, and a public racial equity forum. The goal was to ground-truth information and findings from the data-based community profile, listening sessions,

and interviews with the public at the racial equity forum. By polling forum attendees, we hoped to gauge support for findings over various iterations and engagement formats. The forum was postponed indefinitely due to the emergency declaration. In place of the forum, we implemented a community survey (to replace polling and ground-truthing) to reach residents and gauge their experiences and perceptions of equity in Oak Park and as related to Village Hall specifically.

Listening Sessions

For listening sessions, we originally proposed holding affinity group sessions in a variety of areas. Email invitations were sent to stakeholders, with follow-up emails and phone calls. Very few people responded. We shifted to open, roundtable-style listening sessions with people from different disciplines and with varying expertise. We offered signups for virtual sessions and in-person sessions (at the Oak Park Library's Dole branch) in the morning, around lunchtime, and in the evening.

During outreach, we heard from several people that the busy time of year (late October) or family obligations prevented them from participating. Other people expressed a specific lack of interest in participating in this project or Village projects and/or did not respond after multiple inquiries and accommodations.

We held four listening sessions in late October 2023. There were three last-minute cancelations from organizational representatives not included in the list at

Listening Session Goals

- Identify the racial equity needs and priorities for the Village of Oak Park.
- Identify the overall climate around race and equity for the Village of Oak Park and the ways that racial identity and racial equity affect the experiences of residents, businesses, and organizations.
- Determine internal and external recommendations and actions needed to advance racial equity in the Village of Oak Park.

right. All sessions were transcribed for use in thematic coding and analysis.

Listening sessions were designed to create comfortable conversation spaces for participants to share about racial equity in the Village of Oak Park, including their experiences, comments, and recommendations..

Guiding questions were developed (and shared with participants. Participants were encouraged to answer those questions that most resonated with them or share what they believed was most important for advancing racial equity:

- What are the most important racial equity needs, racial issues, and/or racial inequities in Oak Park?
- Which programs or services has the Village of Oak Park implemented that have met these needs or issues?

What remains unresolved?

- How is/are your organization/you most often engaged to participate in Village conversations?
- What bothers/concerns/confuses you the most about your current and past racial experiences as a resident or stakeholder of Oak Park? What gives you hope or joy?

All listening sessions were transcribed by the GCI team. Transcriptions were cleaned, coded using inductive coding, and analyzed for themes.

Listening Session Participant Affiliations

Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation

Race Conscious Dialogues

Byline Bank

Downtown Oak Park

Oak Park Apartments

Oak Park Township

Collaboration for Early Childhood

NAMI Metro Suburban

Park District of Oak Park

Revolutionary Youth Action League (ROYAL)

Involved residents



Phase 3: External Needs Assessment

Commissions and Advisory Boards

The Village has 21 boards, commissions, and committees (BCCs) that meet about once a month. The stated mission of the BCCs is to “foster citizen participation” and “encourage citizen participation.” The Village Clerk’s office helpfully facilitated GCI’s engagement with BCC members.

GCI developed a two-part engagement strategy for BCCs: a questionnaire for all BCCs and individual interviews with commissioners on the Community Relations Commission. First, GCI developed a questionnaire for all BCC members that provided a working definition of racial equity and asked about specific Village departments that each BCC worked with, as well as for respondents to characterize the racial climate in Oak Park. As the GCI team was made aware of the CRC’s history of

being disbanded and reinstated, as well as its overall equity- and equality-specific mission, we created a separate questionnaire for the CRC that asked an additional question: to identify the most important equity needs and inequities in Oak Park. Questionnaires were emailed to all members with a request to fill then out; GCI received zero responses from any member of a BCC.

The GCI team pivoted the engagement strategy to ensure that we could reach BCC volunteers. We developed a Google Form for BCCs to complete at their meetings after watching a short video explaining the project. Members were then asked to describe whether their group does work or has responsibilities that advance racial equity, which resources they need to further racial equity work or support their responsibilities, and how they communicate



or collaborate with external stakeholders in the Village. Thanks to Clerk Christina Waters and her staff, the form was added to the agenda of each meeting throughout October and November. We received responses from 11 BCCs (two different responses were from the Citizen Involvement Commission). We also conducted four interviews with CRC commissioners.



Participating Commissions

- Building Code
- Citizen Involvement
- Citizen Police Oversight
- Civic Information Systems
- Community Design
- Community Relations
- Environment and Energy
- Historic Preservation
- Housing Programs
- Liquor Control Review
- Oak Park Farmers' Market
- Zoning Board of Appeals

Phase 3: External Needs Assessment

Survey

The GCI team developed a survey to assess community perceptions about racial equity in Oak Park. We designed questions in collaboration with the DEI Office to explore respondents' ideas about what the Village and community do or should prioritize in terms of racial equity, to ask about their own experiences of discrimination or witnessing discrimination and racism in Oak Park, and to solicit ideas for ways the Village can address equity.

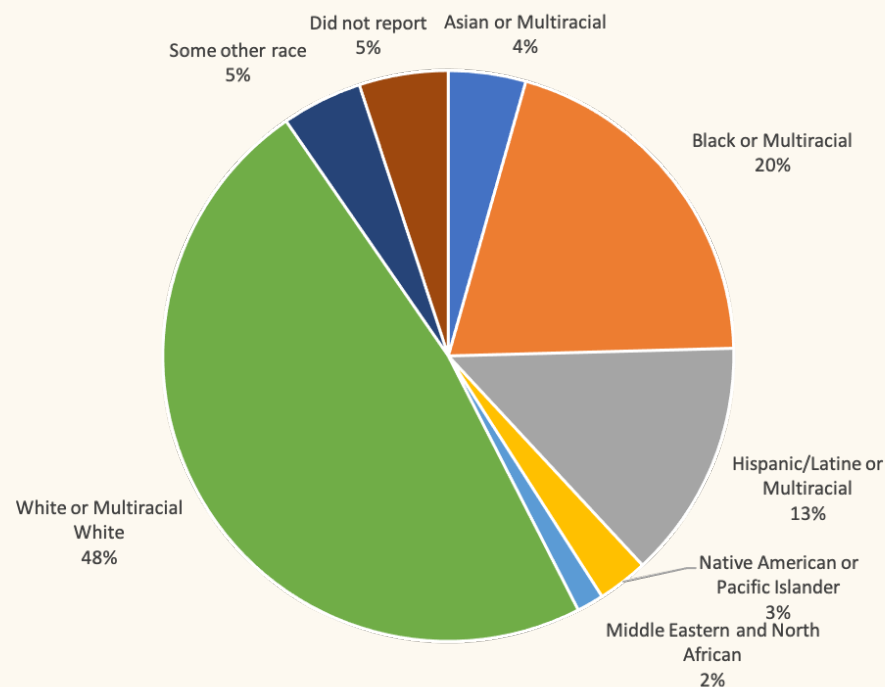
The survey opened in the second week of December 2023. It was available in English and Spanish. Respondents could choose to be selected to win one of several \$50 giftcards provided by the DEI Office. The survey was sent to a distribution list of 1,195 emails, compiled from publicly available email addresses for businesses, service providers, educators, administrators, nonprofit executives and staff, and elected officials in Oak Park. We made special effort to invite all who had participated in the listening sessions or interviews. All GCI communications about the survey included a direct ask that individuals share the survey QR code and other information in their own networks. In late December, a GCI team member posted print versions of the survey in local businesses and flyer on the street. The Village's Communications Director also boosted the survey on social media channels during December and included it in the January/February 2024 print Village newsletter.

The survey faced some challenges from bots, which is common when a financial incentive is offered. The GCI team relied on Qualtrics fraud detection to filter bots. A team member also manually reviewed all responses to filter out additional bots and fraudulent responses based on the following criteria: (1) did not finish more than 1% of the survey, (2) spent less than 90 seconds filling out (estimated completion time : 10 minute), (3) included non-English-alphabet characters, (4) invalid zip code (e.g., too many numbers, contained other text), (5) indicated living in Oak Park but invalid zip code, (6) email address was clearly automatically generated (e.g., AbdulkarimBaerEPQfby@gmail.com, PettifordRahmayandaQulpINK@gmail.com, and (7) was an exact duplicate of other responses. Remaining email addresses were verified as active addresses at the online service ZeroBounce.

A total of 557 survey responses were judged to be valid. Responses came from all Oak Park zip codes and Census tracts. Several respondents indicated they did not live in Oak Park but provided valid zip codes in Cook or neighboring counties. Seven responses were provided in Spanish. Of responses, 520 were generated by email or anonymous link, meaning users clicked the link in an email body or where posted online; 37 respondents scanned a QR code.

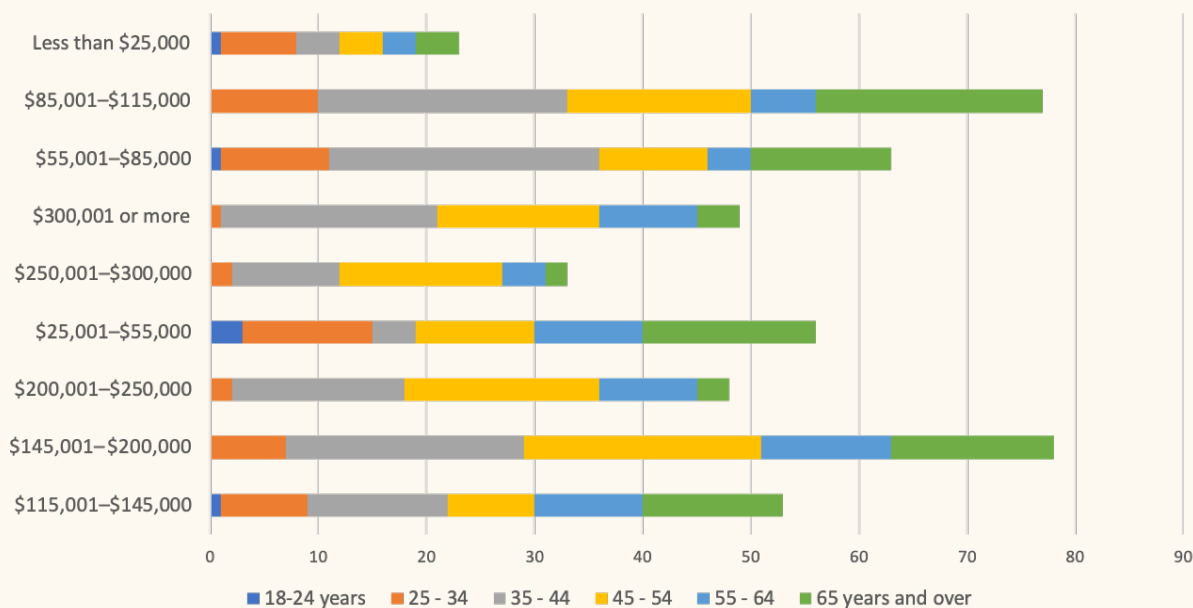
Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that Village email blasts and social media accounts are effective ways to reach them.

Survey responses by race

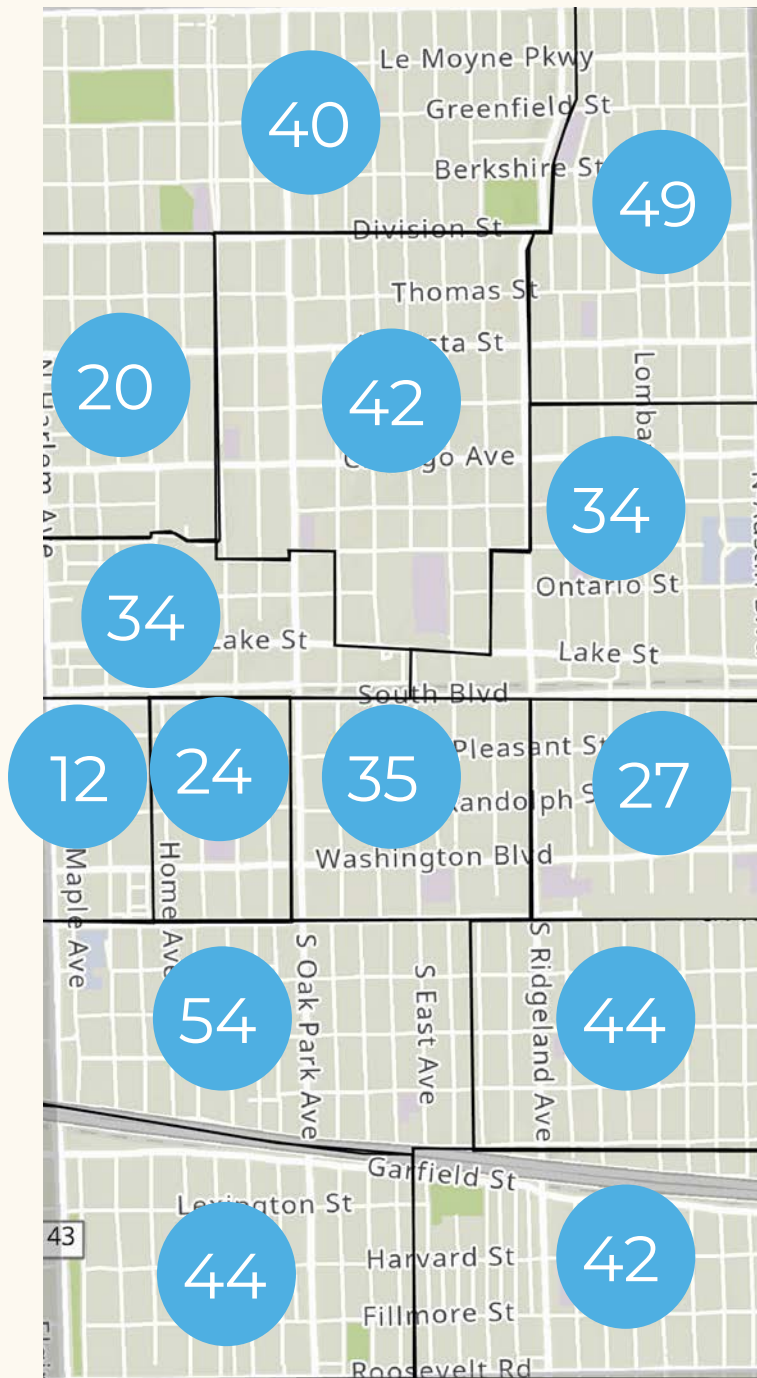


Categories at left include any category respondents chose, as they could check multiple boxes. “Some other race” offered a write-in option. Several respondents who chose that option wrote in “human”(or similar), indicated the survey should not ask about race at all, or specified an ethnicity (e.g., Eastern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

