Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

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OLO FFICE OF LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

OLO Report 2024-8 **Executive Summary** **March 12, 2024**

Summary. This report provides an overview of community engagement in the County and how the County's efforts align with best practices for equitable community engagement that advance racial equity and social justice in governmental decision-making. Four key findings emerge from a review and analysis of available information:

- Racial inequities and disparities characterize community engagement in the County. Common community engagement practices often amplify the voice and power of White community members while marginalizing the voice and power of Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) community members in government decision-making.

- County departments primarily carry out one-way community engagement practices that center BIPOC community members in limited and inconsistent ways.

- County staff experience several challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement practices. Yet, some County staff are using promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work to varying degrees.

- Adopting equitable community engagement practices that center the needs and priorities of BIPOC community members can assist County departments in developing policies and programs that address racial inequities and disparities and advance racial equity and social justice (RESJ).

Based on these findings, OLO recommends that the County Council and County Executive convene a collaborative effort with County and BIPOC community stakeholders to jointly develop, implement, and evaluate an equitable community engagement framework that builds on the County's existing efforts.

Equitable Community Engagement Overview

Community engagement refers to a broad range of methods used by government stakeholders that allow community members – including individual constituents, community organizers and advocates, community organizations, businesses, special interest groups, and other stakeholders – to become more informed about and/or influence government decisions.

Equitable community engagement is community engagement that specifically centers the needs, leadership, and power of BIPOC and community members with low incomes to advance RESJ. Centering BIPOC in community engagement ensures that County policies and programs accurately represent the needs and priorities of all community members and address racial inequities and disparities to advance RESJ. The County's RESJ Act recognizes the need for equitable community engagement as it:

- Codifies the County's commitment to applying a RESJ lens to government decisions; and

- Requires a comprehensive RESJ Action Plan for the County that incorporates and embeds "racial equity and social justice principles and strategies into operations, programs, service policies, and community engagement."[1]

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[1] Montgomery County Code § 2-64A

As BIPOC increasingly become a larger share of the County's population, equitable community engagement practices will be necessary for the County's sustainability to ensure that County policies, programs, and practices are adequately responding to the needs of all community members.

Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

Facilitating Power's *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*[2] offers a useful framework for understanding community engagement in developmental stages. Figure 1 outlines the *Spectrum* with examples of common community engagement practices used in the County. OLO identified three broad levels to the *Spectrum*: **no community engagement** where the government denies community members access to decision-making processes; **one-way community engagement**, where the government shares information with community members, but provides limited opportunities to shape decision-making; and **two-way community engagement** where community members increasingly have meaningful opportunities to shape policies, programs, and practices.

Figure 1. Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership Stages by Level of Community Engagement

No community engagement
• **Stage 0, Ignore:** Deny community access to decision-making processes.
One-way community engagement
Examples: websites, press releases, e-newsletters, social media, presentations, print materials, MC311, public hearings, public meetings, and forums
• **Stage 1, Inform:** Provide the community with relevant information. • **Stage 2, Consult:** Gather input from the community.
Two-way community engagement
Examples: Boards, Committees, and Commissions
• **Stage 3, Involve:** Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process and inform planning. • **Stage 4, Collaborate:** Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in the implementation of decisions. • **Stage 5, Defer To:** Foster democratic participation and equity through community driven decision-making; bridge divide between community and governance.

The centering of BIPOC determines whether community engagement practices throughout the *Spectrum* are equitable. For example, providing presentations and fact sheets in multiple languages is an equitable one-way engagement practice, as it centers BIPOC more than providing materials only in English. However, two-way community engagement practices that lift the voice and power of BIPOC in shaping government policies and programs have the most potential to advance RESJ.

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[2] "The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership," Facilitating Power, 2019.

Equitable Community Engagement Best Practices

A review of research and literature from organizations, researchers, and local jurisdictions, reveals the following eight best practice themes for equitable community engagement:

1. Develop a shared understanding of RESJ;
2. Make community engagement an organizational priority;
3. Center BIPOC and empower collaborators;
4. Build relationships and trust;
5. Make it easier for people to participate;
6. Co-create and enforce an equitable community engagement policy;
7. Use tools to operationalize equitable community engagement; and
8. Use data to inform strategies and track results.

The County's RESJ Action Plan Regulations established a community engagement process for the County. **The regulations reflect several best practices for equitable community engagement, including:**

- **Centering BIPOC and empowering collaborators.** The regulations define community engagement as a two-way exchange of information, ideas, and resources that should offer opportunities for culturally and ethnically diverse communities to have a meaningful role in decision-making;

- **Making it easier for people to participate.** The regulations define that community engagement should remove barriers that may have previously prevented community members from successfully working with County government;

- **Building relationships and trust**. The regulations require County departments to identify intended stakeholders and partners in community engagement plans, acknowledge community engagement participants for their contributions, and provide them with opportunities for on-going communication and collaboration; and

- **Using data to inform strategies and track results**. The regulations require departments' community engagement plans to reflect research and background information on affected communities, including language or dialect spoken, customs, historical or geographical data, and other relevant data.

Equitable Community Engagement in Montgomery County

OLO studied 11 County departments with high levels of community engagement and conducted focus groups with BIPOC community partners from local organizations to understand the extent of equitable community engagement in the County. Four key findings emerged:

- **There are racial inequities and disparities in community engagement in the County.** Public testimony and correspondence data from the County Council demonstrate that predominantly White communities were overrepresented in constituent engagement while predominantly BIPOC communities were largely underrepresented, suggesting there are racial disparities among community members who engage with the County through common channels. Current community engagement practices, built on a history of White inclusion and BIPOC exclusion, are characterized by racial inequities that make them more conducive to fostering engagement among White community members than among BIPOC community members.

- **County departments primarily carry out one-way community engagement that centers BIPOC community members in limited and inconsistent ways.** Most departments rely on one-way community engagement practices where they share information with community members but offer limited opportunities to shape decision-making. Language accessibility is a common strategy for County departments to center BIPOC in one-way community engagement practices. Yet, there are more resources available to reach community members who speak Spanish than BIPOC community members who speak other languages, including English, Mandarin, and Amharic.

- **County staff experience several challenges in carrying out equitable community engagement.** Staff noted challenges such as racial inequities in common channels of community engagement; limited time, resources, and/or staffing for equitable community engagement; lack of an overall standard and accountability for equitable community engagement in the County; and reluctance within County departments to centering race and prioritizing racial equity in County operations, including in community engagement. Many of the challenges noted by County staff aligned with feedback shared by BIPOC community partners.

- **Despite challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement, County staff are using several promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work to varying degrees.** Equitable community engagement practices carried out by staff were typically not documented or structured into department practice. Instead, staff used equitable engagement practices to varying degrees and at their own discretion. Many of the practices used by staff aligned with best practices, including prioritizing equitable community engagement, building trust with BIPOC community members, creating engagement opportunities in BIPOC communities, and tailoring engagement opportunities to meet the needs of BIPOC community members. Many of the practices noted by County staff reflected promising practices for equitable community engagement shared by BIPOC community partners.

Recommendations for Council Action

OLO's **primary recommendation** is for the County Council and County Executive **to convene a collaborative effort with County and BIPOC community stakeholders to jointly develop, implement, and evaluate an equitable community engagement framework that builds on the County's existing efforts**. More specifically, OLO recommends the "Collaborative" co-develop, co-implement, and co-evaluate an equitable community engagement framework that centers and strengthens community engagement with BIPOC in government decision-making to advance RESJ. In support of the primary recommendation, OLO offers **six supporting recommendations** for Council discussion and action that encourage the proposed Collaborative to:

- **Design and implement learning pathways and resources to guide County staff on equitable community engagement;**

- **Recommend County support for programs that build the capacity of BIPOC community members to organize and advocate for their needs and priorities;**

- **Propose strategies to strengthen channels for one-way community engagement between the County and BIPOC community members;**

- **Develop new channels for two-way community engagement between the County and BIPOC community members;**

- **Develop a structure for holding County staff accountable to equitable community engagement; and**

- **Determine resource needs for departments to carry out equitable community engagement**.

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Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

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Introduction

Equitable community engagement is community engagement that advances racial equity and social justice (RESJ) by centering the needs, leadership, and power of Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) and community members with low incomes. Centering BIPOC in community engagement strengthens democracy through ensuring that policy decisions accurately represent the needs and priorities of all community members. Centering BIPOC in community engagement is also necessary for County policies and programs to effectively address racial inequities and disparities and advance RESJ. As explained by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE):

> "It is not enough to consult data or literature to assume how a proposal might impact a community. Involving communities impacted by a topic, engaging community throughout all phases of a project, and maintaining clear and transparent communication as the policy or program is implemented will help produce more racially equitable results."[3]

The County Council requested this Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report to understand best practices for enhancing community engagement with BIPOC community members in government decision-making and to examine the extent to which County efforts align with these best practices.

Four key findings emerge from the information reviewed for this report:

- Racial inequities and disparities characterize community engagement in the County. Common community engagement practices often amplify the voice and power of White community members while marginalizing the voice and power of Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) community members in government decision-making.

- County departments primarily carry out one-way community engagement practices that center BIPOC community members in limited and inconsistent ways.

- County staff experience several challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement practices. Yet, some County staff are using promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work to varying degrees.

- Adopting equitable community engagement practices that center the needs and priorities of BIPOC community members can assist County departments in developing policies and programs that address racial inequities and disparities and advance racial equity and social justice (RESJ).

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[3] Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity, Government Alliance on Race and Equity, December 2016.

Based on these findings, OLO offers one primary recommendation and six supporting recommendations for Council discussion and action:

- The County Council and County Executive convene a collaborative effort with County and BIPOC community stakeholders (the "Collaborative") to jointly develop, implement, and evaluate an equitable community engagement framework that builds on the County's existing community engagement process.

- Encourage the Collaborative to design and implement learning pathways and resources to guide County staff on equitable community engagement.

- Encourage the Collaborative to recommend County support for programs that build the capacity of BIPOC community members to organize and advocate for their needs and priorities.

- Encourage the Collaborative to propose strategies to strengthen channels for one-way community engagement between the County and BIPOC community members.

- Encourage the Collaborative to develop new channels for two-way community engagement between the County and BIPOC community members.

- Encourage the Collaborative to develop a structure for holding County staff accountable to equitable community engagement.

- Encourage the Collaborative to determine resource needs for departments to successfully carry out equitable community engagement.

This report is organized as follows:

- **Chapter 1** provides an overview of community engagement for RESJ and why equitable community engagement is important for advancing RESJ in the County;

- **Chapter 2** provides the historical and current context of racial inequities in community engagement and presents available data for understanding local racial disparities in community engagement;

- **Chapter 3** describes best practices for equitable community engagement developed by organizations, researchers, and local jurisdictions;

- **Chapter 4** summarizes the perspectives of local BIPOC community partners on the extent of equitable community engagement in the County;

- **Chapter 5** describes the extent of equitable community engagement in the County based on interviews with County staff and a review of policies, programs, and practices in select departments; and

- **Chapter 6** presents OLO's findings and recommendations.

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

Methodology. OLO staff members Janmarie Peña and Chitra Kalyandurg conducted this study with assistance from OLO Summer Fellows Diana Carrillo and Kayla Jones and OLO staff members Elaine Bonner-Tompkins and Karen Pecoraro. To prepare this report, OLO gathered information through document review, data analysis, literature review, and interviews with staff in County departments and community organizations.

OLO received a high level of cooperation from everyone involved in this study and appreciates the information and insights shared by all who participated, including:

County Staff

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Joseph Hooks

CASA, Inc.
Gustavo Torres

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Tadella Demeke Fanta

Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families
Jayne Park

Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee
Shane Lloyd

Rose Pedals Consulting, Inc.
Tiffany Kelly

Other local BIPOC community partners

Chapter 1. Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice Overview

Equitable community engagement is community engagement that advances racial equity and social justice (RESJ) by centering the needs, leadership, and power of Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) and community members with low incomes.

This chapter describes key terms and concepts related to community engagement for RESJ and why equitable community engagement is important for advancing RESJ.

This chapter is presented in two sections:

- **Section A** defines key terms and concepts related to community engagement for RESJ and the theoretical framework the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) uses to understand the extent of equitable community engagement in the County; and

- **Section B** describes why equitable community engagement is important for advancing RESJ in the County. This includes an overview of the community engagement process outlined in the County's RESJ Action Plan Regulations and the County's changing racial and ethnic demographics.

Two key findings emerge from the information reviewed in this chapter:

- Community engagement exists on a spectrum that ranges from one-way to two-way community engagement practices. Two-way community engagement practices that center BIPOC community members and lift their voice and power in shaping government policies and programs has the most potential to advance RESJ.

- Equitable community engagement is important for strengthening democracy and the effectiveness of County policies and programs to advance RESJ; for adhering to the County's RESJ Action Plan Regulations; and for responding to the County's changing racial and ethnic demographics.

A. Key Terms and Concepts

This section describes the following key terms and concepts that will be used throughout the report:

- What community engagement is and how it differs from civic engagement;

- Facilitating Power's *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding the range of community engagement methods;

- What equitable community engagement is; and

- Other important terms, including Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color, Latine, racial inequities, and racial disparities.

Community engagement. 'Community engagement' is a broad term that does not have a widely accepted definition. Further, community engagement is often used interchangeably with the term civic engagement. For this report, OLO adopts broad definitions of community engagement and civic engagement offered by the Institute for Local Government:[4]

- **Community Engagement**: Community engagement refers to a broad range of methods used by government stakeholders that allow community members – including individual constituents, community organizers and advocates, community organizations, businesses, special interest groups, and other stakeholders – to become more informed about and/or influence government policies, programs, and practices. As described in more detail below, community engagement methods exist on a spectrum ranging from one-way to two-way engagement with community members in government efforts and decision-making.

- **Civic Engagement**: Civic engagement refers to the many ways that community members involve themselves in the civic and political life of their community. In contrast to community engagement, civic engagement is carried out by community members as opposed to government stakeholders and does not necessarily involve activities related to government. Examples of civic engagement include volunteering at a local non-profit and participating in elections.

Community engagement and civic engagement are interrelated, as community engagement by government can facilitate and influence civic engagement by community members, and vice versa. For instance, a board of elections that engages community members through voter registration events may influence civic engagement in the community through increasing participation in elections.