Survey responses by age and income



Survey response count by Census tract

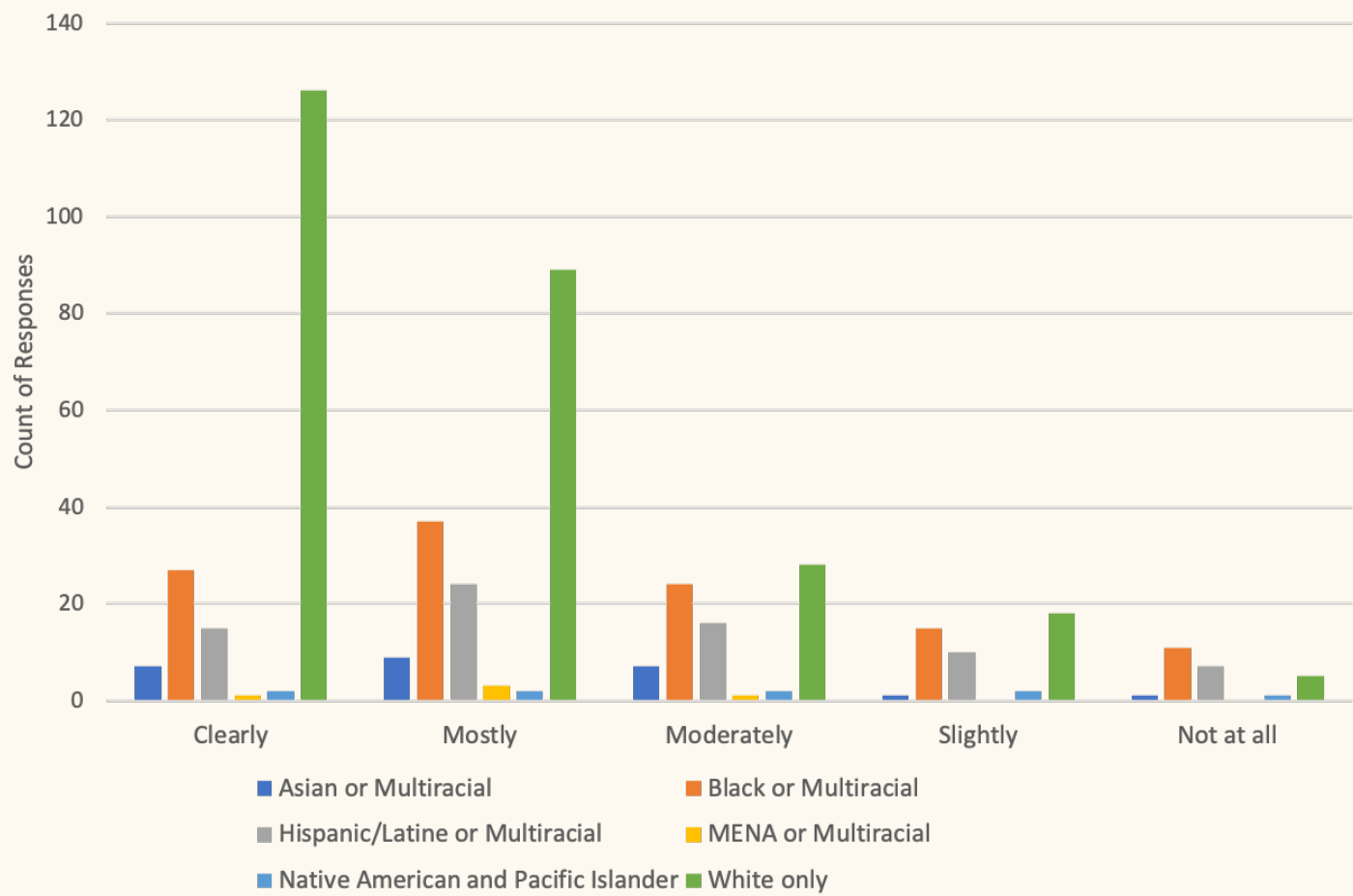


Respondents indicated the number that corresponded to where they live in Oak Park—29 respondents did not live in the village but provided a nearby zip code; 32 did not respond.

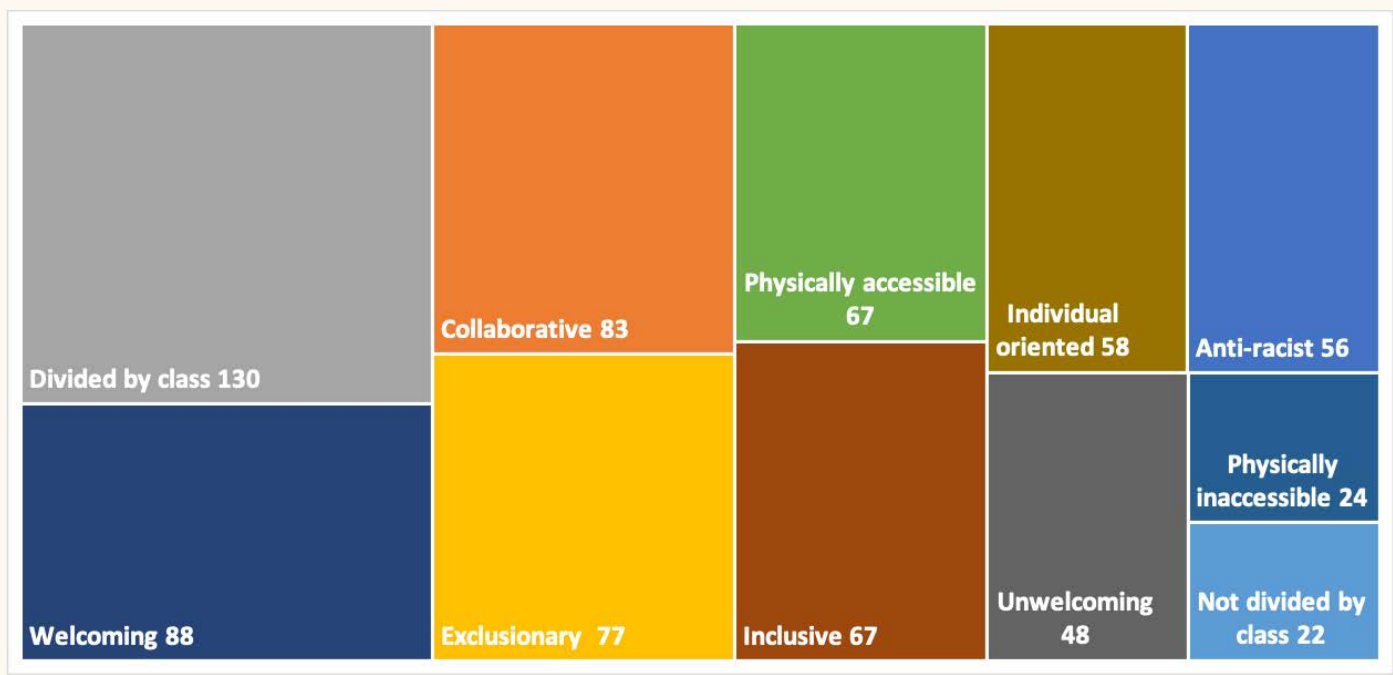
The three Census tracts with the fewest responses are also the tracts with the highest numbers of renters and have high social vulnerability according to the American Community Survey (see profile). Innovative outreach and partnership is needed to reach residents in multifamily buildings.

All data tabulated by UIC Great Cities Institute from external engagement survey responses.

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



Number of Oak Park descriptions based on personal experience





Research Limitations

The needs assessment encountered several noteworthy limitations. First, there was mistrust among many Oak Park community members about participating in discussions of equity and racial equity with the GCI team, particularly among those identifying themselves as people of color or as having family members who are people of color. Partly this was the result of historical mistreatment, disparities, and inequalities generally, on scales larger than that of the Village; partly this was the result of specific personal experiences that have caused harm and distrust in Oak Park and/or specific encounters with Village staff and electeds, current and former. As a result, it was often difficult to gain buy-in from community leaders and residents during external engagement.

Second, and related to the first, there was a perception of this needs assessment as “one more study” or “just another study.” People who are part of minoritized groups are often asked to share their personal experiences and knowledge for the benefit of all, yet those same people so often fail to see tangible change or outcomes after doing so. Even efforts to include a broad diversity of voices can often fail to change the systemic issues or disparities that people of color face. This cycle of being engaged without seeing real, meaningful change leads to disillusionment and a disinterest in participating in research efforts.

Third, this needs assessment was initiated by one division of the Village. At the same time, other Village divisions had recently

conducted or were concurrently conducting several other studies and surveys. All of those efforts either clearly did or might have been able to incorporate elements of racial equity to shed light on racial equity as part of various topics of interest to the Village, such as housing, sustainability and the environment, language access, and more. It would have been advantageous to have staff from across Village Hall come together to explore how the diverse projects could have collaboratively built off one another, facilitating the sharing of valuable data and results across the studies. Such collaboration could have significantly informed this needs assessment and possibly enhanced the effectiveness of any one individual initiative.


Fourth, the Village established the Office of Racial Equity, Access, and Collective Impact and the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer position in April 2022 and that of collective impact manager in March 2023. The positions were filled in August 2022 and June 2023, respectively. While deeply committed, competent, and caring staff oversaw the assessment, their newness to the Village meant that we heard from many community members who did not understand or were unaware of their roles and responsibilities. Moreover,

their many and diverse responsibilities limited the DEI team's capacity to engage with the public around the events and activities planned for this assessment.

Finally, and not least, the ongoing migrant crisis nationally and in the Chicago area led to the Village's emergency declaration on November 2, 2023, which was later extended through February 2, 2024. Initially, that declaration diverted staff attention and resources from the racial equity needs assessment. As a result, the GCI team scratched the planned public forum, pivoted to a survey, and then delayed that survey launch. As such, our ability to ground-truth findings with the public has been limited.

Given these limitations, the findings are not exhaustive. Even so, because of the depth of contextual research and information, and the many comments, perspectives, and inputs from Village senior staff, residents, and community leaders that inform this assessment, the findings and recommendations listed in this report can support decision-making around future steps to advance racial equity in the Village of Oak Park.

Needs Assessment



“[I encounter] subtle, yet hurtful, forms of discrimination in daily interactions.”
—Survey respondent

Addressing racial equity at Village Hall requires an approach that prioritizes internal issues while simultaneously working to build trust and develop meaningful relationships externally. The Village’s decision making and various policies and initiatives have long worked toward fostering racial equity. Continuous engagement, policy refinement, and genuine inclusion efforts will help the Village continue to address the complex, entrenched systemic issues of racial disparities and injustices as they manifest inside Village Hall. At the same time, fostering positive external relationships with other government bodies, anchors, organizations, and affinity groups is essential for being able to implement policies that do not cause disparities or actively shrink them. By looking across areas that can lead to internal reforms and provide returns on external engagement in the form of trust and participation, the Village positions itself to make genuine progress toward racial equity inside Village Hall and out in the community.

The framework in which we connected both the internal and external assessment findings defines racial equity as both a set of values and a goal of local government programs. As a set of values, racial equity is about acknowledging prior harms and commitment to reform and affirming commitment to

change that discontinues harmful policies and implements new policies and programs that build and support municipalities with the tools they need to bring more internal and external stakeholders together with shared purpose and voice. As a goal of local government programs, the traditional imperatives of effectiveness and efficiency in local government must be informed by equity considerations to increase the impacts that public leaders strive to achieve. Increasing the effectiveness of local government programs while balancing efficiency concerns with cost-effective practices, integration of new technologies, and upskilling of public-sector workers to be more responsive to stakeholder needs is the analytical framework in which we conducted this assessment.

GCI has identified the following categories of need, each of which arose during all three aspects of this research. The Village can work to address these as part of its ongoing advancement of racial equity. The sections that follow present specific datapoints that support the identification of these needs, organized by contextual, internal, and external needs assessments.



"The Village tends to welcome others but not take care of our own."
—Survey respondent



Categories of Need across Research Areas

Acknowledging Harms and
Changing the Narrative



Village Hall • Village Board

Data Collection for
Shared Governance



Village Hall Departments •
Co-Governments • Community
Anchors • Nonprofit Partners

Internal Communications
and Team Building



Village Hall Officers • Village
Board Commission Liaisons
• Village Hall Commission
Liaisons

External
Communications



Village Hall Officers •
Village Board • Village Hall
Communications Department •
Village Volunteer Commissions
• Co-Governments • Community
Anchors • Nonprofit Partners •
Residents

Collaboration and
Knowledge Sharing



Village Officers • Volunteer
Commissions • Community
Anchors • Nonprofit Partners



Acknowledging Harms and Changing the Narrative

Village Hall · Village Board

Village officers and leaders, as well as the Village Board trustees—perhaps together with co-governments and community anchors—can begin to foster more trust and goodwill among nonprofit partners, volunteer commissioners, and, not least, community residents, explicitly by publicly acknowledging two things. One, racism exists and manifests in Oak Park. Two, while no one individual either inside or outside government is responsible for perpetuating racism, individuals in Oak Park regularly experience racism and discrimination. Acknowledging this reality can validate the experiences of many residents and build additional support for Village racial equity efforts. It may contribute to helping all Oak Parkers to feel more of a sense of inclusion, welcome, or belonging in the community. Acknowledgment can also contribute to changing two harmful community narratives in Oak Park. One pits North and South Oak Park against each other; the data show that any “geographical” divisions are more likely based in household income and homeownership status. The other is the idea that “everyone” knows Oak Park is a diverse, welcoming community but does not give voice to the reality of that falsehood or recognized community divisions and disparities. Talking openly about these narratives can also contribute to all Oak Parkers’ feeling a sense of inclusion in the community because it makes them feel visible and validates their being part of the community. Internally, current Village leaders can open dialogue with volunteer commissioners and nonprofit partners about harms caused during previous administrations or by previous Village employees in order to gain goodwill and focus on the future.