The *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.* This report focuses on community engagement carried out by stakeholders in County government and to what extent it advances RESJ. In *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, Facilitating Power proposes the following developmental stages of community engagement (Figure 1.1):[5]
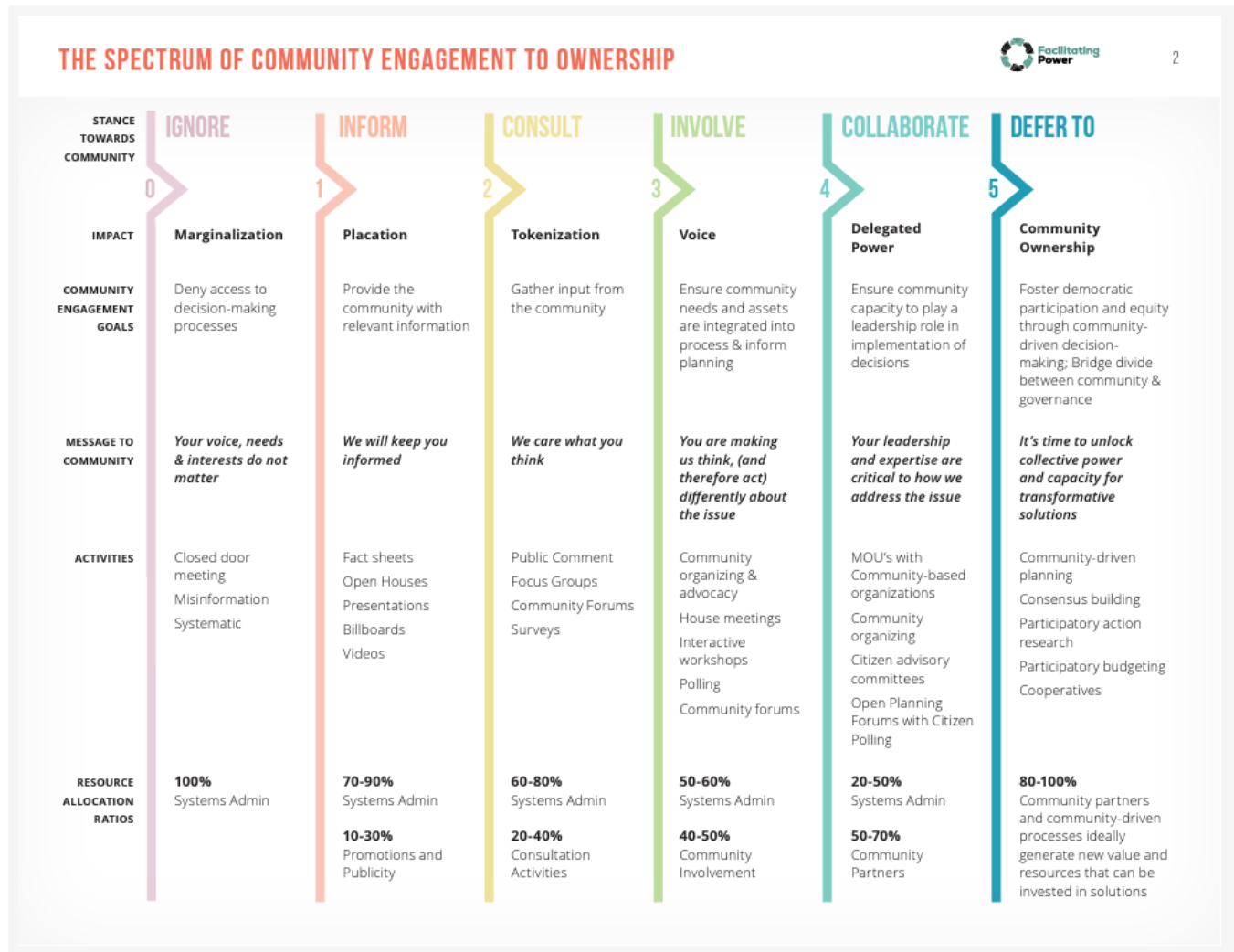
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[4] Definitions adapted from "What Is Public Engagement?" Institute for Local Government, July 2012.
[5] "The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership," Facilitating Power, 2019.

- **Stage 0, Ignore:** Deny community access to decision-making processes.

- **Stage 1, Inform:** Provide the community with relevant information.

- **Stage 2, Consult:** Gather input from the community.

- **Stage 3, Involve:** Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process and inform planning.

- **Stage 4, Collaborate:** Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in the implementation of decisions.

- **Stage 5, Defer To:** Foster democratic participation and equity through community driven decision-making; bridge divide between community and governance.

Figure 1.1. The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP

Facilitating Power 2

	IGNORE 0	INFORM 1	CONSULT 2	INVOLVE 3	COLLABORATE 4	DEFER TO 5
STANCE TOWARDS COMMUNITY						
IMPACT	Marginalization	Placation	Tokenization	Voice	Delegated Power	Community Ownership
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS	Deny access to decision-making processes	Provide the community with relevant information	Gather input from the community	Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process & inform planning	Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in implementation of decisions	Foster democratic participation and equity through community-driven decision-making; Bridge divide between community & governance
MESSAGE TO COMMUNITY	*Your voice, needs & interests do not matter*	*We will keep you informed*	*We care what you think*	*You are making us think, (and therefore act) differently about the issue*	*Your leadership and expertise are critical to how we address the issue*	*It's time to unlock collective power and capacity for transformative solutions*
ACTIVITIES	Closed door meeting Misinformation Systematic	Fact sheets Open Houses Presentations Billboards Videos	Public Comment Focus Groups Community Forums Surveys	Community organizing & advocacy House meetings Interactive workshops Polling Community forums	MOU's with Community-based organizations Community organizing Citizen advisory committees Open Planning Forums with Citizen Polling	Community-driven planning Consensus building Participatory action research Participatory budgeting Cooperatives
RESOURCE ALLOCATION RATIOS	100% Systems Admin	70-90% Systems Admin / 10-30% Promotions and Publicity	60-80% Systems Admin / 20-40% Consultation Activities	50-60% Systems Admin / 40-50% Community Involvement	20-50% Systems Admin / 50-70% Community Partners	80-100% Community partners and community-driven processes ideally generate new value and resources that can be invested in solutions

Source: Facilitating Power.

On the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownershi*p, Stage 0 is representative of no community engagement. As noted by one community leader in focus groups with OLO, marginalization by County stakeholders can happen by default if there is not an intentional effort to engage community members, even if the goal is not explicitly to deny community members access to decision-making processes.

On the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, Stages 1 through 2 are more representative of **one-way community engagement** where at best, community members may have the opportunity to weigh-in on government policies, programs, and practices but have limited opportunities to shape them. As described in Chapter 5, common Stage 1 practices in the County include communications and outreach activities that create a one-way channel of information from County stakeholders to community members, such as providing information on websites, sending press releases and e-newsletters, posting on social media, and sharing presentations, handouts, and other materials at community events. Common Stage 2 community engagement practices in the County include public hearings, meetings, and forums, which create a one-way channel of information from community members to County stakeholders through allowing community members to provide input on County policies, programs, and other efforts.

On the other hand, Stages 3 through 5 of the *Spectrum* are more representative of **two-way community engagement** where community members can be more influential in shaping policies, programs, and practices. As described in Chapter 5, Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCCs) are a common Stage 3 practice in the County. BCCs serve as a channel for two-way community engagement through providing a space for on-going and direct discussion between County stakeholders and community members.

Equitable community engagement. Practices throughout the *Spectrum* can vary in how much they work to advance RESJ. OLO adopts the following definition of equitable community engagement, which incorporates the definition of RESJ used by OLO for RESJ impact statements:

- **Equitable Community Engagement**: In this report equitable community engagement refers to community engagement that advances RESJ by centering the needs, leadership, and power of BIPOC and community members with low incomes.

Both one-way and two-way community engagement practices can contain elements of equitable community engagement. For example, providing presentations and fact sheets in multiple languages centers BIPOC more than providing materials only in English. However, two-way community engagement practices that center BIPOC community members and lift their voice and power in shaping government policies and programs have the most potential to advance RESJ. As Facilitating Power explains regarding the developmental stages of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*:

> "To achieve racial equity and environmental justice we must build from a culture of collaboration to a culture of whole governance in which decisions are driven by the common good. Whole governance and community ownership are needed to break the cycle of perpetual advocacy for basic needs that many communities find themselves in. Developmental stages allow us to recognize where we are and set goals for where we can go together through conscious and collective practice—so key to transforming systems."[6]

Other important terms. Other terms used throughout the report include:

- **Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color**: OLO uses the term Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) to collectively refer to people of color, including Black, Indigenous, Latine, and Asian people and people of other racial and ethnic groups who do not identify as White. The term BIPOC centers and acknowledges Black and Indigenous people as the groups with the deepest history of racial marginalization and oppression in the United States and who are the most impacted by racial inequities and disparities today.

- **Latine**: OLO uses the term Latine as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina for describing people who descend from Latin America. As described by El Centro at Colorado State University, "Latinx/e pushes beyond gender binaries and acknowledges the intersecting identities" of the diverse community of people who descend from Latin America.[7]

- **Racial Inequities:** OLO uses the term racial inequities to refer to biases at the individual, institutional, and/or structural levels that foster racial disparities.

- **Racial Disparities:** OLO uses the term racial disparities to refer to differences in outcomes by race and ethnicity.

Additionally, OLO often uses **department** or **departments** throughout the report as a broad term to refer to County departments, offices, agencies, and/or other County entities.

B. Why Equitable Community Engagement

Community engagement plays several key roles in government. Community engagement supports democracy by allowing elected officials to understand and reflect the needs and priorities of community members in policy decisions. As the government fundamentally exists to serve the community, community engagement is also key for administrators in government to develop policies and programs that effectively respond to the needs and priorities of community members.

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[6] From Community Engagement to Ownership, Facilitating Power.
[7] "Why Latinx/e?" El Centro, Colorado State University.

However, as described in Chapter 2, common community engagement channels in the County generally amplify the voice and power of White community members while marginalizing the voice and power of BIPOC community members in government decision-making. Racial inequities in community engagement in turn exacerbate racial inequities and disparities in the County through perpetuating policies, programs, and practices across County departments that reflect the needs and priorities of White community members and ignore the needs and priorities of BIPOC community members. Centering BIPOC in community engagement strengthens democracy through ensuring that policy decisions accurately represent the needs and priorities of all community members. Centering BIPOC in community engagement is also necessary for County policies and programs to effectively address racial inequities and disparities and advance RESJ.

The RESJ Action Plan Regulations and changing racial and ethnic demographics also point to the importance of equitable community engagement in the County. The remainder of this section describes these in more detail.

1. Community Engagement Process in RESJ Action Plan Regulations

The County has recognized the importance of advancing RESJ in community engagement through the RESJ Act. The RESJ Act requires a comprehensive RESJ Action Plan for the County that incorporates and embeds "racial equity and social justice principles and strategies into operations, programs, service policies, and community engagement." Per the RESJ Act, the County Executive was required to adopt the County's RESJ Action Plan by Method (2) regulations.[8] Among several requirements, the RESJ Action Plan Regulations had to establish a community engagement process for the County.[9]

Following the enactment of the RESJ Act, the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) worked with Wayfinding Partners, a local firm that specializes in racial equity consulting, to develop the RESJ Action Plan Regulations. ORESJ drafted the regulations based on best practices for operationalizing RESJ in County departments, including through community engagement. Per Method (2) procedures, the proposed regulations were published in the County register for public comment and then transmitted to the Council for review. The RESJ Action Plan Regulations went into effect in July 2022 with minimal changes from the review period.

The community engagement process established through the RESJ Action Plan Regulations is currently in effect. The regulations define that community engagement:[10]

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[8] Refer to Montgomery County Code § 2A-15 for procedures for the adoption of Method (2) regulations.
[9] Montgomery County Code § 2-64A
[10] Of note, much of the remainder of this section is directly quoting the RESJ Action Plan Regulations, Code of Montgomery County Regulations (COMCOR) § 02.64A.01.02

- Is a way of ensuring that community members have an opportunity to be able to contribute meaningfully to decisions and develop functional capabilities that enable them to participate fully;

- Is a two-way exchange of information, ideas, and resources;

- Includes a range of approaches from informing to sharing leadership to resident-led efforts, depending on the degree of community and county involvement, decision-making and control;

- Should offer opportunities for communities to express their views and have a meaningful role in decision-making;

- Should consider the diversity of our communities, including culture and ethnicity, and seek to create an inclusive and accessible process;

- Should remove barriers that may have previously prevented community members from successfully working with County government; and

- Can vary in implementation depending on program goals, time constraints, level of program and community readiness, capacity, and resources.

The RESJ Action Plan Regulations state departments should consider using the community engagement process when making any decision that impacts community members. However, the process is particularly recommended when a department is developing a strategic plan or major initiative that will have a substantive and significant impact on community members.

Department community engagement plans. Departments using the community engagement process should submit a proposed community engagement plan in writing to ORESJ. The plan must explain the following:

- Topic or issue for the community engagement process, the intended stakeholders and partners, and the impacted communities;

- Goals of the community engagement process and main purpose of the department for involving the community;

- Who is most impacted by, involved in, or has a specific interest in the issue area and why;

- How the community engagement process will ensure impacted communities that have not historically been included in the initial decision-making phase will be included;

- Degree of public and community support for the engagement and potential for unintended consequences if the engagement is not implemented successfully;

- Anticipated costs, timeline, and duration of the community engagement process; and

- Plan for publicizing and promoting the community engagement process to community members.

The proposed community engagement plan must also present research and background information about the affected communities the department intends to reach, including:

- Language or dialect spoken, customs, historical or geographical data, and other relevant data;

- Known barriers and risks, such as trust issues among the community and the public that may prevent full engagement and community willingness to participate; and

- Detailed steps and strategies that will be taken to address language and literacy needs.

After approval by ORESJ, departments must make community engagement plans available to the public. Additionally, departments must follow-up with community engagement participants no later than eight weeks after the conclusion of the engagement to:

- Acknowledge community members for their contributions;

- Indicate opportunities for program or project updates, feedback, future dialogue, collaboration; and

- Present resultant decisions or outcomes of the community engagement process.

Departments must also provide a final report to community engagement participants that presents resultant decisions or outcomes after the conclusion of the program or project.