Data Collection for Shared Governance

Village Hall Departments · Co-Governments · Community Anchors · Nonprofit Partners

Data drive good policy and bring to light new issue areas for policy to address. There is no one data repository for all Village departments to draw on, and publicly available data are limited and outdated. The Village collects external data through the Engage Oak Park platform and has many other opportunities to collect and analyze public data and qualitative data on programs and performance across Village Hall. The Village’s co-governments and community partners also collect and analyze their own data to inform their work. Reciprocity in data sharing with external partners can improve decision making, and a shared repository can inform decisions across the village. With good data, the Village and others can establish feedback loops to continuously update and adapt policy and decision making. Data-driven decision making can drive goodwill when it leads to adaptations and pivots in existing policy, especially when residents and others who are asked to share their opinions are able to see those opinions reflected in outcomes. Good data also can help shape narratives, demonstrate disparities, and win support from the public on decision making and the need for change.

Internal Communications and Team Building

Village Hall Officers · Village Board Commission Liaisons · Village Hall Commission Liaisons



Findings show a lack of access to relevant information and communications within Village Hall for leaders and staff alike, including about different roles and responsibilities of specific job titles, volunteer positions, departments, and initiatives. This can drive actual or perceived disparities in employee discipline, salary, workload, and responsibilities, thereby lowering employee engagement, performance, and retention. With a working definition of racial equity values and goals, the first step is for the Village to address the existence of institutionalized rules and policies that routinely marginalize and exclude leaders and staff. Empowering leaders and staff to build new structures of inclusion and belonging inside the organization will directly affect employee satisfaction and retention, and through that, the community's experience with various departments.

There is also a need for team building among Village employees by communicating to them their value to the organization—through onboarding, recognition, skills training, and promotion opportunities. Work to improve internal communications and team building inside Village Hall may have a positive impact on staff capacity, retention, and performance.

The lack of internal communication on roles has extended to volunteer commissions and commissioners' understanding of roles and responsibilities, as well the willingness of some to continue serving the Village. A lack of clear communications around roles and responsibilities within the organization contributes to the same lack of clarity outside the organization about Village volunteer opportunities and responsibilities, and resources and services.



External Communications

Village Hall Officers · Village Board · Village Hall Communications Department · Village Volunteer Commissions · Co-Governments · Community Anchors · Nonprofit Partners · Residents

There is a clear need for Village Hall to build on existing communications and outreach to increase participation in and enthusiasm for Village efforts and initiatives. There is a particularly acute need to reach Oak Park residents who are not already heard or traditionally represented at Village Hall. This might include people of color who have experienced racism in Oak Park and have become reluctant to participate, as well as teenagers, young adults under the age of 30, immigrants, people with limited English proficiency, renters, people who live in Oak Park but work elsewhere, people with limited social capital, low-income households, people working in low-wage jobs, and people living in Census tracts designated as having high social vulnerability. Communicating the intent, the work, and the efforts of the Village will resonate most when people with less resources or access are able to contribute their opinions and experiences alongside those who have more resources and easier access, and when people can see that their input leads to outcomes. Any work to improve information sharing and role clarity inside Village Hall can have a positive impact on staff capacity to conduct different types of external communication and to educate residents on the roles and responsibilities of Village Hall, as well as of co-governments.



Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Village Officers • Volunteer Commissions • Community Anchors • Nonprofit Partners



Nonprofit and co-government leaders expressed a desire to increase collaboration and knowledge sharing with the Village. All are working toward racial equity in some way, and some have issued research, statements, and policies about their commitment to achieving it. Even so, coming together to collaboratively define terms and outcomes, to learn about and understand partners' processes and successes, and to have a space for sharing experiences and setting goals together can go a long way toward building trust and advancing equity actions in the community. Some partners are a step ahead of others in the pursuit of equity, although all are on that road. With that, it may be difficult for some partners to contribute to and support Village efforts collaboratively if they fear a diminished capacity or responsibility as a result, or if they struggle to share their resources and success with others. Likewise, it may be difficult for the Village, and Village employees especially, to collaborate with co-governments, community partners, and even residents if they perceive that their role or responsibilities will become greater or more complicated, or even stymied by collaboration. But collaboration and knowledge sharing are the rising tide that lifts all boats, inside the walls of Village Hall, in Village relationships in the community, and ultimately for all the Oak Parkers served by the Village, co-governments, and nonprofit partners.



Needs Assessment by Research Phase

Phase 1: Contextual Research

UIC Great Cities Institute conducted contextual research to ensure that findings would be well informed and grounded in community context. The following needs were identified during Phase 1.

Develop and implement a comprehensive data strategy for the entire Village organization that involves collection, analysis, internal dissemination, information sharing with partners, and public availability and makes room for publicly available data as well as qualitative data from residents.

- The Village does not appear to have a comprehensive data strategy that emphasizes the outcomes of all its current efforts to gather and share data and information. Ultimately, a data strategy enables internal and external stakeholders to be better informed and engaged across all activities and opportunities that the Village offers.
- The Oak Park website's map gallery features outdated American Community Survey variables rather than updated datapoints or composite variables that show assets or challenges faced by different population segments.
- There is a need to look at data over time to identify changing needs and populations in Oak Park, with variables such as housing burden, social vulnerability, income source, and other relevant

administrative and socioeconomic indicators being utilized for decision-making.

- There were several concurrent but separate qualitative data collection efforts run by the Village during this project as part of community engagement, all of which may have shed light on some aspects of racial equity or racial equity work for the Village overall had there been more interdepartmental communication and collaboration opportunities.
- Being data informed and data driven is a best practice according to the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action). Collective efforts across departments to identify what kinds and sources of data are currently being used and what additional sources could be collected and for what purpose is an example of how to operationalize this best practice.

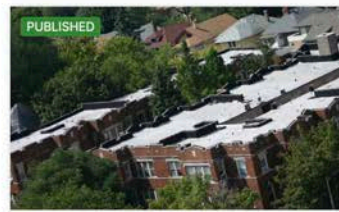
Number of active concurrent community surveys



Community Compost



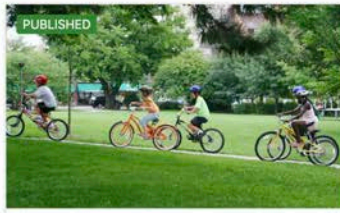
Language Access



Vision for Housing in Oak Park



Building Electrification



Vision Zero



Climate Ready Oak Park Community Conv...



Racial Equity Assessment



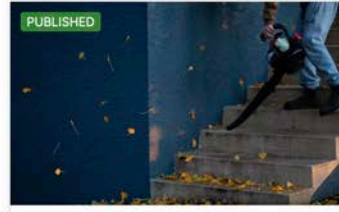
Community Health Plan Implementation



Alternative Response Taskforce - Ment...



Single-Use Plastics and Polystyrene F...



Landscaping Practices



Ask Oak Park



Map gallery social indicators from 2019, may be difficult to interpret for residents without data experience



As part of that strategy, collect and analyze timely public data—with a particular eye to composite variables and data over time—to inform decision making and policies, contribute to changing false community narratives, and spot issues and opportunities on the horizon. Identify which datapoints that best contribute to understandings of racial equity in the Village should be tracked. There is annual, easily accessible public data, such as found in the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s Community Snapshot, at the website of the US Census Bureau, and the Cook County Data Portal.

- Oak Park is a diverse community in terms of race/ethnicity and heritage. Forty percent of the population identifies as other than white, non-Hispanic. Residents who identify as Hispanic have heritage in 18 countries in Latin America and Europe, and residents who identify as Asian in 10 countries.
- From 2016 to 2021, Census tracts in southeastern Oak Park have seen the greatest growth in residents identifying as Asian or as Hispanic (of all races). Two tracts, along Harlem and also Austin between South Boulevard and Madison have seen the greatest growth in residents identifying as African American or Black.
- There is substantial race-based disparity in Oak Park around median income. The median income of non-White households, and especially Black and African American households, is below that of White households by more than \$30,000.
- Two particular Census tracts in Oak Park, along Harlem near Madison, have high social vulnerability according to composites variables of American

Community Survey data.

- Census tracts with higher numbers of multifamily buildings are more likely to be lower income and to have high social vulnerability.

As part of that strategy, make data easily accessible and more relevant across the Village organization to be used in informing decision-making at all levels.

- Having data on hand and easily accessible opens up staff capacity in instances when the Village must react to an urgent situation or crisis.
- Having easily accessible, updated data allows for quick identification trends as drives programmatic and policy successes.
- Data to drive equity decisions can inform goals and be shared and ground-truthed with the community during goal setting for Village policies and programs.

Promote sharing data with the public, such as via the Village website, newsletter, social media accounts, and public relations efforts, as well as other outlets, in order to show need for Village policies but also to highlight the assets and challenges faced by Oak Parkers across the village. Gathering data helps inform the Village and residents; sharing data helps inform and educate residents.

- There is a need to update all public data presented on the Village’s website to current information.
- The existing publicly available “social vulnerability” indicators (in the Map Gallery) are outdated and pulled only from the American Community Survey.

- The Village map gallery could have a more dynamic, engaging design to tell stories about the data rather than requiring residents to know how to analyze particular datapoints.
- There is an opportunity to use the map gallery and other Village web pages to highlight through data Oak Park's racial/ethnic, country-of-origin, and linguistic diversity as assets, promoting inclusion and belonging.

Develop a comprehensive, tiered language access policy that prioritizes (1) Oak Park residents with limited English proficiency and (2) bilingual Oak Parkers who may be less confident speaking English in more "official" contexts.

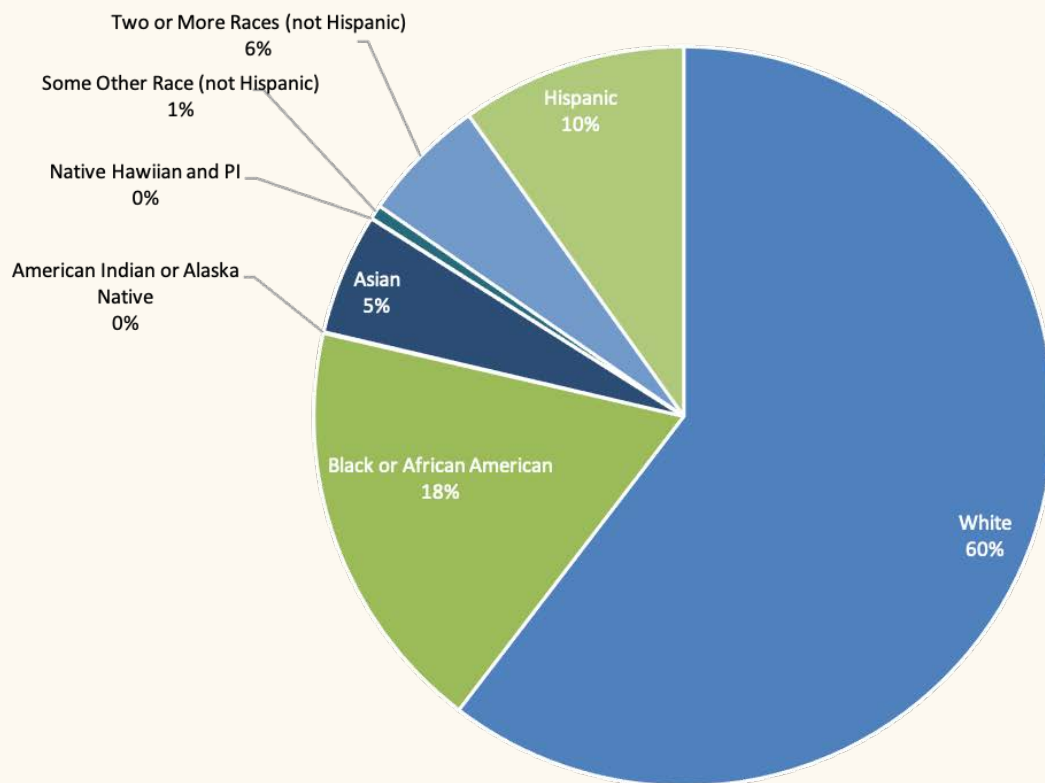
- More than 370 Oak Park households identify as "limited English households." This is most common for households where Spanish is spoken, followed by other Indo-European languages and Asian languages. These households are more likely to be located in Census tracts along Madison and Harlem that also have higher numbers of multifamily buildings than other tracts.
- There is a need to build relationships with immigrant communities in order to promote their inclusion and participation in village life.
- Develop a secondary language access policy that helps the Village deal with one-off or short-term situations in unanticipated languages.

Draw on existing resources at all scales, national to local, to continue informing the Village's racial equity work; to share data; to learn about challenges and successes;

and to build relationships with partners through convening for dialogue and collaboration.

- Oak Park's resources, diversity, and assets can be celebrated while acknowledging the realities inside the Village of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism. (GARE: Communicate and Act with Urgency)
- Several organizations, including GARE, recommend implementing racial equity impact assessments as a best practice in decision-making, policy making, and budgeting.
- There are numerous case studies on municipalities of similar sizes and their efforts to address and advance equity in their communities.
- Prior research and continuing efforts of community organizations and partners, including the Oak Park Public Library anti-racism commitment, the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation's equity report, and the work of groups such as Nova Collective and Race Conscious Dialogues, among others.
- The equity statements and policies of Oak Park's coterminous governments reveal differences in definitions, actions, metrics, and familiarity in talking about racism and racial equity. For example, the Oak Park Public Library's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan; Park District of Oak Park's inclusivity pillar and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee; District 97's equity policy developed after two years of community engagement, District 200's equitable excellence framework focusing in on continuous improvements.

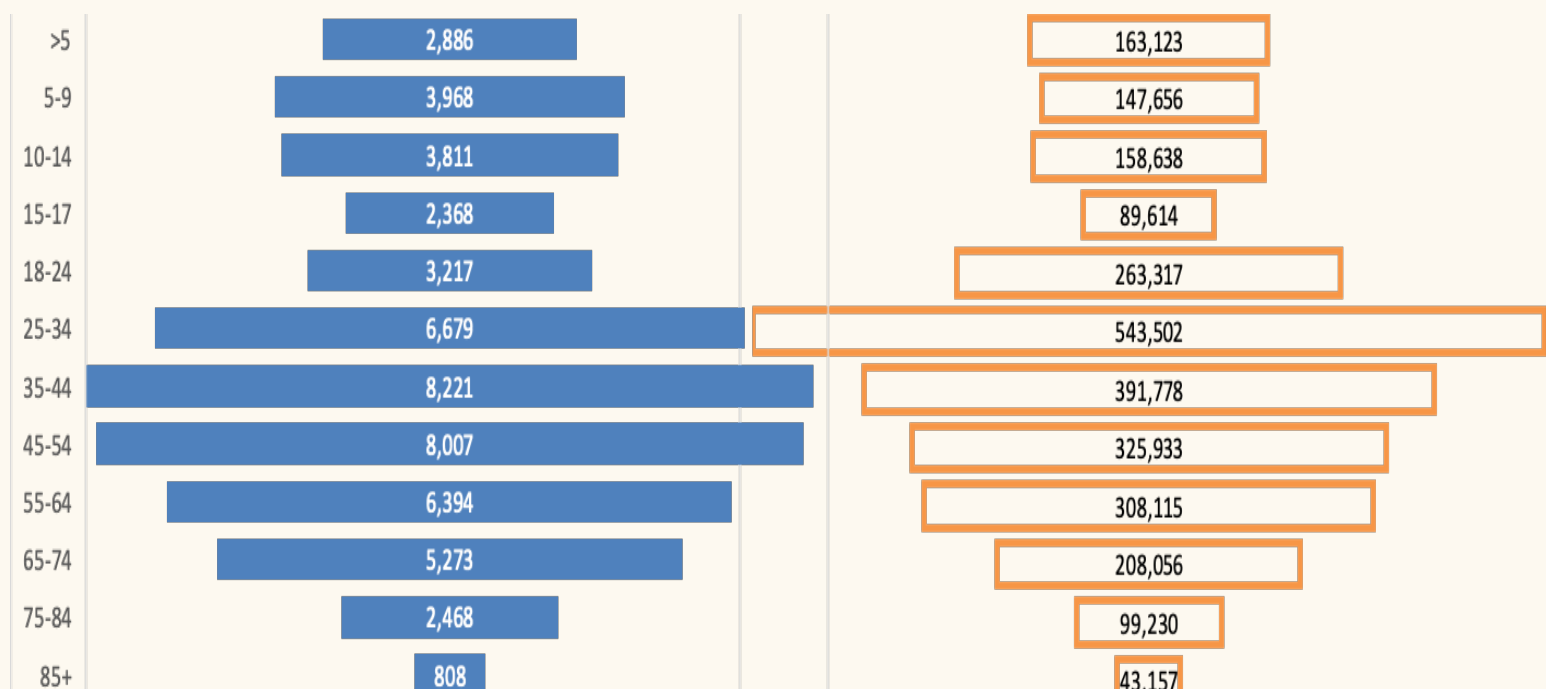
Oak Park racial/ethnic diversity



Oak Park is a truly diverse community. It can be valuable to track growth in “some other race” or two or more races. Census categories can have limitations and can be confusing for respondents or make them feel uncertain in how to identify their response.

Oak Park’s age distribution (below) shows that many more people 25–34 live in Chicago. Age breakouts can indicate housing needs as well.

Age distribution in Oak Park (left) and Chicago (right)



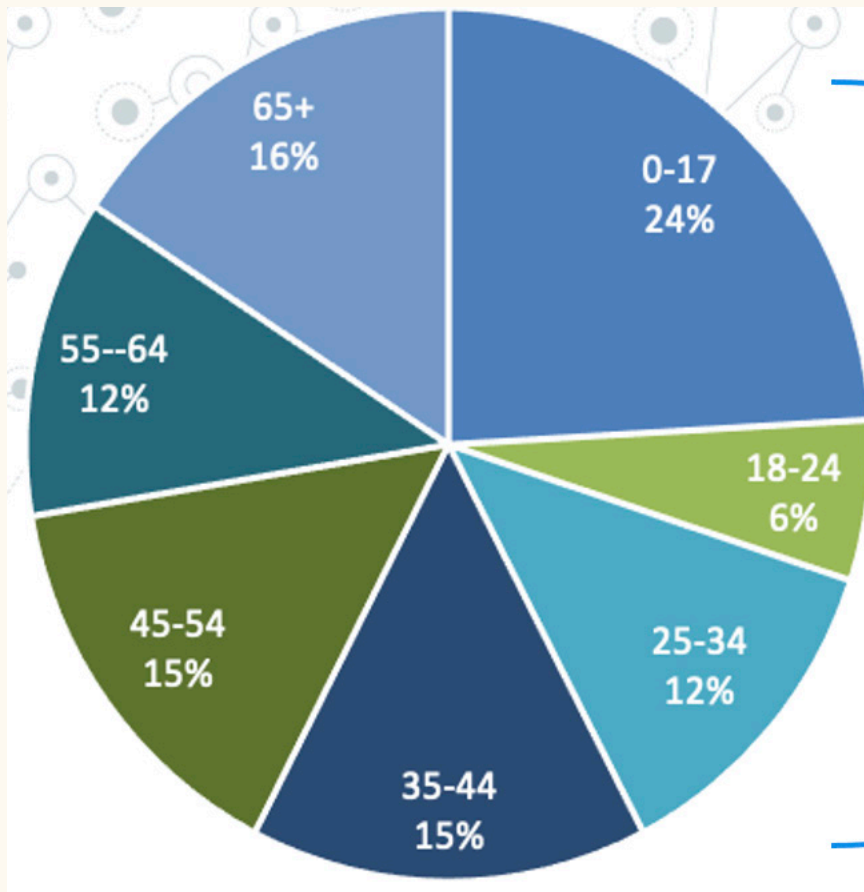
All data tabulated from American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, 2017-2021, by UIC Great Cities Institute.

Heritage and country of origin for Oak Parkers who indicate Hispanic or Asian heritage in the American Community Survey



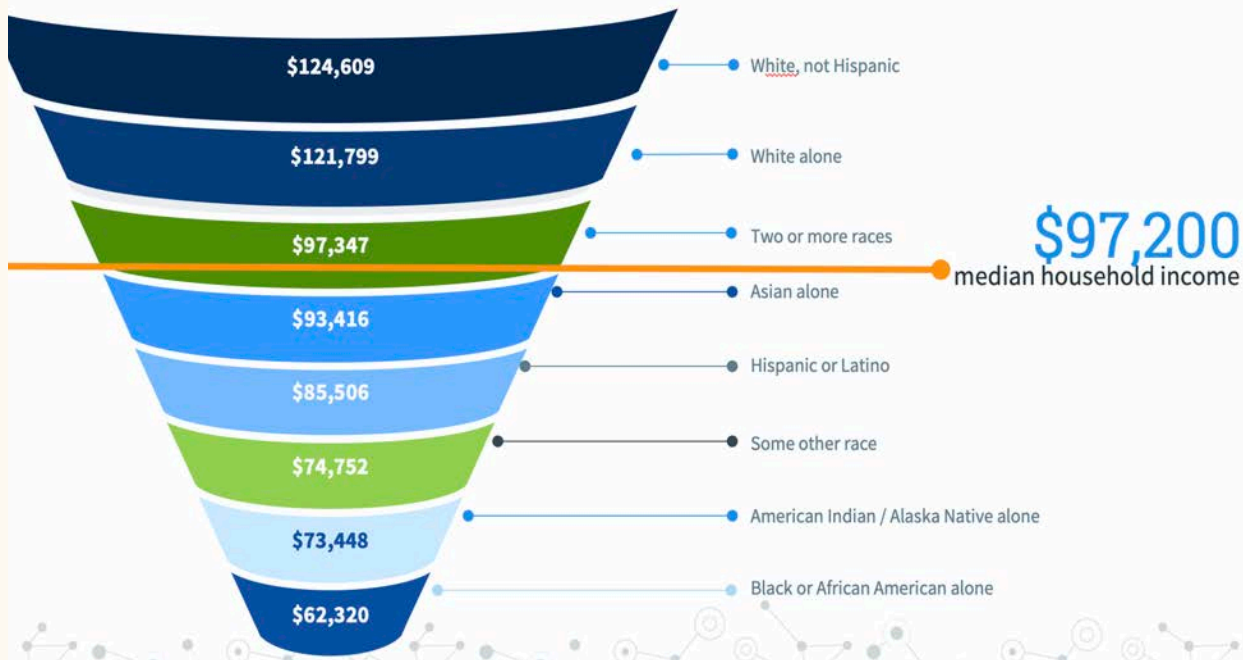
Oak Parkers hail from or recognize their heritage around the world. These images at left show Hispanic and Asian heritage alone. The most common heritage is Mexico for Latin America and Philippines for Asia. It may be valuable for the Village to recognize heritage in racial equity discussions as well. Cultural awareness can enhance communications as well.

Age breakout by percentage



Looking at age data for Oak Park suggests that most people move here after age 24, and most leave after age 17. Young adults 18–24 may need supports. In addition, community narrative about high property taxes and cost of living may lead those age 54+ to move out of Oak Park

Oak Park median household income by race



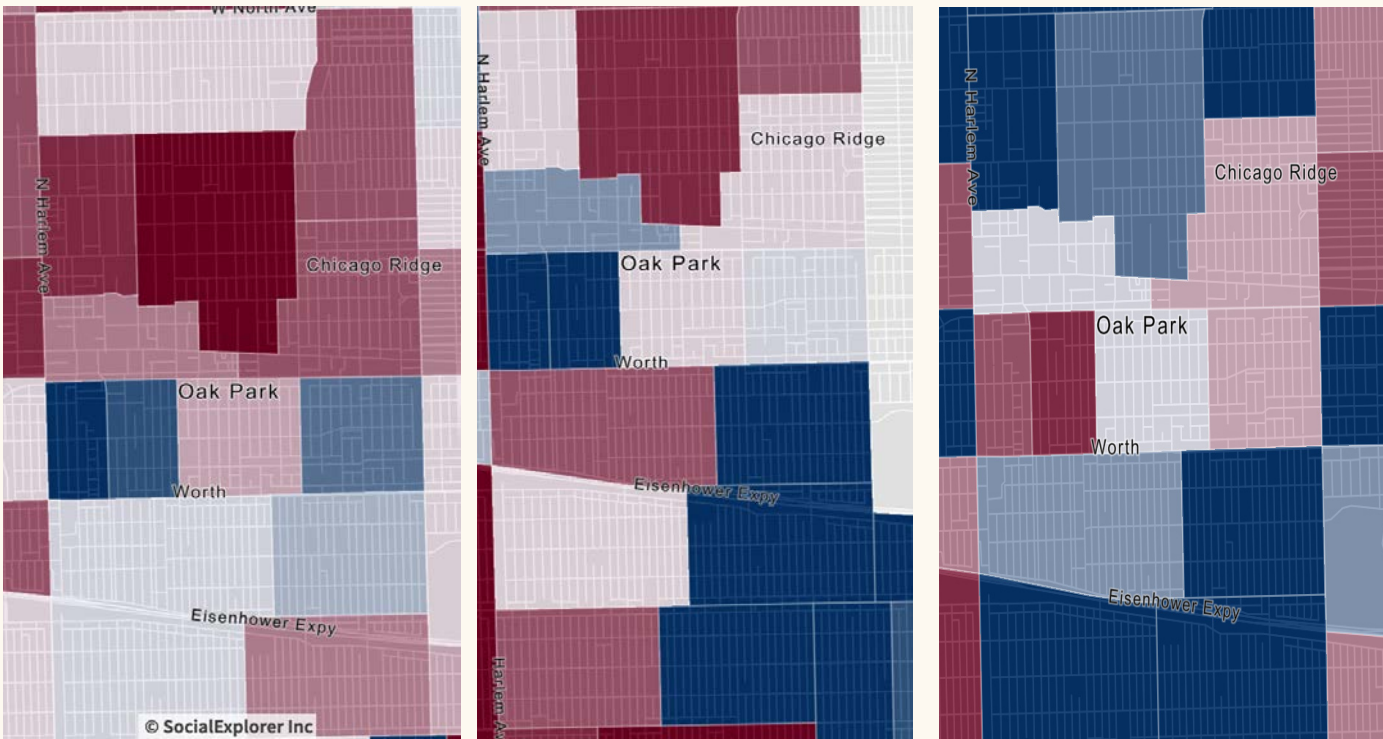
Data indicate significant disparities in household median income by race. The median income of Black households is more than \$30,000 less than white households.

Median household income by other factors



Looking at median household income by other factors, such as homeownership status and gender, continues to reveal disparities among households.