2. County Racial and Ethnic Demographics

Demographic patterns in the County also point to the importance of equitable community engagement. As BIPOC community members increasingly become a larger part of the County population, equitable community engagement will be necessary for the County's sustainability to ensure that County policies, programs, and practices are adequately responding to the needs of community members.

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

Demographic change. Figure 1.2 and Table 1.1 below demonstrate how the demographics of the County have changed over the past six decades. From 1960 to 2020, the County's racial and ethnic demographics have drastically shifted from a population that was once 96 percent White and 4 percent BIPOC to a population that is today 41 percent White and 59 percent BIPOC.

Figure 1.2. County Population by Race and Ethnicity by Decade from 1960 to 2020
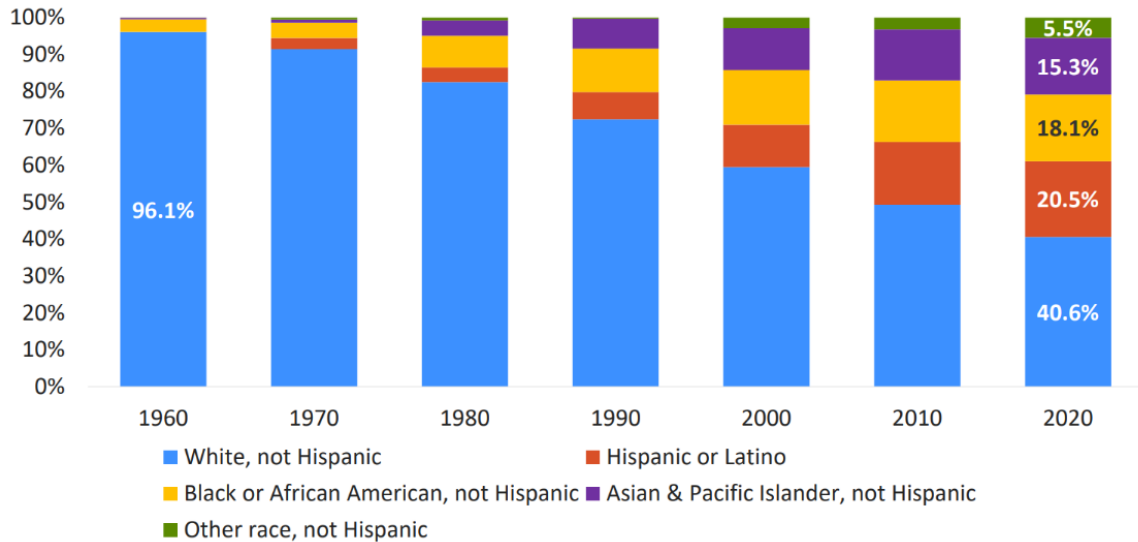
Source: Montgomery Planning Analysis of 1960-2020 Decennial Census, Census Bureau.

Table 1.1. County Population by Race and Ethnicity by Decade from 1960 to 2020[11]

Race and ethnicity	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
White	96.1%	91.4%	82.5%	72.4%	59.5%	49.3%	40.6%
Latine	N/A	3.0%	3.9%	7.4%	11.5%	17.0%	20.5%
Black	3.4%	4.1%	8.6%	11.8%	14.8%	16.6%	18.1%
Asian and Pacific Islander	0.5%	1.0%	3.9%	8.1%	11.3%	13.9%	15.3%
Other	0.0%	0.4%	1.0%	0.4%	2.9%	3.2%	5.5%

Source: Montgomery Planning Analysis of 1960-2020 Decennial Census, Census Bureau.

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[11] Latine people are not included in other racial groups in this table. The 1960 census did not collect data on Hispanic origin. "Other" includes non-Latine categories of American Indian and Alaskan Native, Some Other race, and (after 2000) Two or more races.

Montgomery County was home to many thriving Black communities during the late-19th and early 20th centuries.[12] However, at the turn of the 20th century, the share of Black people in the County began to steadily decline, going from 33 percent in 1900 to only 3 percent by 1960. [13] A full analysis of the factors driving demographic change in the County was beyond the scope of this project. However, historical evidence points to violent and discriminatory conditions for Black people in the County that likely contributed to this trend. For instance:

- Between 1880 and 1896, three Black men – George Peck, John Diggs-Dorsey, and Sidney Randolph – were publicly lynched by White mobs.[14]

- Racial discrimination in housing and public accommodations such as restaurants, pools and other facilities was commonplace in the County well into the 20th century. Indeed, the County's Human Rights Commission – originally called the "Commission on Interracial Problems" – was established in 1960 in response to economic boycotts organized by the Montgomery County NAACP against two Rockville restaurants that refused to serve Black people.[15]

- The suburban boom of the 1950s facilitated the mass migration of White families to the County at the exclusion of Black families. To conform with Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration policies for government-backed loans, banks and savings and loans companies typically imposed racially restrictive covenants that prohibited Black families from purchasing many of the new homes that were developed in the County during this period. As described by Montgomery History, "[a]s a result, there were few, if any opportunities for Black families living in Montgomery County […] to purchase or rent houses or rent apartments," unless they were located in segregated Black communities.[16]

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[12] African American History: Communities and Schools, Montgomery History.

[13] Ralph Buglass, Montgomery County, Maryland's Historic African American Communities, Montgomery History, August 2023.

[14] African American History: Lynchings in Montgomery County, Montgomery History.

[15] David Brack, Twenty Years of Civil Rights Progress: A History of the Human Relations Commission of Montgomery County, Maryland, Office of Human Rights, published circa 1980's.

[16] How Montgomery County Grew in the 1950s, Montgomery History, updated May 5, 2021.

The decline in the share of Black people in the County during this period coincides with the Great Migration of the 20th century, where approximately five million Black people migrated from the South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western states.[17] As explained by the National Archives, the "driving force behind the mass movement was to escape racial violence, pursue economic and educational opportunities, and obtain freedom from the oppression of Jim Crow."[18] Interactive "Mapping the Great Migration out of the South" maps from the University of Washington's America's Great Migrations project shows that many Black Marylanders migrated to neighboring Pennsylvania during these decades.[19]

In 1960, White people were the overwhelming majority of the County's population, while BIPOC were the minority. However, each decade since, the share of White people in the County has steadily decreased, while the shares of Black, Latine and Asian people have increased. By 2010, Montgomery County shifted from a majority White county to a majority BIPOC county. A study of racial and ethnic trends by Montgomery Planning found that:[20]

- **The Latine population grew rapidly between 1980 and 2010, with Latine people surpassing Black people as the second largest racial or ethnic group in the County in 2010.** The migration of Latine people to the D.C. region was fueled in large part by migrants fleeing political turmoil in El Salvador, Guatemala, and other Central American countries.[21] The Migration Policy Institute explains that in the early 1980s, the U.S. supported the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala to fight "Marxist-led popular movements" during their civil wars, seeing the conflicts as "theaters in the Cold War." Military and government-supported paramilitary forces in these countries carried out widespread human rights violations during this period, including the disappearance and murders of thousands of civilians.[22]

- **The Black population has steadily increased since 1990, with the greatest increase occurring between 1990 and 2000.** This trend coincides with the 'New Great Migration', a reversal of the Great Migration that slowly started in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1990s. Brookings explains the movement is largely "driven by younger, college-educated Black Americans from [N]orthern and [W]estern places of origin" moving to Southern states such as Maryland for job opportunities and cultural and familial ties to the region.[23] The trend also aligns with the steady increase of migrants from sub-Saharan African countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Sierra

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[17] William H. Frey, "A 'New Great Migration' is Bringing Black Americans Back to the South," Brookings, September 12, 2022.

[18] The Great Migration (1910-1970), National Archives, last reviewed June 28, 2021.

[19] Mapping Segregation Out of the South (Part 2), America's Great Migrations Project, University of Washington.

[20] Trends in Racial and Ethnic Diversity In Montgomery County, MD, 1990-2020, Montgomery Planning.

[21] Audrey Singer, Latin American Immigrants in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area: History and Demography, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, November 1, 2007.

[22] Susan Gzesh, "Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era," Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, April 1, 2006.

[23] Frey

Leone.[24] Researchers note the increase in migration from Africa was driven by "economic and political instability in some African countries" and changes in U.S. immigration policy that provided "new avenues for highly skilled/educated African immigrants to immigrate to the United States."[25]

- **The fastest growth of the Asian and Pacific Islander population occurred in the 1970s and 1980s**. This trend coincides with the national wave of migration from Asia following the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which eliminated national-origin quotas that limited immigration from countries in Asia, Africa and other regions.[26] Researchers at the Migration Policy Institute explain the "migration motivations and demographic characteristics of Asian immigrants have varied greatly over time and by country of origin."[27] For instance, migrants from countries like China and India were largely drawn by economic opportunity,[28,29] while migrants from Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were largely resettled as refugees in the U.S. after being displaced by war.[30]

The growth of BIPOC in the County in more recent decades follows a national trend of increasing White migration to city centers such as D.C. and subsequent BIPOC displacement to suburban areas.[31] As explained by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC):

"Neighborhoods experience gentrification when an influx of investment and changes to the built environment leads to rising home values, family incomes and educational levels of residents. Cultural displacement occurs when minority areas see a rapid decline in their numbers as affluent, [W]hite gentrifiers replace the incumbent residents."[32]

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[24] Jane Lorenzi and Jeanne Batalova, "Sub-Saharan African Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, May 11, 2022.

[25] Mamadi Corra, "Immigration from Africa to the United States: Key Insights from Recent Research," Frontiers in Sociology, June 8, 2023.

[26] Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, Immigrants from Asia in the United States, Migration Policy Institute, January 6, 2016.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Qian Song and Zai Liang, "New Emigration from China: Patterns, Causes and Impacts," PubMed Central, 2019.

[29] Shreya Bhandari, Chapter 1: The History of South Asians in the United States, South Asians in the United States (NASW Press, 2022)

[30] Linda W. Gordon, 7: Southeast Asian Refugee Migration to the United States, Center for Migration Studies, May 1987.

[31] Tara Bahrampour, et. al., "White People Have Flocked Back to City Centers — and Transformed Them," Washington Post, February 6, 2023.

[32] Jason Richardson, et. al., "Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and Cultural Displacement in American Cities," National Community Reinvestment Coalition, March 19, 2019.

A national study by NCRC found that between 2000 and 2013, D.C. was among the cities with the highest rates of gentrification and had the most census tracts where Black community members were displaced.[33] Further, a national study by the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity found that between 2000 and 2016, D.C. "experienced the strongest gentrification and displacement of any city in the country."[34]

The population of BIPOC in the County is expected to continue increasing through the next 20 years. Figure 1.3 below demonstrates that by 2045, the population of community members who are Black, Latine, White, and Other Race is expected to be roughly equal.

Figure 1.3. County Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity from 2010 to 2045
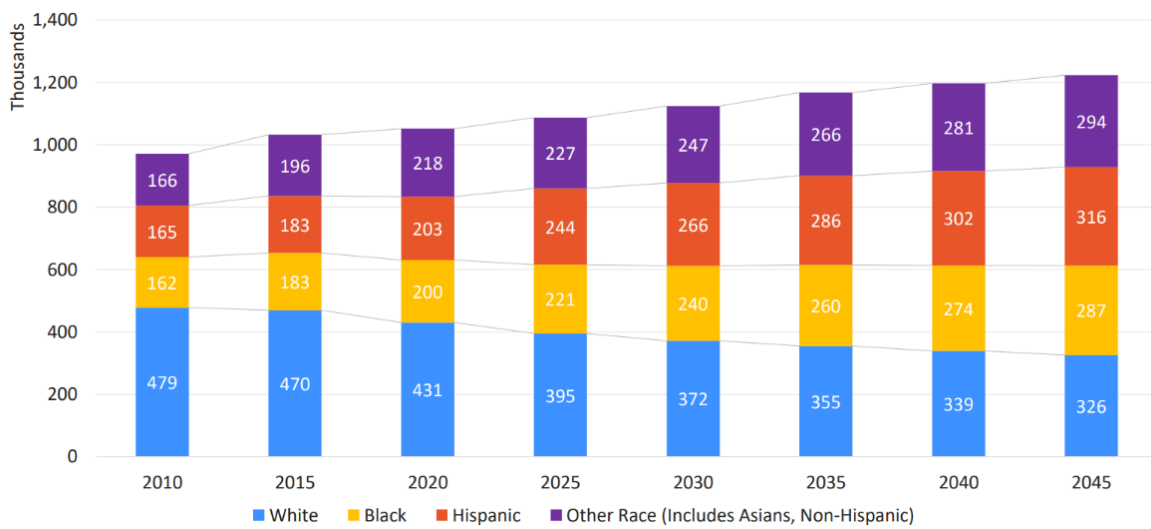
Source: Montgomery Planning Analysis of State Data Center Data, Maryland Department of Planning.

Community members by race and ethnicity. Capacity and needs for community engagement with the County varies for community members by race and ethnicity, which points to a need for equitable community engagement practices. Table 1.2 highlights select characteristics of County constituents by race and ethnicity at the County level.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Washington D.C. Region Report, American Neighborhood Change in the 21st Century: Gentrification and Decline, Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, April 2019.

Table 1.2. Select Characteristics of County Constituents by Race and Ethnicity[35]

Characteristic	County	White	Latine	Black	Asian
Median Age	40.3	47.0	32.5	37.7	43.3
% Single Parent Household[36]	4.9	2.7	9.0	9.4	2.8
% Speak English Less than "Very Well"	16.0	4.0	39.1	9.4	30.6
% High School Graduate or Higher	91.9	97.7	72.0	93.7	92.6
% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	60.9	74.5	28.3	47.2	69.8
% In Labor Force	69.3	66.2	74.1	73.6	66.2
% Employed	66.2	63.7	70.7	69.1	63.3
% Unemployed	2.6	1.7	3.3	4.4	2.5
% Employed in Management, Business, Sciences, and Arts Occupations	60.0	74.5	29.7	50.7	69.6
% Employed in Service Occupations	14.1	7.2	28.1	17.6	12.0
Median Household Income	$118,823	$144,828	$84,963	$86,954	$134,880
Poverty Rate	7.9	4.3	11.2	14.3	7.9
Child Poverty Rate	10.1	4.4	13.4	20.2	9.6
% Homeowners	65.8	74.7	52.0	45.8	76.6
% Renters	34.2	25.3	48.0	54.2	23.4
% No Vehicles Available in Household	9.2	6.3	9.6	16.9	7.8

Source: Table S0201, 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Census Bureau.