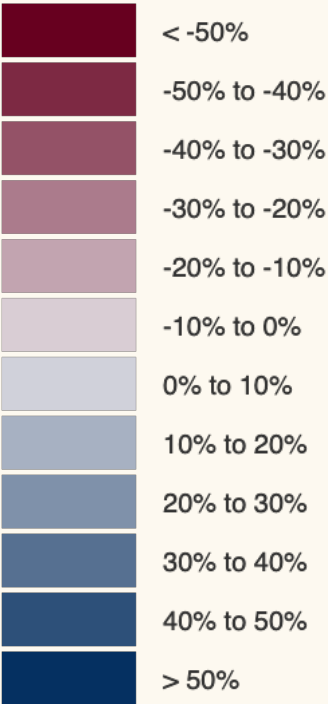
Population growth over time



Black and African American

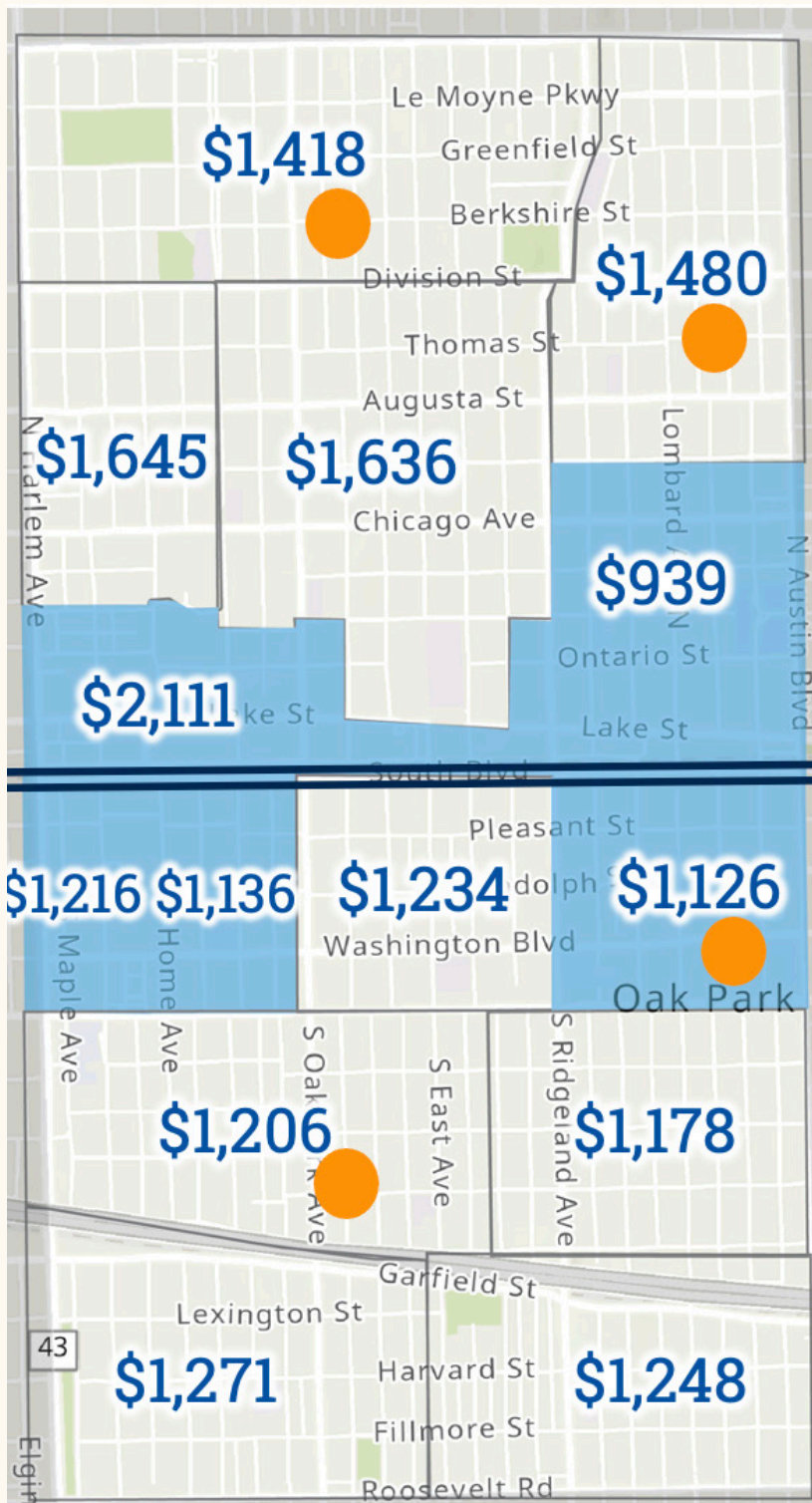
Asian

Hispanic/Latine



The maps above show population trend changes in particular Oak Park Census tracts. Southeast Oak Park has seen the greatest increase in Hispanic and Asian residents. Oak Park's neighbor Berwyn is majority Hispanic, and this may indicate people moving into Oak Park from Berwyn. High Black/African American and Asian population growth is seen in the tracts along Harlem Avenue at the village's western border. These tracts have high numbers of multifamily buildings.

Renter profile: Median rent by Census tract



Blue shows renter-majority tracts. All renter-majority tracts also have the lowest median incomes in Oak Park. Orange dots are tracts where more than 30% of renters experience housing burden (more than 30% of income toward housing costs)

In no tract are homeowners' costs greater than 30% of income.

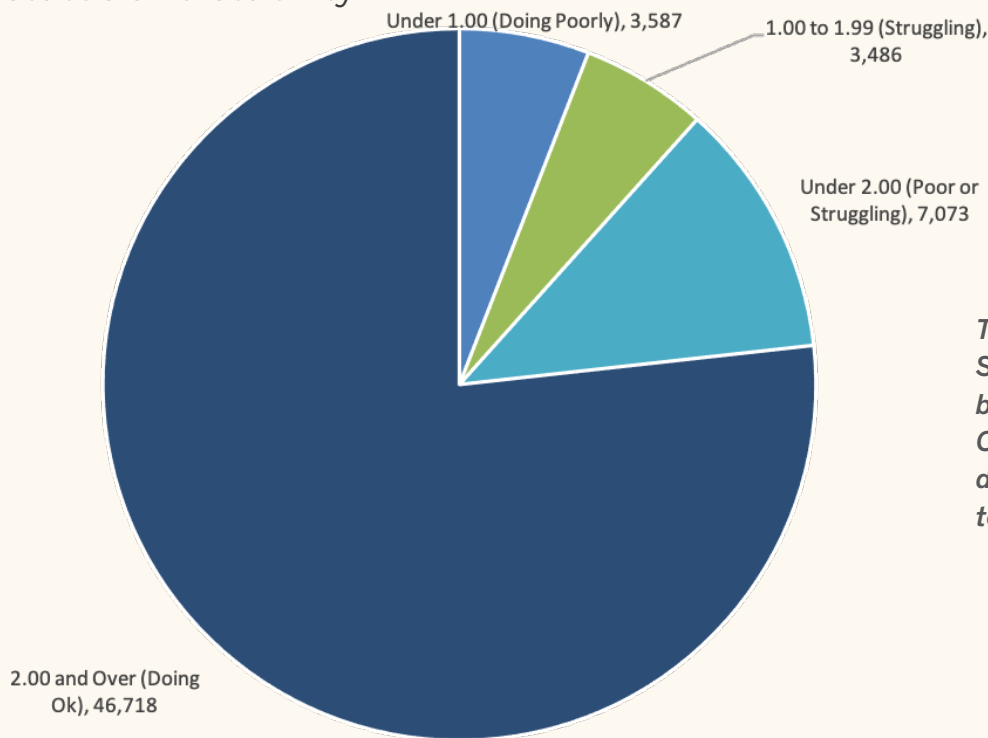
Overall Oak Park has 60:40 owner/renter split; but for tracts in the blue belt it is closer to 70:30.

It may be that larger multifamily buildings on Harlem and Austin influence the full tract.

Even so identifying renter-majority areas may help counter a community narrative or contribute to conversations around renter inclusion.

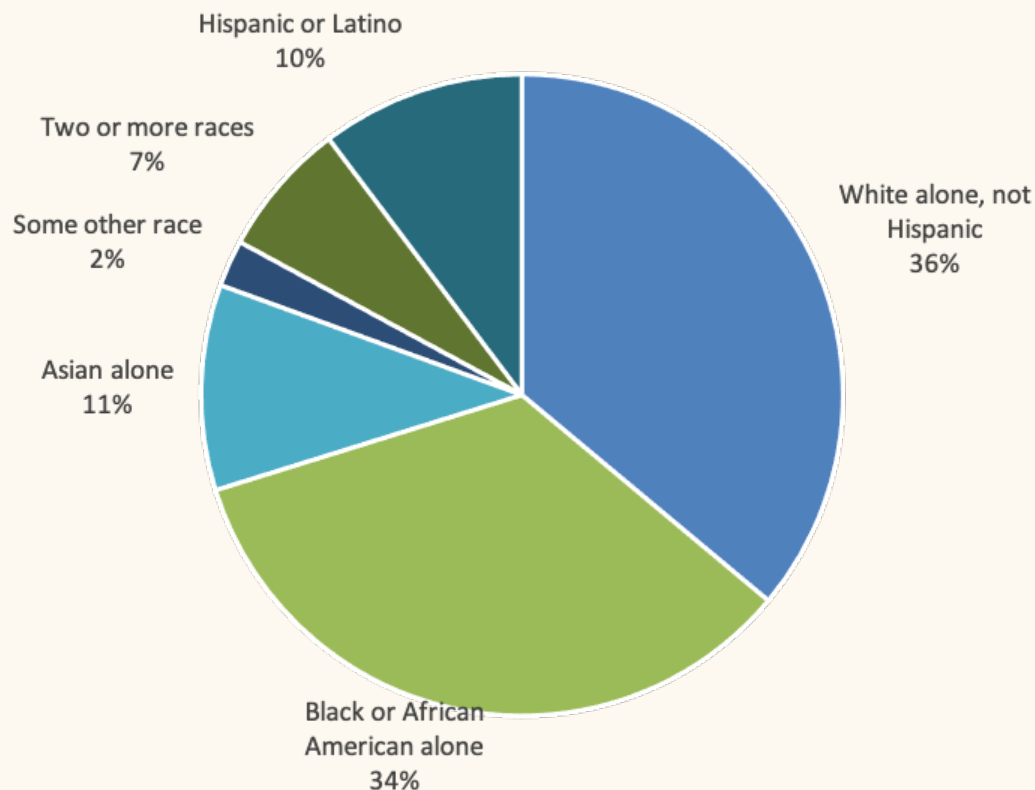
The middle belt of rentals may serve as a barrier physically and for resident perceptions, similar to Austin Boulevard.

Poverty status and stability



The American Community Survey categorizes poverty by ranking. About 25% of Oak Parkers are struggling or doing “poorly” in economic terms.

Race/ethnicity of Oak Park residents who are of poverty status



Poverty status is relatively evenly split between Black and white Oak Park residents. Looking at poverty in particular Census tracts can help determine the population in poverty and their specific needs, such as seniors or families.

- The approaches of the equity statements and policies of Oak Park's nongovernmental community anchors (e.g., the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation and its equity study, Rush Oak Park's Health Equity Study and Racial Justice Action Committee) and other organizations working in the racial equity space (e.g., Race Conscious Dialogue, Nova Collective), present datapoints, research, and outcomes that may benefit the Village in its racial equity work.

Address persistent community narratives about Oak Park that serve to divide residents and affinity groups and prevent many from feeling a sense of belonging or visibility in the community they live in. Contribute to changing those narratives to celebrate Oak Park's resources, diversity, and assets while acknowledging the realities inside the village of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism.

- Local print media are a robust resource and outlet for informing the public about

important news in the village, including as related to racial equity.

- Among Village trustees, co-governments, community organizations, and community anchors, there is overlap (found in staff directories, named partners, and board affiliations) in individuals who participate in many different realms at once. This reveals a tremendous asset of volunteerism and community service. It may also make it harder sometimes for the Village to gain participation from new volunteers or to hear about experiences from residents who have less time and resources to volunteer.
- Residents with high social capital and more community connections are more likely than residents without social capital to know about resources and opportunities available in the community.
- The archive of the Oak Park Housing Collection, 1971–2000, at Oak Park Public Library Special Collections

Equity-related community discussion topics in local media during study



Education

Racist graffiti at schools; equity representation at school board; student voice; equity conversations around district capital projects.



Reparations

Oak Park Reparations Task Force established with Dominican.



Public Safety

Carjacking spike in 2022–early 2023 and other gun-related crimes; 24-hour gas station ordinance.



NIMBYism

Affluent Oak Parkers have been/are against development of various housing projects on Oak Park Ave., Austin, and Ridgeland; as well as zoning updates to allow for multifamily homes.



Neighborhoods

North vs. South Oak Park narrative, Austin as a dividing line, Halloween trick or treaters.



Support for BIPOC Biz

Hate crime incident at local café; public complaints against particular businesses; supporting BIPOC owned business generally

provides a record of racist incidents and a read of the racial climate in Oak Park dating back decades, some of which is reflected in news today—including the Austin Boulevard “divide,” discriminatory housing, police contact with Black men, and stereotypes about areas of Oak Park that persist today.

- A media scan revealed that equity is a constant part of the conversation in Oak Park.

Review all active and past plans and existing policies to determine areas for continuous and incremental improvements, and to ensure that all contribute as much as they can to making Village life and environment more accessible and equitable to all.

- The Village’s comprehensive plan was last updated in 2014. Comprehensive plans tend to be updated every 10 or 20 years. Any upcoming revisions to the comprehensive plan can center racial



equity as well as equitable engagement and outcomes.