Table 1.2 points to racial disparities among community members in various outcomes, for instance:

- Black and Latine community members are less likely to have a bachelor's degree than White and Asian community members;

- The poverty rates of Asian, Latine, and Black children are respectively two, three, and five times the poverty rate of White children;

- While Black and Latine community members have the highest rates of employment, they have the lowest median incomes; and

- 77 percent of Asian and 75 percent of White constituents are homeowners, compared to 46 percent of Black constituents and 52 percent of Latine constituents.

Table 1.2 indicates White community members are generally more advantaged than BIPOC community members in terms of education, employment, income, transportation, and other outcomes. As described more in Chapter 2, this contributes to White community members having more capacity than BIPOC community members to easily engage in government.

Racial disparities among community members are rooted in a deep history of government policies and practices – including land theft, slavery, racial segregation, and disenfranchisement – that structurally privileged White people and structurally marginalized and oppressed BIPOC.[37] As described by the

Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), "[f]rom the inception of our country, government at the local, regional, state and federal level has played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequity" and "despite progress in addressing explicit discrimination, racial inequities continue to be deep, pervasive and persistent across the country."[38]

Understanding the characteristics of community members by race and ethnicity provides some insight into differing capacity and needs they may have for community engagement with the County, for instance:

- Higher shares of Black and Latine households are headed by single parents. Single parents may not be able to participate in engagements that do not accommodate childcare;

- Higher shares of Asian and Latine constituents have limited English proficiency. Community members with limited English proficiency may not be able to participate in engagements that are not offered in their native language;

- Higher shares of White and Asian constituents are not in the labor force. Community members who are not in the labor force could have more availability to participate in engagements;

- Higher shares of White and Asian constituents are employed in management, business, sciences, and arts occupations. Employees in these occupations could have more flexibility in their work schedule to participate in engagements;

- Higher shares of Black and Latine constituents are employed in service occupations. Employees in service occupations could have less flexibility in their work schedule to participate in engagements; and

- Higher shares of Black households have no access to a vehicle. Households without a vehicle may not be able to participate in engagements in locations that are not walkable or easily accessible by public transportation.

Studying constituent characteristics by race and ethnicity in more specific geographies could provide County stakeholders with helpful information for effectively engaging community members in different parts of the County. As described in Chapter 3, using data to understand communities is a best practice that supports government stakeholders to tailor engagement efforts in targeted, meaningful ways.

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[35] Latine people are included in other racial groups throughout this report, unless where otherwise noted. Estimates for Native American and Pacific Islander constituents are not available for all data points presented in report.

[36] Reported by the Census Bureau as "female householder, no spouse present, family" and "with own children of the householder under 18 years."

[37] "Turning the Floodlights on the Root Causes of Today's Racialized Economic Disparities: Community Development Work at the Boston Fed Post-2020," Regional & Community Outreach, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, December 2020.

[38] Why Government? Government Alliance on Race and Equity.

Chapter 2. Racial Inequities and Disparities in Community Engagement

Community engagement supports strong democracy and effective government by allowing government stakeholders – including elected officials and administrators – to reflect the needs and priorities of community members in government policies, programs, and practices. Yet, community engagement by government has historically amplified the voice and power of White community members while excluding the voice and power of BIPOC community members. This in turn perpetuates policies, programs, and practices that exacerbate racial inequities and disparities.

This chapter describes the historical and current context of racial inequities in community engagement. This chapter also presents available local data for understanding racial disparities in community engagement in the County.

This chapter is presented in three sections:

- **Section A** describes the historical context of racial inequities in community engagement. This includes a general overview of the nation's history of empowering and disempowering community members with citizenship and the right to vote by race and ethnicity.

- **Section B** describes the current context of racial inequities in community engagement given the legacy of structural racism. This includes findings from research on racial inequities in community engagement and examples of racial inequities in common community engagement practices used in the County based on feedback from community partners, County staff, and OLO's observations.

- **Section C** presents OLO's analysis of racial and ethnic disparities in the County's community engagement based on available data from constituent engagement with the County Council and calls to MC311.

Two key findings emerge from the information reviewed in this chapter:

- There is a deep history of government at all levels empowering and disempowering people in government by race. Racial inequities and disparities in community engagement rooted in this legacy of structural racism are evident today.

- An analysis of available data suggests that racial and ethnic disparities characterize community engagement in the County.

A. Historical Context of Racial Inequities in Community Engagement

A deep history of empowering and disempowering people by race at all levels of government in the U.S. has created structural racial inequities in how the government engages with constituents and which voices have been empowered or disempowered to shape government policies, programs, and practices. The U.S. Senate explains that the first three words of the Constitution – "We The People" – "affirm[s] that the government of the United States exists to serve its citizens."[39] Yet, as described by historian Wang Xi, "the debate over who were 'We the People,' or 'who are we,' was present at the beginning of the nation's history," and race was at the center of this debate.[40] Throughout history, BIPOC were deprived of a voice in government through denial of citizenship and the right to vote. Since the government did not exist to serve BIPOC, government stakeholders did not engage BIPOC to influence government policies, programs, and practices. This legacy shapes structural racial inequities and disparities in community engagement today.

Ratified in 1788, the Constitution established the foundational law of the U.S. While the words *citizen* and *citizens* were used in the document, the Constitution did not establish a national definition of citizenship and instead left the power to grant citizenship and to define "the most fundamental right of citizenship – the right to vote and hold offices" – to the states.[41,42] Thus, the states had great power in determining who was a part of society and who could have a basic voice in government through electing representatives.

Figure 2.1 outlines key events in American history related to race, citizenship, and the right to vote. While this timeline is not exhaustive, these milestones illustrate how race has historically defined inclusion and participation in government. Throughout the nation's history, federal and state governments consistently privileged White people in having access to citizenship and the right to vote. Nearly by default, White, property-owning men were vested with the power to vote by all states. Only two years after the Constitution was ratified, the Naturalization Act of 1790 created a framework for White immigrants to become U.S. citizens, giving them access to voting rights according to state guidelines. By 1860, most White men with and without property had the right to vote in the United States.

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[39] Introduction to Constitution of the United States, United States Senate, accessed July 2023.
[40] Wang Xi, "Citizenship and Nation-Building in American History and Beyond," Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2010.
[41] Ibid.
[42] The Founders and the Vote, Library of Congress.

Figure 2.1. Timeline of American Citizenship and the Right to Vote by Race and Ethnicity

Year	Event	Source
1607	White British settlers establish first North American colony in Jamestown, Virginia, invading "territory controlled and settled for centuries by Native Americans."	Library of Congress
1619	First group of enslaved Black people abducted from Africa land in Point Comfort, Virginia.	Hampton History Museum
1788	U.S. Constitution is ratified and leaves details of voting to the states. States generally grant the right to vote to White men with property.	Library of Congress
1790	The Naturalization Act of 1790 establishes federal procedures and criteria for White immigrants to become U.S. citizens.	U.S. Capital Visitor Center
1848	The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo extends citizenship to people living in Mexican territory annexed to the U.S. after the Mexican-American War.	National Park Service
1857	In *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, the Supreme Court rules that free and enslaved Black people are not U.S. citizens.	Cornell Law School
1860	Most White men without property are enfranchised by the states.	Library of Congress
1865	The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution formally abolishes slavery in the United States.	National Archives
1868	The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution extends citizenship to "[a]ll persons born or naturalized in the United States," including formerly enslaved Black people.	National Archives
1870	The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution enshrines the right to vote for U.S. citizens regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."	Library of Congress
1882	The Chinese Exclusion Act prohibits state and federal courts from granting citizenship to Chinese residents.	National Archives
1920	The 19th Amendment to the U.S Constitution enshrines the right to vote for women.	National Archives
1924	The Snyder Act of 1924 extends full U.S. citizenship to Native Americans born in the United States.	Library of Congress
1965	The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits states from using discriminatory voting practices to prevent Black people from voting.	National Archives

Just as the government structurally empowered White people, and in particular White men, with a voice in government, they structurally excluded the voice of BIPOC. Black people in particular were often at the center of this exclusion. Instead of having rights and freedoms under federal and state constitutions, free and enslaved Black people in the United States were controlled by an extensive body of laws known as slave codes.[43] As described by historian Stephen Middleton in *Repressive Legislation: Slave Codes, Northern Black Laws, and Southern Black Codes*:

> "Beginning in the 1630s, colonial assemblies in English America and later the new United States used legislation and constitutions to enslave Africans and deny free [B]lacks civil rights, including free movement, freedom of marriage, freedom of occupation and, of course, citizenship and the vote…After the Revolution, many states passed [B]lack laws to deprive [B]lacks of the same rights as [W]hites. Blacks commonly could not vote, testify in court against a [W]hite, or serve on juries."[44]

In the landmark 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision, the Supreme Court federally enshrined the exclusion of free and enslaved Black people as U.S. citizens, an action that is credited as being among the major drivers of the Civil War.[45]

Free and Enslaved Black People in Maryland

Maryland was the first British colony in North America to recognize slavery by law in 1664, 22 years after the first documented people from Africa were brought to the state.[46,47] As noted by Ross M. Kimmel in *Blacks Before the Law in Colonial Maryland*, slave laws enacted by the Maryland Assembly over decades slowly eroded the civil and personal rights of all Black people in the state.[48] By the time the U.S. declared independence in 1776, more than 92 percent of all Black people in Maryland were enslaved and had no legal rights.[49]

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[43] Slave Code for the District of Columbia, Library of Congress.
[44] Stephen Middleton, "Repressive Legislation: Slave Codes, Northern Black Laws, and Southern Black Codes," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History, February, 28, 2020.
[45] Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857), Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School.
[46] Jonathan L. Alpert, "The Origin of Slavery in the United States – The Maryland Precedent," The American Journal of Legal History, July 1970.
[47] Slavery & Freedom in Maryland, University Libraries, University of Maryland.
[48] Ross M. Kimmel, Chapter 3: Freedom or Bondage – The Legislative Record, "Blacks Before the Law in Colonial Maryland," Maryland State Archives, January 24, 1974.
[49] David S. Bogen, "The Maryland Context of Dred Scott: The Decline in the Legal Status of Maryland Free Blacks 1776-1810," The American Journal of Legal History, October 1990.

Free and Enslaved Black People in Maryland, continued

In *The Maryland Context of Dred Scott: The Decline in the Legal Status of Maryland Free Blacks 1776-1810*, David S. Bogen explains that with the growth of the abolition movement, the Maryland legislature passed laws barring newly freed Black people from voting and serving in public office, "prevent[ing] [B]lacks from becoming a larger percentage of the citizenry" and "forestall[ing] any major change in [W]hite dominance of the power structure."[50] The stripping of the rights of free Black people in Maryland culminated with the enactment of "universal suffrage" legislation in 1802, whereby the General Assembly empowered all White men with and without property with the right to vote through directly disenfranchising of all free Black men.[51] Bogen argues that the "disregard for the rights of free [B]lacks" in his native Maryland likely shaped Chief Justice Roger Taney's views in the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision.[52]

After centuries of exclusion, amendments to the Constitution that followed the federal abolition of slavery aimed for the inclusion of Black people in American society. Extending equal rights to Black people in turn codified rights benefitting people across race and ethnicity. In addition to granting U.S. citizenship to Black people, the 14th Amendment established birthright citizenship for all people born in the United States, regardless of race.[53] After several states continued to block Black people from voting, the 15th Amendment established the right to vote as a fundamental right for all U.S. citizens that was not to be denied "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."[54] Of note, all women, including Black women, were excluded from these protections until 1920 when the 19th Amendment prohibited the right to vote from being denied on account of sex.[55]

Maryland Ratification of the 15th Amendment

Following the abolition of slavery, the Maryland legislature unanimously rejected the 15th Amendment in 1870, signaling a clear opposition to the extension of voting rights to Black people. [56] Though Maryland was required to abide by the 15th Amendment starting in 1870, the legislature did not formally ratify it until 1973.[57]

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Amanda Frost, "Everyone Born in the United States is a U.S. Citizen. Here's Why." Washington Post, March 28, 2023.
[54] Voting Rights for African Americans, Library of Congress.
[55] Between Two Worlds: Black Women and the Fight for Voting Rights, National Park Service.
[56] David Troy, Celebrating Rights and Responsibilities, Maryland State Archives, 1996.
[57] Ibid.

The timeline also notes the struggle of other BIPOC groups to gain recognition as Americans and a basic voice in government. For instance:

- Native Americans were excluded from the 14th Amendment and did not receive recognition as U.S. citizens until Congress passed the Snyder Act nearly 60 years later. Even after the passage of the Snyder Act, it took over 40 years for all states to allow Indigenous people to vote.[58]

- Following the Mexican-American war, approximately 115,000 Mexicans living in territory ceded to the U.S. became "citizens by conquest" through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.[59] However, many of the new Mexican-Americans and their descendants would not have access to the more constructive status of state citizenship for decades as the territory was gradually formed into states. Scholars argue this process was mainly driven by the growth of the English-speaking White population in the territory.[60]

- The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first significant law restricting immigration into the U.S., barred Chinese people living in the U.S. from becoming citizens. This law set the stage for Congress to continue to pass legislation limiting immigration from more countries, including all countries in Asia.[61] While Congress repealed all exclusion acts in 1943,[62] they went on to enact discriminatory national origin quotas that continued to restrict immigration from Asia and other countries.[63] In response to the Civil Rights Movement, Congress eventually passed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished the national origins quota system.[64]

While BIPOC were eventually able to gain access to federal citizenship and the right to vote, state and local governments persisted in excluding the voice of BIPOC through restricting their access to voting. Despite the 15th and 19th Amendments, Southern states succeeded in passing legislation to disenfranchise Black men and women, including grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and poll taxes.[65] Intimidation and violence were also common tactics to prevent Black people from voting.[66] By 1940, only 3 percent of eligible Black voters in the South were registered to vote.[67]

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[58] Voting Rights for Native Americans, Library of Congress.
[59] Margaret E. Montoya, Latinos and the Law, National Park Service, Last updated July 10, 2020.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), National Archives.
[62] Ibid.
[63] The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act), Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.
[64] Chapter 1: The Nation's Immigration Laws, 1920 to Today, "Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S., Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065," Pew Research Center, September 28, 2015.
[65] Voting Rights Act: Major Dates in History, American Civil Liberties Union.
[66] Black Americans and the Vote, National Archives, Last reviewed June 9, 2021.
[67] Voting Rights Act: Major Dates in History

> **Attempts to Disenfranchise Black Voters in Maryland**
>
> In the early 20th century, amid the campaign of Black voter suppression in the South, legislation to disenfranchise Black voters was introduced in the Maryland General Assembly. Historian Dennis Patrick Halpin argues the legislation likely would have passed were it not for the steadfast resistance of Black activists.[68]

Five months after violent attacks by law enforcement on activists peacefully marching for Black voting rights in Selma, Alabama – one of several pivotal moments in the Civil Rights Movement –[69] Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). The VRA, an "act to enforce the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution," outlawed voting practices that denied the right to vote on account of race.[70] While the VRA was specifically enacted to protect the voting rights of Black people, similar to the 14th and 15th amendments, the legislation codified protections benefitting people of all races and ethnicities. For instance, the VRA fully secured the right to vote for Native Americans in every state.[71] The VRA was also successfully used in court cases challenging discriminatory voting practices against Latine and other people with limited English proficiency.[72]

Today, the struggle of BIPOC for a basic voice in government continues. As described by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), "over the last decade, instead of protecting the VRA and expanding access to the ballot box, the Supreme Court and courts across the country have dismantled and gutted crucial parts of the VRA," including through the major *Shelby County v. Holder* decision in 2013.[73] In the 2019 report *Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote*, researchers from the Leadership Conference Education Fund explain:

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[68] Comments from Dennis Patrick Halpin, minute 24:49 to 26:47 in Blocking the Vote: Voter Suppression Then and Now, MD Center for History and Culture, October 29, 2020.

[69] Civil Rights Era, Jim Crow Museum, Ferris State University.

[70] Voting Rights Act (1965), National Archives.

[71] Dana Hedgpeth, "'Jim Crow, Indian Style': How Native Americans were Denied the Right to Vote for Decades," Washington Post, November 1, 2020.

[72] 1966: Katzenbach v. Morgan, A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States, Library of Congress.

[73] Sophia Lin Lakin, "Fifty-Seven Years After its Enactment, the Voting Rights Act is in Peril," American Civil Liberties Union, August 5, 2022.

"Since *Shelby*, a growing number of states and localities across the country have attempted to suppress voter participation among Black and Brown communities in various ways. States have shortened voting hours and days, enacted new barriers to voter registration, purged millions of eligible voters from the rolls, implemented strict voter identification laws, reshaped voting districts, and closed polling places. Many of these changes have been found to discriminate against Black and Brown voters. Courts have, in fact, found intentional discrimination in at least 10 voting rights decisions since *Shelby*."[74]

A 2023 analysis from the Brennan Center for Justice found that in the ten years since the *Shelby* decision, states have passed nearly 100 restrictive voting laws.[75]

Maryland Post *Shelby*

Today, Maryland is not among the more recent wave of states passing restrictive voting legislation in the wake of *Shelby v. Holder*.[76] However, grassroots organizations throughout the state remain active and vigilant in protecting and expanding the rights of BIPOC voters.[77] For instance, advocacy by Out for Justice and other organizations in Maryland led to passage of the Value My Vote Act in 2021, "addressing voter disenfranchisement across Maryland, within jails and prisons, and among individuals on probation and parole."[78]

B. Current Context of Racial Inequities in Community Engagement

The legacy of privileging White voices and excluding BIPOC voices in government shapes racial inequities in community engagement today in significant ways, as it:

- Embedded community engagement practices that accommodate the needs and priorities of White community members by default.

- Fostered distrust and skepticism in government among BIPOC community members that discourages engagement in government decision-making.

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[74] [Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote](#), The Leadership Conference Education Fund, September 2019.

[75] Jasleen Singh and Sara Carter, ["States Have Added Nearly 100 Restrictive Laws Since SCOTUS Gutted the Voting Rights Act 10 Years Ago,"](#) Brennan Center for Justice, June 23, 2023.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Comments from Nicole Hanson-Mundell in Blocking the Vote: Voter Suppression Then and Now

[78] [Past Legislative Victories](#), Out for Justice.

Because White community members have historically been included and connected to government over centuries, they often have the capacity – in terms of time, resources, familiarity, and trust – to easily engage in government. In contrast, BIPOC community members, who have historically been excluded and disconnected from government require community engagement practices that intentionally include them in government through centering their needs and priorities and through relationship building that mends the distrust embedded by government throughout history.

Several studies have found evidence of racial inequities in community engagement today, for instance:

- Research on community member participation in planning and zoning board meetings in Greater Boston[79] between 2015 and 2017 found stark racial disparities in public meeting participation, with White community members "overwhelmingly dominat[ing]" meetings,[80] accounting for 80 percent of the study area population but 95 percent of public meeting participants. The researchers noted overrepresentation of White community members in public meetings amplified support for housing policies that protected the assets of mostly White, wealthier communities and opposition to policies such as affordable housing that would mostly benefit BIPOC and low-income communities.[81]

- In a review of research on community engagement policies and engagement of BIPOC communities in school decision-making, researchers noted that "community engagement is often based on White middle-class cultural norms and deficit views of nondominant communities, and that racially minoritized parents regularly experience alienation in these spaces."[82]

- In a study of school boundary changes in Baltimore and Howard Counties, researchers observed the following regarding community engagement:

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[79] Greater Boston is the metropolitan region encompassing the municipality of Boston and its surrounding areas.

[80] Einstein, K.L., Palmer, M., and Glick, D., Racial Disparities in Housing Politics: Evidence from Administrative Data, Boston University, August 29, 2018.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Literature Review from Eupha Jeanne Daramola, et. al, "Advancing or Inhibiting Equity: The Role of Racism in the Implementation of a Community Engagement Policy," Leadership and Policy in Schools, May 3, 2022.

"School board policies in both Baltimore and Howard Counties outline specific requirements designed to gain public feedback on school attendance boundary studies and changes. These requirements on their face promoted transparency, deliberation, and engagement. However, their implementation through advisory committees, public hearings and workshops, and online surveys favored some residents over others. Individuals and groups with resources to organize, ability to attend evening meetings, and access to technical and professional expertise could more easily navigate the public processes. In Baltimore and Howard Counties – like other communities in the U.S. – residents who opposed the boundary changes and supported the segregated status quo benefited, while voices supportive of boundary changes and a less segregated district remained marginalized."[83]

Figure 2.2 summarizes racial inequities in common community engagement practices in the County based on feedback from community partners, County staff, and OLO observations from focus groups, interviews, and document reviews described in Chapters 4 and 5.

Figure 2.2. Racial Inequities in Common Community Engagement Practices

Stage 1, Inform practices (e.g., websites, press releases, e-newsletters, social media, presentations, print materials, MC311)
• Privileges community members who have time to regularly review content of websites, e-mails and social media. • Privileges community members who have access to and familiarity with technology. • Limited availability of racially and ethnically diverse staff who can develop and disseminate culturally and linguistically competent messages, presentations, and print materials. • Limited outreach to BIPOC community members to subscribe to department e-newsletters and social media pages. • Limited outreach to BIPOC community members to connect to MC311 or how to use its language interpretation services. • Messages and print materials are written to appeal to 'general' audience rather than BIPOC community members. • Messages and print materials are written in complex and technical language that may alienate BIPOC community members. • Messages are distributed to traditional media outlets that are not necessarily connected to BIPOC community members.

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[83] Ariel H. Bierbaum and Gail L. Sunderman, "School Desegregation, School Re-zoning, and Growth Management in Two Maryland Counties," Education Policy Analysis Archives, Arizona State University, December 6, 2021.

Stage 1, Inform Practices, continued (e.g., websites, press releases, e-newsletters, social media, presentations, print materials, MC311)
• Presentations and print materials are shared during community events that are primarily attended by White community members.
Stage 2, Consult practices (e.g., public hearings, meetings, forums)
• Privileges community members who have time, resources, and familiarity to organize advocacy for their needs and priorities.   • Privileges community members who have time and resources to attend public events or write correspondence.   • Limited availability of racially and ethnically diverse staff who can provide culturally and linguistically competent facilitation of public events.   • Limited outreach to BIPOC community members to participate in public events.   • Public events are held during times that do not accommodate schedules of BIPOC community members.   • Public events are held at locations that are less accessible to BIPOC community members in terms of proximity and/or access to transportation.   • Public events do not accommodate needs that are more common among BIPOC community members, such as childcare and language accessibility.   • Skepticism in effectiveness of public event participation to influence government policies, programs, and practices.
Stage 3, Involve practices (e.g., Boards, Committees, and Commissions)
• Privileges community members who have time and resources to regularly participate in Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCC) meetings without compensation.   • Privileges community members who have familiarity or comfort with navigating complex appointment process for BCCs.   • Privileges community members who have existing connections with government officials.   • Limited outreach to BIPOC community members to apply for BCC membership.   • Limited availability of racially and ethnically diverse staff who can provide culturally and linguistically competent facilitation of BCC meetings.   • BCCs meetings do not accommodate needs that are more common among BIPOC community members, such as childcare and language accessibility.   • Imbalances in workload among BCC members.   • Large workload for sole BCC that is focused on overseeing racial equity and social justice implementation in County departments.   • Skepticism in effectiveness of BCC participation to influence government policies, programs, and practices.

Case Study: Racial Inequity in Community Associations

Community associations are frequently cited as a go-to resource for County officials to engage community members on County policies, programs, and practices. For instance, in interviews with OLO, Montgomery Planning staff explained they commonly reach out to community associations as an avenue to engage community members around master plans. Community associations are also referenced by government stakeholders as an effective avenue for community members to organize and influence government decisions. Indeed, the County previously published toolkits guiding community members on how to start, improve, and grow community associations.[84]

The County describes a community association as "a group of individuals with shared interests who meet regularly to accomplish common goals."[85] Montgomery Planning maintains a list of homeowners and civic associations to "send announcements about planning issues of interest in the community."[86] According to Montgomery Planning's database, there are 255 registered civic associations that are primarily organized around specific neighborhoods and communities in the County.[87]

Montgomery History describes that various 'civic minded' associations were created in the early 20th century to improve services in their respective communities.[88] However, historical evidence included in Montgomery Planning's Working Draft of the Mapping Segregation Report suggests civic associations also served to reinforce racial exclusion and segregation in the County. For instance, the Lincoln Park Civic Association in Takoma Park supported racial restrictive covenants and explicitly excluded Black people from joining the association.[89] Black community members organized to form their own association – the Colby Avenue Citizens Association. However, in the Mapping Segregation report, Montgomery Planning explained that "their needs were more easily ignored…due to a lack of participation in the greater community's affairs."[90]

In 1925, the Montgomery County Civic Federation (MCCF) formed as an umbrella for the County's civic organizations and sought to make "wholesale changes in the system of County government."[91] Among MCCF's initial goals was "ensuring the development of single-family dwelling subdivisions," which is now recognized as an exclusionary practice that created and maintained racially segregated communities.[92,93] By the late 1930s, the MCCF actively advocated against "projects such as commercial development, low-income housing, and multifamily dwellings" that were perceived to "have an adverse effect on the standard of living and on property values."[94]

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[84] Montgomery County Community Toolkit, Mid-County Regional Services Centers, August 2014.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Homeowners and Civic Association Tools, Montgomery Planning.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Guide to the Records of the Montgomery County Civic Federation 1925-1998, Montgomery County Archives, Montgomery History, Revised November 24, 2015.

Case Study: Racial Inequity in Community Associations, continued

Today, community associations continue to be well-organized and influential in County decision-making. In data described in the next section, community associations engaged in testimony or correspondence to the County Council 110 times between 2019 and 2023. Further, County officials and department staff occasionally participate in community association meetings.[95,96] However, especially under the MCCF, some associations continue to take positions – such as opposition to upzoning in single-family neighborhoods –[97] that undermine housing affordability for BIPOC and community members with low incomes.

Understanding the historical and current context of community associations and other groups in the County can help County stakeholders be mindful of how they are or are not centering the needs, leadership, and power of BIPOC community members when engaging groups on County efforts.

C. Local Racial Disparities in Community Engagement

Feedback from department staff described in Chapter 5 suggests there are racial and ethnic disparities in community engagement locally. Yet, limited data is collected to fully understand community engagement participation in the County by race and ethnicity.

OLO was able to obtain data on constituent engagement with the County Council and calls to MC311 that could provide insight into racial and ethnic disparities in community engagement in the County. This section presents OLO's analysis of this data.

1. Constituent Testimony and Correspondence Data

OLO analyzed data on **constituents who registered to testify** before the County Council in the past five years. The data comprised two sets:

[89] Working Draft of the Mapping Segregation Report, Montgomery Planning, December 1, 2022.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Guide to Records of the Montgomery County Civic Federation 1925-1998.
[92] The Color of Wealth in the Nation's Capital, Urban Institute, November 1, 2016.
[93] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (Liveright, 2017)
[94] Guide to Records of the Montgomery County Civic Federation 1925-1998.
[95] Representatives Meeting Agenda, Greater Olney Civic Association, May 9, 2023.
[96] Kemp Mill Civic Association General Meeting, Kemp Mill Civic Association, June 26, 2023.
[97] Resolution of the Montgomery County Civic Federation on Proposed Rezoning of Residential Neighborhoods, Montgomery County Civic Federation, October 2021.

- Live testimony registrations from people participating in-person, via video, or via audio. The data set included 4,366 registrations from January 15, 2019 to July 25, 2023 and came from an [online sign-up form](#) that registrants filled out themselves on the Council website; and

- Written and pre-recorded audio or video testimony ("uploaded testimony") registrations submitted through another [online form](#) on the Council website. The data set included 3,358 registrations from April 6, 2023 to August 13, 2023.

OLO also analyzed data on **public correspondence** to the Council between 2018 and 2023. The data set included 15,575 constituent correspondence from two systems:

- Data from the Council's IQ correspondence management system from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022; and

- Data from the Council's new Indigov correspondence management system from January 1, 2023 to August 25, 2023.