- The zoning ordinance may present additional opportunities to encourage different types of housing and inclusion at the neighborhood level and discourage others, such as by requiring developers to provide multiple public benefits; addressing parking restrictions for multifamily buildings across the Village, not just in areas with a high concentration of multifamily buildings; or examining impact fees.
- Language in the zoning ordinance does not prioritize housing among developers' public benefit requirements—affordable housing could be the first example of a public benefit option instead of the last, with minimal to no effect on the content of the ordinance.
- There is opportunity in existing Village ordinances to support business inclusion and increase diversity in procurement, such as by issuing a policy statement, setting metrics for the Village to increase awareness and availability of Minority and Woman-Owned Business Enterprises, or building out the procurement website to provide more information to vendors on bidding processes.
- The robust Climate Ready Oak Park plan can serve as a model for including equity in future plans, such as its direct commitment to spend Village dollars on the most vulnerable and impacted populations, as well as its specific actions to advance equity in Oak Park.
- The currently underway Homes for a Changing Region housing study can prioritize presenting results to the public by race reported, to draw attention to divergent experiences of people of

different race/ethnicities in accessing housing in Oak Park.

- With fourteen active community feedback requests running simultaneously with this research, there is an opportunity to streamline and leverage requests for resident digital engagement.



Phase 2: Internal Assessment

Often, racial equity assessments for local government focus extensively on external stakeholders and temporary policy initiatives that could address issues of the persistent underfunding and outright disinvestment in low-income areas of a municipality. What is often overlooked is how to utilize an equity-driven analysis of the internal environment that could improve performance and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the hundreds of existing programs and policies that may be poorly aligned with the “big picture” outcomes that residents are asking and demanding from their local government. Operationalizing racial equity requires a commitment to shifting the existing organizational culture towards a learning model approach that incentivizes inclusion, innovation, and impact over hoarding information, “siloeing” programs, and adhering to decades-old policies and procedures that marginalize and exclude the most important resource inside of any organization—the people.

Internal stakeholders are not a monolith but collectively are often excluded from analyses of how racial equity can and should be achieved, much to the peril of the best intentions of external stakeholders to hold local governments accountable. Achieving equity goals in municipal operations is a necessary condition for ultimately achieving equity outcomes across all communities, with those that are most marginalized being centered in all efforts. This concept of “targeted universalism” means that as institutional practices within local government become more inclusive and equitable across major operational areas (e.g., human resources, talent cultivation,

finance and budgeting, procurement and operations) for the most vulnerable staff in the organization, all staff will benefit from performance improvement. Take, for example, internal communications. Identifying process change that ensures that staff with limited access to desks and computers, who may be limited English, and who may benefit from printed material and ADA-compliant formats will benefit all staff, not just those who may need more support. The following recommendations are based on interviews with senior staff. Additional focus groups were planned but placed on hold as capacity issues during the time of this assessment necessitated tabling efforts to engage with frontline staff.

Increase and improve internal communications and increase the understanding of what different departments do among all staff.

- There are no organization-wide orientation programs, and new staff are not introduced across the organization.
- Internal staff must have a better understanding of the organization. Not enough people know what everybody else does.
- To increase staff understanding, with all the surveys and results that are released, employees should have at least 30 minutes to read and discuss the results and to learn and share from them. Often there is no positive feedback loop to incorporate survey results.
- We really need a way to learn about what other parts of the organization do—

there should be a VOP 101 that allows employees to understand better what people do.

- Practice more often and value more highly proactive communications and training efforts related to workplace safety and emergency procedures for staff.
- Sustainability initiatives and values had limited cross-departmental support. There is a need for cross-functional teams and cross-functional culture to develop in the Village.
- Language access resources should be easily available and expected for every program and event, without the need for special approval. (Mentioned by a majority of staff interviewees.)

Review policies and establish clarity and transparency in processes and procedures across departments.

- Review existing policies and their amendments, and ones that have never been written down, such as holidays, family leave, and pay equity.
- Require that all programs incorporate a racial equity impact assessment (REIA) before being added to the annual budget, and initiate annual REIA evaluation of programs, with the expectation that programs and policies will be continuously redesigned to achieve better outcomes.
- Use the monthly Supervisor Townhalls and other shared senior and middle-manager spaces to model a learning culture for best practices and idea sharing and collaborative problem-solving across departments.

Address limited staff recognition and teambuilding opportunities across the organization to improve employee engagement and retention

- Identify how the space within the organization can more intentionally contribute to the feeling of belonging or to employee mental health and wellness.
- Create a clear plan on how employee inclusion and belonging needs to connect to a policy review that reduces barriers such as lack of transparency or clear processes that prevent staff from feeling like they are trusted or equally valued.
- Elevate the value of employee recognition and teambuilding with performance metrics and achievement of outcomes through employee working groups that are empowered to identify where opportunities exist or need to be created.
- Co-create a consistent set of engagements and trainings with managers and employees that bridge the communication and trust gap between the two groups – engage in collaborative problem-solving within the organization.

Create a strategic and integrated program for trainings, professional development, and performance management.

- Performance management is much more efficient and cost-effective than continually recruiting people—we can get that through thinking about an equity lens.
- There is no regular or annual internal training on essential infrastructure like the phone system, emergency

procedures, and benefits. It would be far more transparent if there were two set times a year for all staff, new and seasoned, to sign up and learn updates across key areas.

- There is a need for a culture of continuous improvement and assessing what is working and what is not is needed.

Examine how best practices in hiring and training across different departments can be supported and improved by shared HR functions.

- What kinds of trainings and orientations and staff engagement fall within the purview of HR versus separate departments?
- Where can capacity be built for more learning and training opportunities across departments, for example, employee service plans, or middle-manager trainings, or more in-depth and regular employee orientations that include cultural competency training.
- How can we be supportive of empowering and engaging employees while ensuring that any potential human resource and legal regulations are followed

Create clear promotion pathways and improve recruitment and retention of current staff, making the clear case for how diversity and inclusion improves performance and impact.

- The Fire Department needs more recruits with an emphasis on cultural competency and/or language ability
- Which hiring practices would reflect the

organizational understanding of diversity as a human resource?

- Public Works would like more structured professional development for front-line staff and middle managers.
- Specifically improve the retention of current, more senior staff of diverse backgrounds
- Improve the content of onboarding new employees so that core values and organizational commitments to inclusion and diversity are introduced as part of the shared organizational onboarding process

Review engagement and communications that moves from inside Village Hall to outside.

- Establish a policy that the Village will compensate community members who provide significant time toward Village initiatives so that those with limited resources can participate fully.
- Slow down the policy and program process and include more stakeholders to create policies the public actually can access and utilize.
- Offer more opportunities for the public to learn about how to develop ordinances and on Robert's Rules of Order.
- For boards and commissions, engage in a full review of the residents who serve, those who would bring more diversity and perspectives and why they don't serve, and what kind of training and support BCCs need to successfully support the village.

- Paper communications and ADA accessibility are a top priority - not everyone is comfortable or trusts the internet or social media such as seniors and limited English speaking populations and certain front-line staff have limited access to computers or the internet for important organization-wide announcements
- There is an opportunity to formalize and support nonprofits that assist Adjudication with diversion programs. The Village should have an open database that is searchable by contract, amount, and services rendered for internal stakeholders and the public.
- Increase accessibility for processing items. Residents with accessibility challenges regularly ask if they can call in their credit card versus coming to Village Hall. There should be a telephone process for handling items we normally require an in-person visit for.
- Provide greater access to Village programs and services through the Village website. Depending on the program, activity, or information one is seeking, the existing site can be impossible to navigate or access.

Public Engagement by Departments

Core departments in the village engage with the public daily, from public works to adjudication to the office of sustainability. Departments were asked to describe their existing public engagement practices and how that engagement informs how they create programs and policies. We also asked for lists of external partners that departments regularly partner with to deliver social services, programming and support to the residents of Oak Park.

The ***Office of Sustainability*** has the best examples of how the village can model consistent engagement with external stakeholders:

For general education and program outreach, the Office of Sustainability typically sets up tables at existing community events to provide general info, such as BarrieFest, Convivencia, Juneteenth, Day in Our Village, Oak Park Farmers' Market. Staff typically cohost in-person educational events with the Oak Park Public Library and an external speaker, such as [the Citizen Utility Board's] Home Decarbonization 101 and Solar Switch Chicagoland's Solar Power Hour. Occasionally we host more technical webinars for specialized audiences with an external speaker, such as Illinois Green Business Alliance's How to Save Money and Be Green.

For engagement around a specific policy, sustainability staff take a different approach. The general public is engaged through an online survey at EngageOakPark.com (a Bang the Table site). The public is notified of the survey through the usual Village communications channels—mainly social media and the weekly

e-newsletter for subscribers.

Sustainability staff will also request that community partners spread the word via COOP (Climate Ready Outreach for Oak Park), a new collaborative network from local community-based organizations that is facilitated by One Earth, a local nonprofit. Depending on the topic, sustainability staff may also do this for Plant Green (an older collaborative network for local institutions that is facilitated by Seven Generations Ahead and funded by the local community foundation) and/or C4 (Cross-Community Climate Collaborative), which is a newer network for West Cook local governments that is facilitated by Seven Generations Ahead and Urban Efficiency Group and grant-funded through the Cook County Office of Sustainability. Sustainability staff may also post in relevant community-based Facebook groups. The results of the survey are intended to inform Village staff policy proposals. However, many policies are not under the sole control of the sustainability division, and final ordinance language is shaped by other departments, especially law.

The public is also notified or engaged on policy via citizen commission (usually the Environment & Energy Commission) and Board of Trustee meetings. Sustainability staff will also engage community members directly on policy issues, using affinity-based focused groups and human-centered design methods. Feedback from commissions and community focus groups are directly integrated into the policy proposals made by Sustainability staff.

The ***Village Clerk's Office*** does a lot of the Village's civic engagement work, but needs to be more integrated with other departments so that existing engagement in other departments incorporates the opportunities that the Clerk's Office promotes around volunteer opportunities and voter registration, for example.

- The Clerk's Office registers voters at senior centers and high schools; we offer volunteer opportunities through Boards, Commissions and Committees (official governing groups supported by the village known as BCCs)
- The Clerk also serves as a community liaison.
- Most of our programs are geared towards owners and more targeted outreach and programming should be centered around renters.
- Digitizing our documents are critical to increase everyday access and transparency outside of the efforts that are taken with FOIA requests. There should be clear and updated lists of resolutions, FOIA requests and who serves on BCCs and what is being reviewed and which village staff are supporting the BCCs.

The *Adjudication Office*:

There is a lot of confusion between enforcement and adjudication, and in our department, we work with many nonprofits.

This office balances the need for enforcement of penalties and fines with the resolution of issues through a

more equitable, effective and efficient approach to juvenile justice. The office would like to better formalize a diversionary program for youth defense—follow-up for documents, information. The Village usually will not prosecute but instead provide legal advice and connections to NPOs [nonprofit organizations] that can provide social services support to at-risk youth. We provide mediation training for staff but could expand to training for staff on identifying youth with learning disabilities and mental health issues. We have ongoing relationships with a range of NPOs that can be a potential fit for at-risk youth who have been issued a citation.

Examples are:

- Rosecrance Substance Screenings, Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township (active)
- Water Bottles Donated for Adjudication Summer Martial Arts Day Camp by Sales Enterprises (one time)
- Martial Arts Instruction for Adjudication Summer Martial Arts Day Camp, by Master S. H. Yu Martial Arts (active)

The list of providers shared by the Adjudication Office signals that there is a need for a shared database across departments.

From the *Office of Development Customer Services*:

- Regular public education in plain English and Spanish of all the programs and work that we already do
- We give potential ideas for programs and then we ask for feedback and then occasionally make changes to the programs or activities to address the issues raised (Short Term Rental, Business Grants, Landlord Training, Pilot-Parking Program meetings)
- Advise staff of potential pitfalls in proposed program or something that could be simplified to obtain greater participation

Public Knowledge of Village Programs and Activities

Based upon senior manager responses to the general question of what they perceive the public's knowledge of their departments' work, these were their responses:

- We need to promote a better understanding of climate justice and environmental racism; how environmental injustice is demonstrated in Oak Park currently; how environmental policies and programs can further equity when appropriately designed.
- We are their tax dollars at work.
- We are serving them, this is the role of local government, and that people are part of the success of local government
- For public works—it is a big question—people don't have an understanding of the effort and coordination on how to manage infrastructure. And we're in the background—when we're doing our

job correctly, you don't know there is an issue.

- And that we are on the side of residents. We think about and discuss their needs and challenges every day. New programs and policies are not just done to create challenges, but we need to do a better job at incorporating feedback into how we design and implement programs.
- Despite all of the efforts the village makes to engage different stakeholders, we regularly encounter members of the public who do not know about all of the services and help we already provide.



Phase 3: External Engagement

Due to the volume of feedback received across multiple inputs, these needs have been organized by theme.

Acknowledging the Process

Issue a statement that publicly acknowledges that racism happens in Oak Park.

- Most participants described the need to address the perception of Oak Park's image and communications as welcoming, diverse, and inclusive because they believed it does not fully acknowledge or address the experiences of racism that people encounter in the community and institutional settings and it hinders the advancement of racial equity.
- Many participants shared that either they or someone they knew had experienced racism in a professional setting.

Commit to racial equity and specific systemic actions that forward racial equity.

- Most participants reported the need for the Village to take public action on its historical commitment to racial equity.
- Many participants expressed the desire for the Village to implement the findings and recommendations from various racial equity research undertaken to date, including the Berry-Dunn report, Freedom to Thrive Oak Park, Community Voices, and others.
- Some participants expressed the need for the Village to create explicit internal and external policies that advance racial equity.

- Many participants stated that it gives them hope that the Village grapples with equity issues and takes action to address racial equity.
- One participant noted that it gives them joy that Oak Park can seriously consider innovative ideas to advance racial equity because there are more resources in the community than there are in other communities.

Set as a goal that all Oak Parkers have an increased sense of community belonging as a result of (1) increased Village relationship building and engagement with residents, particularly people of color and business owners, and (2) expanding inclusivity in language and accessibility.