The data had the following limitations:

- The County does not collect data on race and/or ethnicity when constituents register to testify or when they submit mail to the Council. OLO was unable to directly analyze constituent testimony or correspondence data by these two factors;

- Not all records contain complete information on constituents' address, city, and postal ZIP code. As presented later in this section, OLO compared available data on constituents' location with Census demographic data to make general estimates on the racial and/or ethnic characteristics of testimony registrants and correspondents;

- The data as provided to OLO did not explicitly identify whether data records were from constituents or from government officials (e.g., testimony made on behalf of the County Executive, or official correspondence from a County department). Where possible, OLO made reasonable judgments about whether an entry was from someone representing a County department and/or an official and excluded it from the sample;

- From the constituent testimony data sets, OLO excluded testimony records with government entities in the "Whom do you Represent" field and records with County government addresses. In total, OLO removed 202 entries from constituent testimony data; and

- From the constituent correspondence data sets, OLO identified entries with County government addresses (i.e., Executive Office, Housing Opportunities Commission, Board of Education) and excluded them from the sample. In total, OLO removed 334 records from the constituent correspondence data.

Table 2.1 displays the top five geographic locations provided by all constituent contacts. This list represents 65 percent of all live testimony registrations, 66 percent of uploaded testimony registrations, and 65 percent of correspondence to the Council.

Of those contacts who provided their locations (16.7 percent of uploaded testimony registrants did not provide their locations during registration), the highest percentages of constituents in each data set came from Silver Spring, Rockville, and Bethesda.

Table 2.1. Top Five Geographic Locations Provided by Constituent Contacts, 2019-2023

	Live Testimony Registrations		Uploaded Testimony Registrations		Correspondence	
Totals	**4,366**		**3,358**		**15,575**	
Locations	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Silver Spring	1,209	27.7%	742	22.1%	4,201	27.0%
NO CITY			560	16.7%		
Rockville	686	15.7%	413	12.3%	2,426	15.6%
Bethesda	395	9.0%	275	8.2%	2,385	15.3%
Gaithersburg	367	8.4%	216	6.4%	1,233	7.9%
Chevy Chase	180	4.1%	116	3.5%	723	4.6%

Source: OLO analysis of Live, In-Person Testimony Registrations from Council Public Hearing Registration Form, January 15, 2019 to July 25, 2023; Written, Audio, and Video Testimony Registrations from Council Testimony Submission Form, April 2020 to August 2023, and Indigov Constituent Export, IQ Correspondence from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022; and Correspondence from January 1, 2023 to August 25, 2023.

Racial and ethnic disparities. To estimate potential racial and ethnic disparities in constituent engagement with the Council, OLO used ZIP code information from the constituent engagement data to analyze how constituent engagement from predominantly White communities compared to engagement from predominantly BIPOC communities. Both the uploaded testimony and public correspondence data sets contained information on constituents' postal ZIP codes. Using Census ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs),[98] OLO identified three ZCTAs with the highest proportion of White constituents and four with the highest proportion of BIPOC constituents among ZCTAs with a population over 30,000.

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[98] ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) are "generalized areal representations"[98] of U.S Postal Service (USPS) ZIP codes using 2020 Census blocks. According to the Census, all 2020 ZCTA codes are current valid USPS ZIP codes as of January 1, 2020. Several ZCTAs overlap with neighboring counties. For this analysis, OLO focused on ZCTAs that were mostly contained in Montgomery County. For more information, refer to ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs), U.S. Census Bureau.

<u>Predominantly White ZCTAs.</u> The top three predominantly White ZCTAs were:

- **20814**, which includes addresses in Bethesda and North Bethesda, Chevy Chase, and South Kensington;
- **20815**, which includes Chevy Chase, Bethesda, and Friendship Village; and
- **20817**, which also includes some addresses in Bethesda and Potomac.

Figure 2.3 on page 39 shows the geographic boundaries of ZCTAs in the County with these three predominantly White ZCTAs highlighted in red.

Table 2.2 shows the racial and ethnic profile of the three predominantly White ZCTAs and Table 2.3 shows constituent engagement from the corresponding ZIP codes. On average, 67 percent of constituents from these ZCTAs are White. While these ZCTAs account for 10 percent of the County population, they accounted for 15 percent of constituent engagement with the Council through uploaded testimony or correspondence.

Table 2.2. Racial and Ethnic Profile of Predominantly White ZCTAs

	ZCTA 20814	ZCTA 20815	ZCTA 20817	County
Total Population	**31,919**	**31,517**	**38,908**	**1,062,061**
Percentage of population	**3%**	**3%**	**4%**	**100%**
Race and Hispanic Origin				
Hispanic or Latino (may be of any race)	10%	8%	9%	20%
Not Hispanic or Latino:[99]				
White only	65%	73%	64%	41%
Black only	6%	5%	5%	18%
Asian only	13%	8%	16%	15%
American Indian and Alaska Native only	0%	0%	0%	0.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander only	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other race	1%	1%	1%	1%
BIPOC[100]	30%	22%	30%	54%

Source: Table DP1, 2020 Decennial Census, Census Bureau.

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[99] For Table 2.2 and 2.4 the 'Not Hispanic or Latino' race categories count the population of people who indicated being one race only.
[100] For Table 2.2 and 2.4, OLO's calculation of BIPOC constituents includes the Hispanic or Latino population and Non-Hispanic or Latino Black, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and Other race populations.

Table 2.3. Uploaded Testimony and Correspondence from Predominantly White ZCTAs

	Uploaded Testimony Registrations		Correspondence		Total	
Totals	3,358		15,575		18,933	
ZIP Codes	#	%	#	%	#	%
20814	128	3.81%	728	4.67%	856	4.52%
20815	123	3.66%	843	5.41%	966	5.10%
20817	102	3.04%	900	5.78%	1002	5.29%

Source: OLO analysis of Written, Audio, and Video Testimony Registrations from Council Testimony Submission Form, April 2020 to August 2023, and Indigov Constituent Export, IQ Correspondence from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022; and Correspondence from January 1, 2023 to August 25, 2023.

Predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs. The top four predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs were:[101]

- **20877**, which includes Gaithersburg and surrounding areas;
- **20886**, which includes Montgomery Village and surrounding areas;
- **20904**, which includes areas around Silver Spring including White Oak, Colesville, and Fairland; and
- **20906**, which includes Aspen Hill, Layhill, and some addresses in Wheaton.

Figure 2.3 on page 39 shows the geographic boundaries of ZCTAs in the County with these four predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs highlighted in yellow.

Table 2.4 shows the racial and ethnic profile of the predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs and Table 2.5 shows constituent engagement from the corresponding ZIP codes. On average, 74 percent of constituents from these ZCTAs are BIPOC. While these ZCTAs account for 20 percent of the County population, they accounted for 8 percent of constituent engagement with the Council through uploaded testimony or correspondence.

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[101] OLO included the top four predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs because two of the ZCTAs (20886, 20906) roughly have the same share of BIPOC constituents. Refer to table 2.4.

Table 2.4. Racial and Ethnic Profile of Predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs

	ZCTA 20877	ZCTA 20886	ZCTA 20904	ZCTA 20906	County
Total Population	**37,577**	**35,649**	**59,051**	**71,641**	**1,062,061**
Percentage of population	**4%**	**3%**	**6%**	**7%**	**100%**
Race and Hispanic Origin					
Hispanic or Latino (may be of any race)	43%	37%	18%	35%	20%
Not Hispanic or Latino:					
White only	19%	24%	20%	24%	41%
Black only	20%	23%	46%	24%	18%
Asian only	13%	11%	12%	12%	15%
American Indian and Alaska Native only	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander only	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other race	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
BIPOC	77%	72%	76%	72%	54%

Source: Table DP1, 2020 Decennial Census, Census Bureau.

Table 2.5. Uploaded Testimony and Correspondence from Predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs

	Uploaded Testimony Registrations		Correspondence		Total	
Totals	**3,358**		**15,575**		**18,933**	
ZIP Codes	#	%	#	%	#	%
20877	46	1.37%	222	1.43%	268	1.42%
20886	45	1.34%	186	1.19%	231	1.22%
20904	97	2.89%	324	2.08%	421	2.22%
20906	73	2.17%	585	3.76%	658	3.48%

Source: OLO analysis of Written, Audio, and Video Testimony Registrations from Council Testimony Submission Form, April 2020 to August 2023, and Indigov Constituent Export, IQ Correspondence from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022; and Correspondence from January 1, 2023 to August 25, 2023.

Figure 2.3. ZCTA Boundaries in Montgomery County
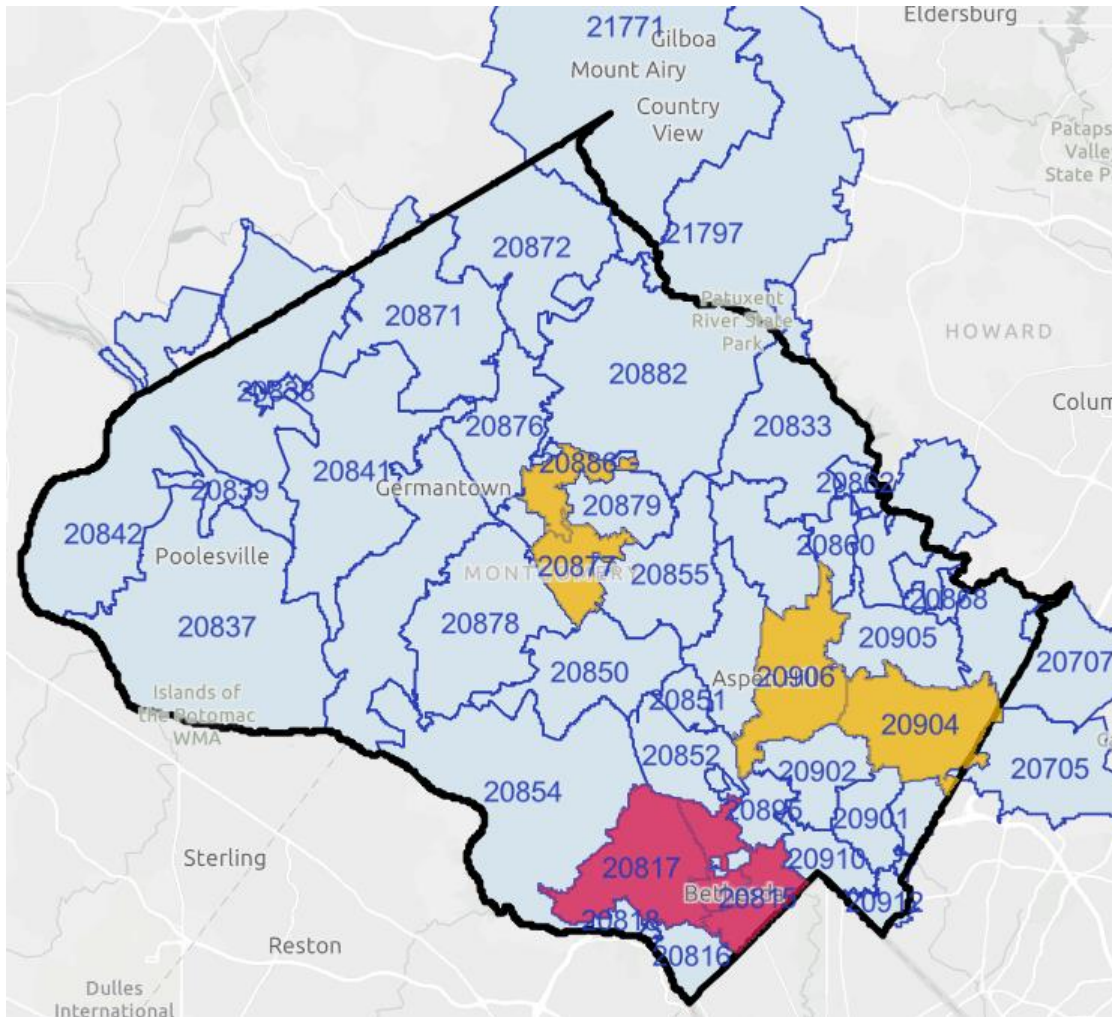
Source: 2020 Zip Code Tabulation Areas, Montgomery County Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions.

Summary. Generally, the predominantly White ZCTAs were overrepresented in constituent engagement with the Council while the predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs were largely underrepresented. Further, while the predominantly White ZCTAs have only half the population of the predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs, constituent engagement from the predominantly White ZCTAs was nearly double the engagement from the predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs. This finding suggests that common channels of engagement in the Council foster stronger engagement among White constituents than among BIPOC constituents. This pattern likely extends to similar channels of engagement in other departments.

2. MC311 Call Data

To better understand local disparities in engaging linguistically diverse constituents, OLO examined key performance metrics published by the MC311 Customer Service Center.[102] The MC311 Customer Service Center provides the public with non-emergency information on County services and programs. The public can access County information and services on MC311's website or by calling a single three-digit number (311) and speaking with a customer service representative (CSR). Callers who prefer to speak Spanish can choose to speak with a certified Spanish-speaking CSR. MC311 conducts all other non-English calls in languages other than Spanish using Voiance, the County's telephone interpretation service.[103]

Table 2.6 displays the average monthly calls to MC311 overall and in Spanish between FY18 and FY23. The data show that, between FY20 and FY23, MC311 averaged about 57,500 calls a month, of which roughly 3,500, or 6 percent, were in Spanish. Calls conducted in Spanish roughly doubled since the start of the pandemic in FY20 and have maintained at these levels in recent years.[104]

Table 2.6. Average Monthly Calls to MC311 Customer Service Center, FY18 – FY23

Average monthly calls	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23[105]
Average monthly calls (total #)	58,613	59,191	61,046	57,822	58,400	52,530
Average monthly calls in Spanish (#)	1,758	1,776	3,663	3,469	3,504	3,152
Average monthly calls in Spanish (%)	3	3	6	6	6	6

Source: OLO extrapolation and analysis of MC311 key performance metrics from MC311 Performance Jul – Apr FY23 presentation, May 17, 2023.

To better understand how the utilization of MC311's non-English services compare to language needs in the County overall, OLO examined U.S. Census Bureau data on languages spoken at home and rates of limited English proficiency (LEP) in the County. Table 2.7 displays the number and percentage of MC311 calls conducted in different languages in April 2023. The non-English languages are classified based on four major language groups used by the Census.[106] The table compares MC311 data to the percentage of people in the County who speak the major language group at home and the percent who speak English less than "very well."