- Most participants shared that either they or the people of color they know or work directly with do not feel a sense of belonging in Oak Park.
- Many participants reported a need to trust the accuracy of storytelling, lived experiences, and qualitative data around racial experiences.
- Most participants reported that Oak Park's history gave them joy, including housing policies designed to promote diversity and integration.
- Many participants shared that the diversity in Oak Park gave them joy, including a few participants who reported moving to Oak Park specifically because of its diverse community.

Support leaders of color and leaders charged with advancing racial equity

by addressing biased beliefs, policies, procedures, and practices at Village Hall as well as across other governments and community partners in Oak Park and during public interactions and community engagements.

- Many participants shared the general need to support the work of leaders of color and those hired to advance racial equity. Participants shared a consistent perception that leaders of color are often challenged more rigorously and frequently both internally in their institutions and nonprofit organizations and by the public in Village affairs.
- Many participants stated that hiring the Village Manager, Chief Equity Officer, and Collective Impact Manager gives them hope that the Village can make progress in advancing racial equity.
- Some participants reported the need to address racist behavior—such as personal attacks or alliance building—by residents at public meetings toward leaders of color, especially toward Black women.
- Some participants shared that people of color in leadership positions are asked to prove their expertise over and over again both internally in their organizations and publicly when implementing new programs or initiatives, particularly programs aimed at advancing racial equity.
- Many participants expressed a need to create safe spaces to meet and dialogues for residents across races and socioeconomic demographics to meet and learn about one another and develop relationships.
- Some participants shared a need for the Village to adopt engagement activities that focus on trust building, relationship building, and listening to needs, such as one-on-one conversations and small-group discussions with specific BIPOC populations and/or in specific neighborhoods.
- Some participants shared the need to create or revive a dialogue series on racial equity to have hard conversations that can be transformative for residents and institutions. Examples shared that have produced positive impacts include the America to Me—related dialogue series that led to changes in the education system, the Dinner & Dialogue racial equity series led by the Community Relations Commission, and the organization Race Conscious Dialogues.
- Some participants stated that they found hope and joy in the Dinner & Dialogue community race dialogues and in the ongoing Race Conscious Dialogues.
- Some participants shared the need to develop a greater understanding of how individuals' actions, no matter how small, have an impact on others, whether professionally or personally.

Going into the Community

Develop engagement activities focused on building relationships, listening, and engaging in dialogue and conversation to foster trust, connections, learning, and safe spaces for difficult racial equity conversations.

Develop an educational campaign that educates the public on the four levels of racism and how to advance racial equity.

- Many participants shared a desire to foster deeper understanding in the community about the need for racial equity, types and levels of racism, and how to embrace racial equity without fearing that it takes something away from themselves or from someone else.
- Many participants reflected on sentiments among community members that are barriers to advancing racial equity, such as that racial equity feels like a “problem” that is too big to solve, that people feel overwhelmed and do not know where to begin to advance racial equity, and that some people believe that racial equity is just the “issue of the day.”
- Some participants expressed a need to hear confirmation or acknowledgment from other community members and from the Village of Oak Park that racism exists in Oak Park.

Ensure that all community dialogues and interactions around racial equity implement guidelines to ensure a safe, constructive discussion and are facilitated by neutral facilitators trained in cultural sensitivity and power dynamics.

- Many participants interested in having hard conversations about advancing racial equity shared concerns about doing so, including (1) skepticism driven by others’ internalized racism and interpersonal biases; (2) an inability to freely, fully, and safely participate without doing so having a negative impact socially or professionally; and (3) misuse of a dialogue space to push an agenda,

impede work to advance racial equity, or allow for stonewalling tactics, especially in discussions of specific policies and programs.

Exert extra effort to reach individuals who are typically marginalized in community discussions, who are considered “hard to reach,” or who often have more barriers to participation and co-create engagement with them—in Oak Park, this includes people of color, lower-income households, renters, and residents in socially vulnerable Census tracts.

- Many participants expressed the need for partners and people of color and individuals who are typically marginalized in community discussions to be involved in planning engagement activities.

Be transparent and clear about how much decision-making authority community engagement participants have in Village of Oak Park engagement activities and how participant feedback and input from engagement are used in final decision-making for Village of Oak Park programs, services, and policy.

- Many participants expressed the need for partners, and people of color to have decision-making power in the programs, services, or policies that affect them.
- Some participants expressed the need for an Oak Park-wide community-building project related to equity that would have a common agenda across all racial/ethnic and affinity groups.

Create intentional feedback loops and reporting mechanisms with partners and community members on racial equity

initiatives, programs, and services to build positive relationships and trust, identify areas for improvement, and drive change.

- Many participants reported a need to create a feedback culture (where individuals feel free, safe, and encouraged to share and receive feedback without anyone being defensive or getting offended) to build racial equity both among and within institutions and organizations.
- Some participants shared that continued research, listening sessions, and surveys without reporting back on what has or has not been implemented has been perceived as a way to delay acting on racial equity issues.

Outreach and Communications

Reduce participation fatigue by creating an annual community engagement plan.

- Participation in external engagement was lower than anticipated given the extent of outreach and follow-up conducted. Low interest in participation from active stakeholders (e.g., partners, religious and faith-based, businesses, chambers, nonprofits) demonstrates a need for additional relationship-building and probable participation fatigue. There was low email response and sign-up to listening sessions, low response to telephone follow-up, and low response from board/commissions to email and telephone requests for interviews, and for feedback from survey/worksheets.
- Many participants reported an initial reluctance to participate for a variety of reasons including: (1) participation fatigue in general and, in particular as it relates to taking surveys, and (2) disappointment, frustration, and/or

lack of trust as a result of not seeing the impact of their previous participation, not seeing how the feedback/input was used, and/or led to an impact, change, or action.

Develop and tailor outreach materials and strategies to the needs of individuals who are typically marginalized in community discussions, who are considered “hard to reach,” or who often have more barriers to participation—in Oak Park, this includes people of color, lower-income households, renters, and residents in socially vulnerable Census tracts.

- Most of the participants reported a need to better engage people of color and individuals who are typically marginalized in community discussions..
- Most participants reported a perception that the Village of Oak Park did not fully and actively engage communities of color and individuals who are typically marginalized in a wide range of civic engagement activities.
- Many participants reported that either they or the residents they worked directly with were unaware of the Village of Oak Park’s Engage Oak Park website, and how to sign up and participate.

Provide amenities to increase the inclusion of individuals who are typically marginalized in community discussions, who are considered “hard to reach,” or who often have more barriers to participation—in Oak Park, this includes people of color, lower-income households, renters, and residents in socially vulnerable Census tracts and reduce barriers to participation.

- Most participants shared the need to include support for more inclusive



Community Engagement Priorities

All aspects of this research demonstrated a need for the Village to develop and implement a comprehensive community engagement plan. As the Village develops a racial equity action plan in the future, to improve participation numbers overall and foster anti-racist or equity-driven community engagement, GCI recommends the following priorities:

MESSAGING

State clearly and often that the Village is actively working to increase participation from people of color and to reach more residents with information on news, resources, initiatives and more.

State clearly and often that inclusion means that all Oak Parkers feel a sense of belonging and welcome in their community, including in having the right to share their voice with the Village to influence policies and programs.

State clearly and often that Village leaders are interested in building trustful, meaningful relationships with current and new connections.

PRACTICES

Existing communications reach very many Oak Parkers, particularly via print or email newsletter. The Village can build on that baseline by diversifying engagement activities into different formats—flyers, posters, message groups, small-group discussions, and so on—that meet residents where they are.

Focus on relationship building with different affinity groups and extend invitations for them to co-create engagement activities with the Village.

Work across Village projects, studies, and goal areas to streamline the number of requests for community engagement and other redundancies and to leverage existing feedback.

OUTCOMES

Develop loops and other pathways to ensure that any community engagement data or feedback is incorporated in some way into policies and decision making.

Develop racial equity success metrics with public input and share progress toward them with residents and other stakeholders. For example, X number of introductory meetings to build relationships, an X% increase in the number of renters who visit public forums, finalized review of X number of policies within one year, and so on.

RACIAL EQUITY SPECIFIC

Acknowledge the hard work, challenges, and discomforts of some in advancing racial equity work while also celebrating that such difficult community work can foster joy, hope, inclusion, and belonging for many.

Ground-truth data, findings, policy proposals, and other decisions related to racial equity or with a racial equity impact with the public and develop opportunities to co-create the same.

Adopt anti-racism language and communications, including educating the public on the four levels of racism, in all engagement activities.



participation of individuals who are typically marginalized in engagement activities and Village of Oak Park boards/commissions including participation stipends, childcare, meals/refreshments, language access, interpretation, and culturally aware neutral facilitators.

Work with partners on engagement efforts including expanding outreach efforts to communities of color.

- Many participants expressed interest in collaborating with the Village of Oak Park on community engagement efforts including but not limited to conducting outreach to their networks in communities of color.

***Communicating What the Village Can Do
Improve communications to create better awareness of the roles and authority of the Village of Oak Park and other conterminous units of government.***

- Most participants reported the need for more clarity on the role and authority of the Village of Oak Park and the other conterminous units of government (Township, Park District, etc.).

Create more equitable access to programs of services throughout the Village of Oak Park.

- Access to programs and services across the village including Village of Oak Park, coterminous units of government, and nonprofits organization programs and services was described services they needed when they needed them.
- The need to develop equitable access was shared by the majority of participants. Equitable access was described as

being more human-centered in the design and delivery of programs and services including (1) having both in-person and virtual options whenever possible; (2) offering programs and services on days of the week and times of the day that work best for the people being served; (3) providing translation and language access; and (4) ensuring cultural awareness in the design and implementation of programs of services including cultural awareness in language choices.

Develop a centralized communications system to create better awareness of programs of services offered in Oak Park. The Village of Oak Park should serve as the lead in coordinating information on all Oak Park programs and services offered including providing a central location to find all information and/or referrals to other conterminous units of government and main partners.

- Lack of awareness of existing programs and services was shared as an equity need and a challenge for people to be able to receive the programs, services, and information they need.
- The majority of participants expressed that either they or the residents they worked directly with had a lack of clarity around where to go to find information on programs and services and which Oak Park entity provided which programs and services.

Create a consistent culture of collaboration, trust, and inclusion with partners that honors partners and their expertise.

- Many participants with funded grants or contracts reported positive partnerships and/or relationships with the Village

of Oak Park including having active engagement with the Village of Oak Park.

- Some participants described effective and productive collaborative relationships with the Village of Oak Park while others shared frustration around lack of communication, lack of shared information and decision-making, utilization of experience or expertise, or feeling “tokenized.”
- Most participants expressed the need to deepen collaborative efforts between their organization/institution and the Village of Oak Park including (1) creating models to collectively address equity needs and issues together utilizing everyone’s expertise and networks; (2) improved utilization of regularly scheduled meetings to engage in collective problem-solving and decision-making; (3) reducing duplication of efforts to better serve the community (programs, services, and events); (4) improved data collection and information sharing to increase effectiveness; and (5) institutionalizing knowledge of partnerships to increase efficiency and effectiveness through staffing transitions.

Create information-sharing mechanisms with racial equity partners and improve communication systems between and among the Village of Oak Park, conterminous units of government, and partners to ensure better coordination.

- Some participants reported a need to improve and formalize communication pathways between and among the Village of Oak Park, conterminous units of government, and partners to ensure awareness of and information about partners, programs, and services are

institutionalized and better coordinated.

- Many participants expressed a need to create a system to improve information sharing between the Village of Oak Park, its partners, and conterminous units of government around new licenses or permits to new businesses, new programs and services, new regulations, etc to ensure greater effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. Example: Partner who coordinates all service providers in a particular field finding out about new business openings by word of mouth rather than a formal communication mechanism.

Promoting Business Inclusion

Revise grants, contracts, and permit applications and processes to expand opportunities for people of color to own more businesses.

- Many participants reported a need for the Village of Oak Park’s grants, contracts, and permitting application processes to be better attuned to the limitations, legal requirements, and needs of small businesses/organizations in particular fields rather than standardized application requirements designed for large businesses/organizations.
- Many participants shared the need to expand the number of contracts that people of color including adding a minority-owned requirement clause for all contracts.

Work with the Oak Park Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Oak Park to support diversely owned businesses and foster reciprocal economic development in the Austin community.

- Some participants reported a need for more diversity among small business owners in Oak Park versus the perception of diversity due to multicultural restaurants and retail.
- Some participants reported that cross-border shopping in Oak Park creates an inequitable economic drain for nearby communities like Austin.
- Some participants described the need to build bridges and reciprocity between Oak Park and Austin small businesses like the relationship that exists between Oak Park and River Forest.

Supporting Existing Community Efforts
Develop comprehensive strategies to address affordable housing (see Contextual Research section for more detailed recommendation).

- Most participants reported that affordable housing is needed generally.
- Participants reported the concerns that the combination of high property taxes and an aging housing stock constrains and prevents people's ability to age in place and build generational wealth.
- Participants reported a mismatch between affordable rental rates and the amount needed by owners to cover all costs including property taxes
- Participants reported specific needs for three-bedroom apartments for families, more accessible housing for people with disabilities, and more transitional housing
- Participants reported concerns that Oak Park is becoming less diverse demographically as a result of housing

affordability and high property taxes, such as students of color not being able to graduate because their families cannot afford to stay in Oak Park or families of color moving right after a child graduates from high school.

- Some participants shared the need to set aside more new units as affordable, ease construction times, revise zoning to encourage more equitable development, and increase regulations around inspections and/or permits to slow down or prevent homes from being flipped quickly with poor rehabilitation work

Support programs and services that address racial inequities in basic needs.

- Some participants reported specific needs for dental care for children and mental health care for young Black men.

Support Oak Park school districts' systemic changes that advance racial equity and encourage equitable funding and systemic change across the district.