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[102] MC311 Performance Jul – Apr FY23 presentation, MC311, May 17, 2023.
[103] Ibid., slide 9.
[104] Ibid.; MC311 does not publish equivalent key performance metrics for non-English calls in languages other than Spanish.
[105] July 2022 – Apr 2023
[106] The U.S. Census Bureau aggregates and disaggregates languages based on the size of the population in the United States speaking that language at home. The most basic categorization collapses languages into four major language groups: Spanish, Other Indo-European languages, Asian and Pacific Island languages, and Other languages. The table at this link shows more detail on the four language groups.

Table 2.7. MC311 Calls by Language (Apr. 2023) compared with Languages Spoken at Home (Total calls = 33,690)

U.S. Census Major Language Groups	MC311 Calls			County Estimates	
	Call Language	Calls (#)	Calls (%)	Constituents (%)	Constituents with LEP (%)
English Proficient	English	31,567	93.7%	85.2%	
Spanish	Spanish (all calls)	2,112	6.3%	17.1%	7.0%
	Live calls	2,076			
	Voiance calls	36			
Other Indo-European, Asian and Pacific Island, and Other languages	Languages other than Spanish[107] (Voiance only)	9	0.0%	24.5%	7.8%

Source: MC311 Performance Jul – Apr FY23 presentation, May 17, 2023; Table S1601, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Census Bureau.

The table shows the following:

- English speakers are overrepresented in MC311 calls. 85.2 percent of County constituents speak English only or speak English "very well" whereas about 94% of calls to MC311 are in English;

- Spanish speakers are proportionately represented in MC311 calls. Seven percent of constituents with LEP speak Spanish while 6 percent of MC311 calls are in Spanish; and

- Non-English speakers who speak languages other than Spanish are underrepresented in MC311 calls. About 8 percent of constituents with LEP speak languages other than Spanish, but less than 1 percent of calls to MC311 are in languages other than English or Spanish.

According to U.S. Census data, the top three languages spoken by constituents with LEP in the County are Spanish, Chinese, and Amharic. Besides Spanish, there is little representation of these languages in MC311 calls as:[108]

- Over 20,000 constituents with LEP speak Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese), but only two calls to MC311 in April 2023 were in Mandarin; and

- Over 10,000 constituents with LEP speak Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages yet no MC311 calls in April 2023 were in those languages.

These data suggest there are racial and ethnic disparities in communications and outreach to constituents with LEP who speak languages other than Spanish to connect to MC311 and other services in the County.

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[107] Languages include Nepali, Bengali, Brazilian Portuguese, French, Neapolitan, and Mandarin.
[108] Table B16001, 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Census Bureau.

Chapter 3. Best Practices for Equitable Community Engagement

The legacy of empowering and disempowering people in government by race and ethnicity has created racial inequities and disparities in community engagement today. Because White community members have historically been included and connected to government over centuries, they often have the capacity to easily engage in government. In contrast, BIPOC community members, who have historically been excluded and disconnected from government require community engagement practices that intentionally include them in government through centering their needs and priorities and through relationship building that mends the distrust embedded by government throughout history.

This chapter describes best practices for centering BIPOC in community engagement and how the County's community engagement process aligns with best practices.

This chapter is presented in two sections:

- **Section A** describes the themes that emerge from a review of best practices for equitable community engagement developed by organizations, researchers, and local jurisdictions.

- **Section B** describes how the County's community engagement process in the RESJ Action Plan Regulations aligns with best practices.

Two key findings emerge from the information reviewed in this chapter:

- A review of research and literature reveals eight best practice themes for advancing equitable community engagement.

- The RESJ Action Plan Regulations reflect several best practices for equitable community engagement.

A. Best Practices for Equitable Community Engagement

To understand best practices for equitable community engagement, OLO reviewed research and literature from organizations, researchers, and local jurisdictions, including:[109]

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[109] Other sources include Facilitating Power, Movement Strategy Center, and the National Association of Climate Resilience Planners; National Center for Biotechnology Information; Governing.com; Medium.com; Shelterforce.com; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; Sustainable CT; OLO; and the National League of Cities.

- The Government Alliance on Race and Equity;
- The City of Alexandria, Virginia;
- ChangeLab Solutions;
- The Stanford Social Innovation Review;
- Partners for Dignity & Rights and Race Forward;
- The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity;
- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation;
- Public Agenda; and
- The Urban Institute.

Based on the review, OLO identified the following eight themes of best practices for equitable community engagement:

1. Develop a shared understanding of RESJ;
2. Make equitable community engagement an organizational priority;
3. Center BIPOC and empower collaborators;
4. Build relationships and trust;
5. Make it easier for people to participate;
6. Co-create and enforce an equitable community engagement policy;
7. Use tools to operationalize equitable community engagement; and
8. Use data to inform strategies and track results.

In summary, best practice research emphasizes the need to normalize RESJ and equitable community engagement by training staff and adequately resourcing both departments and community partners. Additionally, practitioners must develop long-term relationships with BIPOC stakeholders, center BIPOC collaborators in the co-creation of policies and programs and make it easy for BIPOC to participate in engagement activities. Finally, equitable community engagement should be informed and evaluated using local metrics developed with BIPOC communities.

The remainder of this section describes best practices for equitable community engagement by the eight themes identified by OLO.

1. Develop a Shared Understanding of RESJ

According to best practice research, equitable community engagement requires government stakeholders to normalize RESJ by adopting a shared understanding of what RESJ is and why it is important to integrate into all aspects of government work. According to the GARE, institutions develop this internal capacity by educating their employees about structural racism and governments' role in maintaining racial inequity.

RESJ training strengthens government employees' capacity to apply a racial equity framework to their daily work. According to GARE, a racial equity framework "…clearly names the history of government in creating and maintaining racial inequities; envisions and operationalizes a new role; and utilizes clear and easily understood definitions of racial equity and inequity, implicit and explicit bias, and individual, institutional, and structural racism."[110]

According to practitioners, government stakeholders can use RESJ trainings as opportunities to carry out equitable community engagement with BIPOC. In comments made during the 2023 GARE Membership Meeting, a representative from one government jurisdiction noted that organizing RESJ trainings to include both government staff and community members was a powerful strategy for learning and building trust between government and community stakeholders.[111]

2. Make Equitable Community Engagement an Organizational Priority

Researchers observe that governments must regard equitable community engagement as an urgent institutional priority in order to integrate it into their decision-making processes. Prioritization signals to staff that equitable community engagement is mission critical and creates an environment in which it is valued. Importantly, prioritization helps governments avoid reverting to more common engagement practices that have historically excluded BIPOC and that perpetuate racial inequities.[112]

Foster a supportive environment. According to best practice research, department leaders should model equitable community engagement in their own decision-making and reward employees who do the same. Action plans and accountability measures can help set clear expectations for employees and strengthen support within institutions for adopting community engagement practices and striving to make those practices equitable. GARE highlights how the City of Seattle accomplished this when it created its Race and Social Justice Initiative in 2005, noting, "…the development of annual Racial Equity work plans, use of a Racial Equity Tool, … support from the Mayor and departmental directors in integrating racial equity into accountability agreements, and special events to recognize accomplishments all helped foster an environment that is supportive of change."[113]

Dedicate time and resources. Research on community engagement observes the infrastructure needed to develop sustained, meaningful, and permanent collaboration with BIPOC communities requires an amount of time not typically afforded to policy-making processes. As discussed later in this section, equitable engagement involves building and sustaining relationships and trust with impacted communities, particularly communities who have historically been excluded by government decision-

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[110] GARE Communications Guide, Government Alliance on Race and Equity, May 18, 2018, pg. 5.
[111] Conference presentation, "Leveraging Community Participation and Power to Advance Racial Justice," Governing for Racial Justice, 2023 GARE Membership Meeting, November 2, 2023.
[112] Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action, Government Alliance on Race and Equity.
[113] Ibid., pg. 23.

makers. It also involves iterative listening and consultation and co-creation of timelines and agendas with community members. Studies find this approach can take months and even years and cannot be accomplished by just one or two individuals. Prioritizing community engagement with BIPOC requires that government offices dedicate sufficient time, personnel, and funds for teams to thoughtfully plan work, conduct it in impacted communities, and assess outcomes. As GARE observes:

> "Change will not occur if just one person or department is assigned the duties of advancing equity. Staff teams within every department must be sufficiently knowledgeable, equipped with the necessary tools, and given responsibility for incorporating racial equity policies and processes into their regular job duties if a jurisdiction is to advance its goals successfully."[114]

3. Center BIPOC and Empower Collaborators

Best practice research on inclusive and equitable community engagement emphasizes the importance of centering the needs and expertise of BIPOC communities that have historically been excluded from decision making. Studies observe effective engagement avoids top-down approaches and instead recruits and involves people most impacted by a policy or project early in the process, particularly to shape project scopes and agendas.[115] As the City of Alexandria describes in its *Handbook for Civic Engagement*, involving community members in framing issues up-front helps to identify areas of real need for those communities and ensures that "resources can be applied toward resolving them."[116]

Studies observe for community engagement to be most effective, every stage of policy development should draw on expertise[117] from a diverse range of community stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- Nonprofit organizations;
- Faith leaders;
- Community activists;
- Neighborhood associations; and
- Community members.

Importantly, researchers note this engagement must go beyond the "informational" or "consultative" activities governments commonly use that result in tokenizing BIPOC constituents (e.g., seeking input or buy-in from BIPOC communities after a plan that affects them is designed and/or launched).[118] To

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[114] Ibid., pg. 21.
[115] What's Next Alexandria: Handbook for Civic Engagement, City of Alexandria, VA, January 2014.
[116] Ibid., pg. 10.
[117] Strategies for Equitable Policymaking: Applying Law & Policy Frameworks to Improve Health, ChangeLab Solutions, 2023.
[118] From Community Engagement to Ownership: Tools for the Field with Case Studies of Four Municipal Community-Driven Environmental & Racial Equity Committees, Facilitating Power, Movement Strategy Center, and the National Association of Climate Resilience Planners, pg. 13.

meaningfully engage in decision-making, BIPOC collaborators must have the capacity to organize and take ownership of a process. One study explains that "community organizing is essential for effective participation by residents because through organizing activities, they gain a critical lens and political stance on core issues that affect their neighbors and therefore can effectively represent the interests of their communities."[119] Governments and non-profits can help BIPOC communities build this capacity by resourcing organizations and training community leaders to identify their own interests and lead change.[120]

4. Build Relationships and Trust

Researchers emphasize that effective engagement with BIPOC must be sustained and permanent, not temporary. Therefore, governments cannot expect to generate lasting, meaningful involvement from communities without first investing time and resources – often for years in advance – into building and maintaining trusted relationships with stakeholders in those communities. Research finds establishing trust is a difficult and time-consuming endeavor that requires governments to empower community stakeholders and to value them as equitable decision-making partners.[121,122]

GARE observes this is especially true in BIPOC communities, and in particular Black communities, who often distrust government. Historically, these communities have experienced racial oppression, exclusion, and harm from government actions. As the Kirwan Institute states in its report *The Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement*:

 "…many communities are marked by a terrible exclusion of people on the basis
 of racial and ethnic background or economic circumstances…the prior
 experiences of community members have a very real and powerful effect on
 their present relationships and expectations."[123]

Trusted messengers. Research on equitable community engagement highlights building relationships with "trusted messengers" – people that BIPOC community members view as credible sources of information.[124,125] Trusted messengers often hold formal roles such as heads of religious institutions, civic advocates, service providers, local elected officials, and agency heads. According to a study by the

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[119] Ibid., pg. 13.
[120] Melody Barnes and Paul Schmitz, "Community Engagement Matters (Now More Than Ever)", Stanford Social Innovation Review, Spring 2016.
[121] Co-Governing Toward Multiracial Democracy, Partners for Dignity & Rights and Race Forward, February 2023.
[122] Kip Holley, The Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Guide to Transformative Change, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University, pg. 19, 49.
[123] Ibid., pg. 34
[124] Samantha Wright, Annie Neim and Max Steinman, "Finding the Right Messenger for Your Message," Stanford Social Innovation Review, May 6, 2021.
[125] Shifera Asfaw, et al., Talking health: trusted health messengers and effective ways of delivering health messages for rural mothers in Southwest Ethiopia, National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, February 21, 2019.

Kellogg Foundation, these formal leaders are often sought out as partners for racially diverse collaborations because they "have constituencies, access to other leaders in their circle, and credibility and clout with residents." Trusted messengers also come from volunteer and membership groups with more direct ties to BIPOC communities. Groups like neighborhood organizations, block associations, and parent groups have access to and knowledge of community members and issues that formal leaders typically do not. Studies note these volunteer groups often hold more credibility with BIPOC community members because they live in the same neighborhoods and are impacted by the same issues. However, volunteer leaders and other respected, influential community members like older people or local store owners, can often be overlooked when creating community coalitions.[126,127]

Across stakeholder groups. The Kellogg Foundation study finds that building trusted relationships across various stakeholder groups instills confidence in collaborative decision-making. Participant buy-in helps the process in the long run, as it can result in more effective and sustained collaboration, especially when stakeholders face conflict during the process.[128] Studies find building relationships across a broad-base of community members, groups, professional networks, and government institutions will ensure that diverse perspectives, beliefs, values, and levels of expertise are included in the decision-making process and will shape more equitable and responsive policy outcomes.[129,130]

5. Make it Easier for People to Participate

Survey data compiled by the National Research Center (NRC) found community members often do not participate in local government because they do not have time or do not know how to engage.[131] People without ready access to transportation or who have work, family, or other obligations, may find it challenging to travel to engagement events like community meetings or public forums. Additionally, community members may feel uncomfortable attending engagement activities held in formal, often bureaucratic settings. Best practices recommend governments create engagement activities that are more accessible to and inclusive of the communities they seek to engage.