- Most participants reported that the America to Me docuseries on racial disparities at Oak Park River Forest High School and subsequent community dialogues were a watershed moment for racial equity in Oak Park.
- Some participants stated that they found hope in the impact of the America to Me community dialogue series and the subsequent school curriculum restructuring.
- Some participants shared concerns about inequitable funding across public schools in Oak Park that leads to different access to educational resources.

- Some participants shared feeling they had to fight for rigorous academics and educational access for children of color.
- Some participants reported students sharing experiences of being discouraged from attending college or hearing disparaging comments about community colleges or vocational training.
- Some participants shared finding hope in racial equity work that changed student discipline models, shifting toward education around student behavior and restorative justice models.
- Many participants described a class divide between North Oak Park and South Oak Park.
- Many participants reported the need to acknowledge that racial equity issues do not stop at the Village's borders or at specific areas or central streets in Oak Park.
- Some participants discussed the findings from the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation's Community Voices report, which looks at equity needs in Oak Park's neighbors to the west as well, prioritizing education, health care, wealth equality, and safety, belonging, and stability.
- Some participants expressed that race and class issues were intertwined and a need for equity strategies to address both.

Work with partners to enhance existing cultural/ethnic programming opportunities and awareness of cultural differences.

- Many participants reported a need for the Village of Oak Park and/or partners to provide more cultural and ethnic programming that is not festivals (e.g., music, art, history, cooking).
- Many participants reported that the variety of ways Oak Parkers embrace and celebrate multiculturalism gives them joy.
- Some participants reported a perception that a lack of awareness of different cultural expressions and languages creates racial tensions and discrimination among community members.

Foster economic opportunities and growth in lower-income areas and communities surrounding Oak Park.

- Many participants described inequities between Oak Park and the Austin neighborhood of Chicago, particularly visible race and class differences.

Review the built environment and examine ways including conducting traffic studies and the feasibility of public restrooms downtown to determine how to create a more welcoming and open environment.

- Most participants described the need to resolve inequity in the built environment specifically the cul-de-sacs and one-way streets that give the impression of blocking access to Oak Park streets and alleyways.
- Some participants reported the need for public restrooms in downtown Oak Park to make visiting the downtown area more accessible.

Engaging and Supporting Volunteer Commissions

Improve communications with and support provided to volunteer commissions so they can carry out their responsibilities with clarity and transparency in their service to the Village and ultimately residents.

- All commissions identified racial equity as a component of their work, some as a more explicit component than others.

All commissions, with the exception of one, indicated that encouraging diverse representation on their commission was a responsibility of theirs.

- Commissions and boards have varying needs for resources and support that the Village can support them in receiving, such as access to publicly available or Village-collected data, information about participation in and goals of Village programs, and support in reaching more residents via Village communications channels.
- There is a need for Village support in diversifying the residents who participate in commissions—this may be due to lack of knowledge among residents, inability to commit to evening participation once a month, or other factors.
- Half of respondents ranked “different representation” as most important to their work to advance equity
- Additional write-in comments indicated a need for support in diversifying membership and reaching more and different residents.
- Commissions that deal with more “traditional” or technical built environment topics—Zoning, Information Systems, Building Code, and Environment and Energy—tended to rank “training on incorporating DEI” into their work plans as the most important support to their work.

Providing Additional Supports to the Community Relations Commission

Acknowledge that, given the CRC’s history of disbandment and reinstatement, there is a need across all Village Board members and staff to acknowledge past harms and build trust and there is an opportunity to draw on the CRC’s racial equity commitment to leverage Village efforts.

- The CRC members’ commitment, expertise, and community experience are an asset to the Village in its work to advance racial equity.
- Village staff and previous consultants have caused harm to community members by ignoring or glossing over their personal documented experiences related to racial inequities.
- There may be a role for the CRC to vocally address or communicate to residents the reality of racial inequities in Oak Park, and the divide between perceived and real Oak Park.
- All CRC members are also active participants in other community outlets.
- CRC work is systemic, not one-off. Need to build up Village infrastructure of participation and outreach through a common agenda across Village entities and other governments and stakeholders.
- Politicization of issues or relationships degrades the CRC’s ability to develop work plans, strategies, and communications—to do its work.
- Internalized racism in previous Village Board members tanked the CRC’s ability to do its job.

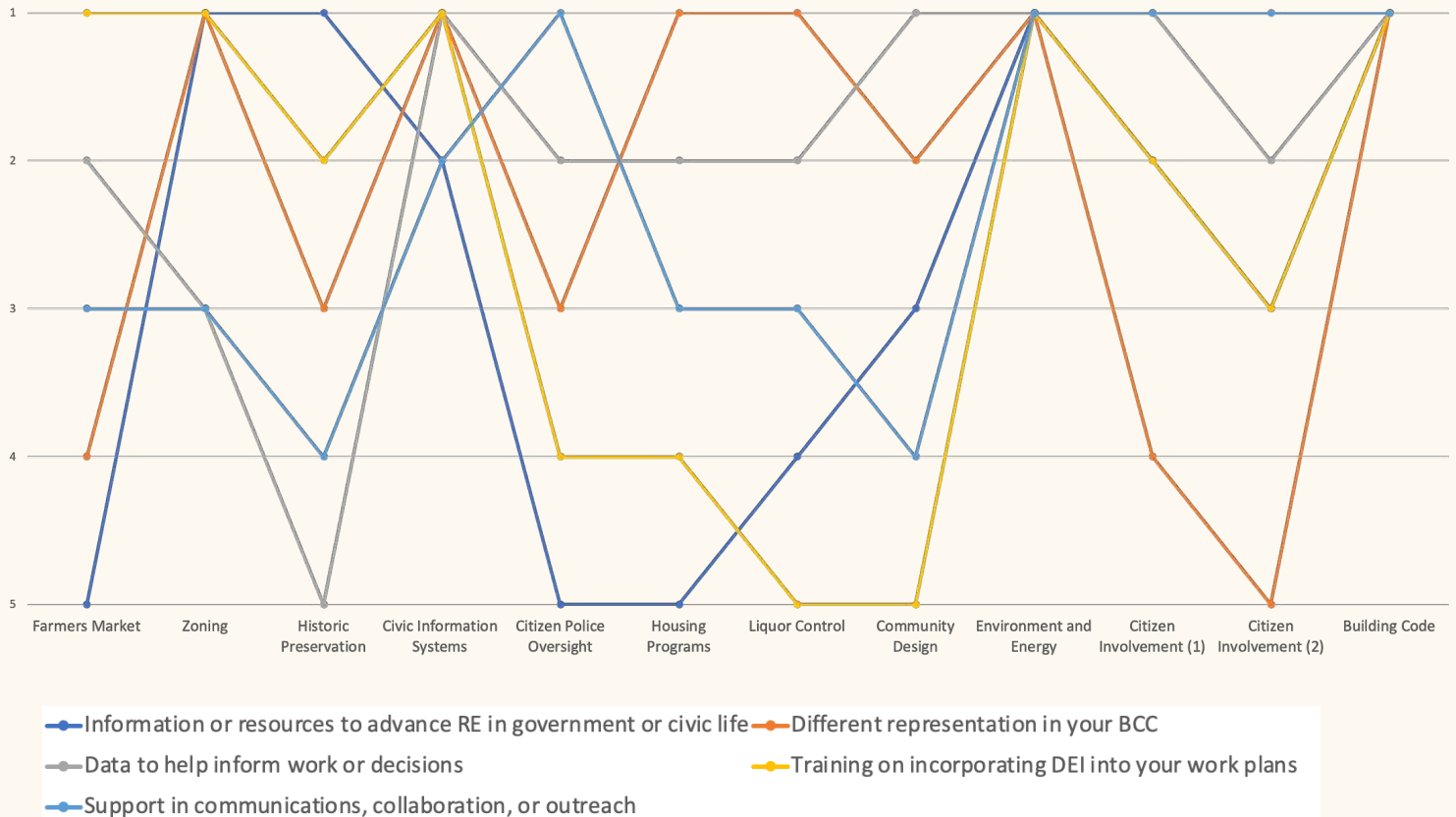
Collaborate with CRC commissioners to clarify roles and responsibilities of the CRC overall, commissioners, staff liaisons, and board liaisons to build trust and clarity around asks and expectations.

- There is a need to clarify and confirm the roles and responsibilities of the CRC vis-à-vis the Village Board and the Village staff. Likewise, the Village needs to confirm the roles and responsibilities of staff and board liaisons.
- The CRC members have experience implementing racial equity tools but have received mixed messages as well as confusing or unclear information and criteria from staff on how those tools

should be used or interpreted.

- Administrative holdups and lack of clarity prevent the CRC from completing its work efficiently and effectively.
- The Village asks the CRC to provide volunteer support at events but does not ask for meaningful input.
- CRC and Village Board and staff turnover affect the functionality of the CRC and other BCCs.
- Ensure that Village Manager, Village President, and trustees are aligned in BCCs' functions, tasks, and responsibilities.

Bump chart of needs as reported by volunteer commissions





Next Steps:

Operationalizing Change

This report identifies needs that the Village of Oak Park can begin to address in its work to advance racial equity. As part of the ongoing, continuous, iterative process of working to achieve racial equity, we anticipate that the Village will use the needs here to inform its future plans and decision-making related to operationalizing the racial equity recommendations contained in this report.

As it does so, we recommend the following objectives to help drive such meaningful change in Oak Park that all residents and other stakeholders feel a sense of belonging.

We strongly recommend considering the following components of organizational change models to help in constructing a roadmap that takes into account internal change management practices to increase performance and the impact of village operations to achieve racial equity in Village Hall. The key activities and outcomes that the Village should look for in future equity-driven change models are the following:

- A clear, consistent commitment by top levels of administrative and elected leadership to empower guided groups of employees to learn about the importance of process change and

institutional reforms that will reduce the barriers employees face in their everyday work serving the residents of Oak Park. Guidance from consultants should include training and data analysis support to ensure that potential solutions are in alignment with human resources and legal considerations of working in a large public organization.

- A proven model of public employee training and engagement that emphasizes iterative learning and shared problem identification and solutions to improve internal communications, trust, and engagement of all employees by examining the barriers faced by employees with the least job security, fewest promotion pathways, and lowest pay face in accomplishing their program and policy goals.
- Toolkits provided by the Government Alliance on Racial Equity are only a first step. Transforming and adapting toolkits into an ongoing change management program that allows employees to learn key project management skills, policy and process analysis and socio-emotional practices is necessary in operationalizing racial equity.
- Models, such as Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI), of organizational change specifically designed for large public organizations may be most relevant for future implementation. Other change management models can be considered (e.g., Six Sigma) but need adapting to the specific needs of large public organizations. Any model should emphasize the connection between utilizing equity principles, the

improvement of internal performance, and increases in impact and relevant outcomes for employees and residents of Oak Park.

Short Term (6 months–2 years)

To improve clarity in roles and responsibilities, and to increase awareness among Oak Park residents of the different roles, responsibilities, jurisdictions, programs, services, and available resources of all taxing bodies in the Village.

- Establish a cohort of engaged staff from mid-management and below who are open to ongoing training and participation in iterative learning opportunities
- Create educational materials including infographics that explain the different government bodies, authorities, roles, and expertise areas for both internal knowledge building as well as for the public
- Disseminate information on the Village website, and in the newsletter and use employee and resident focus groups to ensure that awareness and trust is being built through the dissemination process

To increase equitable access to programs and services.

- Implement regular workshops and training opportunities for all internal staff who have public-facing roles to

learn from each other in their work, who they interact with, and how to contact and engage their programs when relevant.

- Engage in process change analysis with employees to increase the availability of in-person and virtual options to selected programs and services. For example, offering multiple sessions at all times of day and days of week and in different formats to ensure that essential programs and services are more accessible requires that existing staff who are responsible for public engagement adjust or improve the delivery of these existing sessions.
- Elevate the importance of cultural competency and language access starts with the employees on the inside of the village who may already use their skills to provide informal translation and interpretation support in their daily work. Regular recognition and incentivization of these additional skills will encourage staff to bring their diverse skills and backgrounds into the workplace.
- Contract for translation of the Village website with an emphasis on translating essential Village documents and application processes (permits, grants, contracts)
- Create an internal process that allows staff who are conducting community events to identify when language access is needed. Staff should have a quick and easy process to request language interpretation and/or translation as part of their planning and engagement process.

To report out to stakeholders and back to community and other partners on equity progress.

- Host an inaugural biannual meeting or symposium to share out progress on racial equity initiatives, programs and services, and feedback and engagement.
- Begin the process of employee engagement around key performance indicators and other measures of impact and outcomes that support their innovation and problem-solving activities within the organization.

Medium Term (2–3 years)

To increase activities related to promoting awareness of the reality of racism and disparities in the community, work to address it, and the four levels of racism.

- Develop and conduct (or partner) 4 racial equity workshops.
- Develop educational materials on the dynamics of race and racism.
- Disseminate information on the Village website, in the newsletter, and through a communications plan.

To establish mechanisms to support and celebrate racial equity work.

- Institute recognition awards to celebrate community and staff equity champions.
- Develop a racial equity champion subcommittee or partner with the Community Relations Commission to

determine if it should be part of their work plan.

- Prepare communications on award recipients for the newsletter and website.

To interpret and analyze racial equity data and progress in the Village in a way that is easily accessible and digestible for residents.

- Create an online racial equity dashboard on the Village of Oak Park's website that documents and tracks progress on racial equity initiatives, programs, and services by 2026.

Long Term (4+ years)

To have an increased number of Oak Parkers report feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion in the community.

- Hold a series of 10 engagement activities by 2027 that include a range of topics and activities to build relationships and connections
- Have Village staff facilitate (or seek training for Village staff in leading) safe, constructive discussions around race and racial equity.
- Develop a racial equity action with a focus on realistic metrics and an urgent implementation timeline.





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