Meet people in their communities. According to best practices, constituents are likely to feel more comfortable engaging in activities that are easier to access in terms of proximity and familiarity, such as in their neighborhoods. Moreover, conducting community engagement in predominantly BIPOC neighborhoods is important for advancing RESJ because BIPOC have historically been excluded and disconnected from government. Best practice research identifies various strategies government stakeholders can use to equitably engage individuals in their communities, including:

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[126] Jewru Bandeh, et.al., Sustaining Community-Based Initiatives, Module 1: Developing Community Capacity, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, pgs. 118-119
[127] "Finding the Right Messenger for Your Message"
[128] Bandeh, et. al., pg. 19
[129] Ibid, pg. 25.
[130] Strategies for Equitable Policymaking: Applying Law & Policy Frameworks to Improve Health, pg. 11.
[131] Mike Maciag, "The Citizens Most Vocal in Local Government," Governing.com, June 11, 2014.

- **Go door to door.** Knocking on doors has been a successful strategy long used by community and civic organizers to impart information and seek resident feedback. Studies observe that engaging face-to-face with individuals can help break down barriers and encourage more open dialogue. While some people might be hesitant to speak to strangers, let alone government representatives, at their homes, research suggests employing staff or volunteers who are from the community can help create trust and increase the likelihood people will engage with them.[132]

- **Organize smaller, local meetings instead of larger, centralized meetings.** Inviting many constituents to one or two large community meetings held in a central location may save time and resources for government facilitators, but BIPOC can find this format inaccessible or inconvenient. Some jurisdictions have found success organizing smaller meetings in various neighborhoods over a longer period of time.[133] Stakeholders can also consider creating more collegial environments at meetings by arranging chairs in circles or small clusters instead of classroom style set ups.[134]

Remove barriers to participation. Successful community engagement, particularly with BIPOC, requires governments to account for obstacles that prevent constituents from participating. Best practice literature describes the following ways to remove common barriers to participation:

- **Increase participation channels.** Community engagement activities that do not offer multiple in-person and online access points will limit who is able to participate. Offering different engagement channels at varying times accommodates people with varying work, family, and other obligations. Online options can include those who do not have time or cannot physically attend meetings. At the same time, accessible in-person engagements can benefit individuals with limited access to technology and/or the internet. Finally, offering various options will likely draw participation from a diverse pool of people that better represents the demographics of the community.[135,136]

- **Provide language interpretation and translation and culturally appropriate communications.** Equitable engagement requires program providers to accommodate individuals who do not speak English by offering simultaneous language interpretation at live-events and providing culturally appropriate, translated versions of all materials.[137]

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[132] Bandeh, et. al., pg. 127.
[133] Holley, pg. 45.
[134] Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement: A Planning Guide for Communities, Public Agenda, 2017, pg. 13.
[135] What's Next Alexandria: Handbook for Civic Engagement
[136] Laurenellen McCann, "Building Community and Engagement Around Data," Medium.com, Feb 23, 2015.
[137] What's Next Alexandria: Handbook for Civic Engagement, pg. 29.

- **Compensate BIPOC for their time and expertise.** Best practice research emphasizes the importance of centering BIPOC expertise to make community engagement equitable and advance RESJ. BIPOC must commit significant time and resources to sit at the table and meaningfully contribute throughout a decision-making process. Studies note this can be a lot of work for individuals who may be volunteering their time, and can be especially unfair to "low-income residents, who often have little time to spare outside of home and work responsibilities."[138] Compensating community members for their time can help lower this burden while also recognizing the value of BIPOC's expertise.[139]

Create a welcoming, safe environment. As described in Chapter 2, common community engagement methods and the spaces in which they are conducted are born from a system that has privileged White voices in government while structurally excluding BIPOC voices. Formal meetings held in bureaucratic settings with culturally specific rules of decorum can be intimidating and alienating to BIPOC. Best practice literature describes the following strategies to create safe, inviting, and inclusive engagement opportunities that center BIPOC:

- **Accommodate constituent needs**. Engagement events that offer childcare or other caretaking may encourage BIPOC parents and/or caretakers to participate.[140,141] Additionally, providing food and/or transportation, especially during evening events, can make attendance easier for constituents while also creating a more inviting atmosphere.

- **Meet people in less formal spaces**. Rather than holding engagement activities in government or other administrative settings, stakeholders may consider engaging BIPOC in more informal or neutral settings such as at a community member's home, a coffee shop, or as part of another community event.[142] Unconventional settings like concerts or sporting events can also have the potential of attracting new voices.

- **Use an outside facilitator**. An outside moderator who is both skilled in facilitation and trusted by all participants can encourage open dialogue between government and community stakeholders and productively navigate conflicts as they arise.[143]

Use creative engagement methods. As discussed earlier in this report, common methods of community engagement often exclude BIPOC voices due to factors including holding events at locations that are less accessible to BIPOC in terms of proximity and or access to transportation, language barriers, or technology requirements that limit participation. Using creative community

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[138] Brittany Hutson, "Paying Community Members for Their Time," Shelterforce.com, February 26, 2021.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Iris Hinh, "Public Engagement and Transparency Is Key to States and Localities Using Federal Aid to Advance Racial Equity," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 5, 2022.
[141] What's Next Alexandria: Handbook for Civic Engagement, pg. 29.
[142] Bandeh, et. al., pg. 127.
[143] Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement: A Planning Guide for Communities, pg. 13.

engagement methods can make it easier for people to participate and draw new insight by encouraging community members to share their lived experiences in approachable ways.[144,145] In a presentation about community engagement in data, Sustainable CT offers several creative data collection methods that can be more culturally appropriate and inclusive of BIPOC. Figure 3.1 outlines some of these approaches.[146]

Figure 3.1. Community Engagement Approaches that Center Equity

Method	Description	Benefits
Mobile ethnography	Participants use mobile phones to document their lives through photos, videos, and voice recordings.	This method can collect insights that participants may not share in more common formats.
Online discussions	Participants share responses to discussion questions on a digital platform.	The online format can increase accessibility.
Visioning/Idea Wall	Users share their thoughts around key questions on a large piece of paper or online whiteboard. The data can be categorized into themes.	This method allows for quick collection of ideas and lets users see and respond to data in real time.
Community Map	Participants draw and write answers to questions about their community on a community map.	This method is useful for people with limited literacy, it can capture many opinions, and can reveal unexpected outcomes.

6. Co-Create and Enforce an Equitable Community Engagement Policy

In their report *Co-Governing Toward Multiracial Democracy*, co-authors Partners for Dignity & Rights and Race Forward state that successful co-governance comes from governments and communities working to "make collective policy decisions…and make sure those policies…are implemented effectively."[147] The authors conclude that co-governance does not have a one-size-fits-all model; exactly how governments and communities choose to work together is ultimately determined by local contexts and circumstances. Further, other researchers observe that without clearly defined community engagement policies and protocols, decision-making can easily revert to common, top-down approaches that tend to exclude BIPOC.[148] It is important, therefore, to co-develop community engagement policies and protocols with BIPOC community stakeholders equitably using the practices described in this chapter.

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[144] GARE Racial Equity Toolkit, Government Alliance on Race and Equity, 2015.
[145] "Community Engagement in Data (Two-Part Series)," Sustainable CT presentation, October 19 and 26, 2021.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Co-Governing Toward Multiracial Democracy, pg. 55.
[148] Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action

In its report *Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement: A Planning Guide for Communities*, Public Agenda proposes the following characteristics of a successful community engagement policy:[149]

- Articulates a vision of community engagement for a government office, department, and/or program, and outlines the tools, strategies, and structures that can realize that vision;

- Helps public officials and employees decide what kinds of decisions and situations warrant more intensive, participatory community involvement;

- Describes potential engagement goals and appropriate actions to meet those goals; and

- Helps public officials and employees understand the goals that community members might bring to the process and how to meet those goals.

Studies also emphasize that once adopted, stakeholders should hold themselves and each other accountable for implementing community engagement policies. Joint research by Partners for Dignity & Rights and Race Forward finds that for a community engagement policy to have any chance of success, it must have measurable goals against which equitable outcomes can be assessed. As discussed later in this chapter, governments and community stakeholders must work together to identify and define metrics that can effectively measure aspects of equitable engagement that are not easily quantifiable (e.g., relationship building, trust, accessibility, etc.). Furthermore, Partners for Dignity & Rights and Race Forward contend that since "policy change is not a win if it's not enforced," governments must establish reasonable rules and penalties to incentivize policy implementation among departments and staff.[150]

7. Use Tools to Operationalize Equitable Community Engagement

Best practice literature offers organizations various tools and resources to help operationalize equitable community engagement. Governments can employ these tools at various levels, such as when developing an institution or department-wide community engagement policy as described above, when integrating equitable community engagement into their routine activities, or when launching a new policy initiative.

Community Engagement Toolkit. The Urban Institute has developed a toolkit that offers local governments approaches for equitable community engagement, including ten sets of guiding questions stakeholders can use to take stock of "their knowledge base; their preliminary racial equity goals; and their ideas for centering community engagement, measuring impact, and sustaining positive outcomes." The toolkit underscores the need for stakeholders to continually revisit these questions

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[149] Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement: A Planning Guide for Communities, pgs. 13-14.
[150] Co-Governing Toward Multiracial Democracy, pgs. 71-72.

and update the answers based on feedback from their community partners. The ten sets of questions are as follows:[151]

1. What **past policies** have created or exacerbated racial disparities within this issue area in your neighborhoods? (Consider national, state, and local policies)

2. What **data or stories** have you collected that indicate the local government's need for a policy change? Are the data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other intersectional experiences and identities?

3. How might your new policy decision, program, or investment **affect communities of color**, either positively or negatively? Which communities of color will be impacted the most? Acknowledging people's intersections, how might impacts differ across various groups?

4. What **harms or unintended consequences** might be triggered by your new policy decision? How will you mitigate these?

5. What **form of engagement** (e.g., virtual convenings, one-on-one interviews, focus groups) will best solicit the input needed from the communities you hope to serve? When would it be most appropriate to engage community members and how frequently?

6. How and with which community members **have you built trust and relationships** in the past? How has this been challenging? How do you aim to be transparent and own your past actions? How do you intend to address power imbalances?

7. What practices or resources will **ensure that residents are able to meaningfully participate** in your engagement? What are the potential barriers to participation, and how might they be addressed? How do you intend to compensate community members for their expertise and participation?

8. What **systems-level impact** do you hope your new policy decision will have? Assessing your new potential policy honestly, which impacts will it not have?

9. What **data, metrics, and evaluation strategies** will you implement to measure progress toward short- and long-term goals? How can these metrics be co-created with community members?

10. How will the local government aim to **preserve the relationship with community members** beyond the end of the proposed project?

Community Needs Assessments. Another tool described in the research is to conduct a community needs assessment at the start of a program or policy initiative. As discussed earlier in this chapter, effective engagement involves community ownership at every stage, so that the individuals most impacted by a proposed process are helping to define the problem and solution. A community needs

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[151] Sonia Torres Rodríguez, et. al., Changing Power Dynamics Among Researchers, Local Governments, and Community Members: A Community Engagement and Racial Equity Guidebook, Urban Institute, pg. 8.

assessment facilitates this by convening all relevant community stakeholders to share information, identify needs and resources, create a plan, and mobilize toward implementation. In its report *Developing Community Capacity*, the Kellogg Foundation offers a roadmap containing six components for community assessments:[152]

- Community meetings;
- Focus groups;
- A briefing book;
- Citizen surveys;
- A resource inventory; and
- Coalition expansion.

According to the Kellogg Foundation, this community assessment process "yields a wealth of information for your coalition to use in its strategies and planning." It also helps governments sustain meaningful community participation by creating community ownership and cultivating new community leaders that can serve as coalition members in the future.[153]

8. Use Data to Inform Strategies and Track Results

Best practices recommend that governments use data to both inform and evaluate their racial equity efforts.[154] In the case of equitable community engagement, data can help stakeholders better understand the BIPOC communities they are engaging, and in turn help tailor engagement efforts in targeted, meaningful ways. Data can then measure the extent to which engagement efforts themselves are equitable. Finally, data can help stakeholders evaluate progress on community engagement and whether it is achieving desired outcomes.

Data to understand communities. At the outset of a community engagement effort, stakeholders can use demographic data to understand the characteristics of the community affected by the policy initiative, the scope of racial disparities within that issue area in the community,[155] and who in the community will be impacted most by the initiative. These efforts require data disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Additionally, data by income and geography can help describe social inequities and

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[152] Bandeh, et. al.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action

[155] It is important to note that it can be harmful and inequitable to BIPOC to present data on racial and ethnic disparities without explaining what drives those disparities within institutions and society. As OLO's RESJ Action Plan explains, "presenting data on racial and ethnic gaps without explaining the systemic factors that contribute to these gaps can reinforce stereotypes that differences in individual behavior explain racial disparities more than systemic racism and economic inequality." OLO RESJ Action Plan, Office of Legislative Oversight, pg. 6.

disparities.[156] Best practices note that stakeholders can find an abundance of publicly available data from national and state-level sources, such as:[157,158]

- U.S. Census Bureau (i.e., American Community Survey, Annual Business Survey, Decennial Census);
- National data (e.g., U.S. Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Bureau for Labor Statistics, Federal Reserve);
- National Equity Atlas; and
- State data (e.g., education, health, juvenile services).

It can be more difficult to find County-level data disaggregated by race and ethnicity. OLO has found through previous research and discussions with County staff that many County departments do not collect or use such data, despite being a best practice for policy development.[159]

Researchers note demographic data alone cannot properly account for the diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic experiences of BIPOC. As such, local governments should work with BIPOC community stakeholders to identify additional data sources that can help paint a more detailed picture of the communities they hope to engage. Active involvement from BIPOC stakeholders in data collection can help engagement efforts reach the right groups of people with the most effective methods, and address priorities that matter to the communities involved.[160]

Data to measure equitable engagement. Research notes there are no standard metrics for measuring community engagement. Government and BIPOC community members must collaborate to define and create metrics that measure whether community engagement efforts are equitable and center BIPOC.[161] Typical metrics that focus on outputs (i.e., the number of people served, or the amount of money spent on a particular activity) do not meaningfully measure engagement. Instead, the selected metrics should measure factors required for equitable community engagement, including but not limited to:

- Relationship- and consensus-building;
- Trust;
- Power-sharing; and
- Access and inclusion.

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[156] OLO RESJ Action Plan, pg. 6
[157] "How Local Governments Can Put Community Data to Work," National League of Cities, December 12, 2022.
[158] OLO presentation, "Racial Equity & Social Justice Impact Statements, Trends and Promising Practices," September 20, 2023.
[159] OLO RESJ Action Plan, pg. 6
[160] GARE Racial Equity Toolkit
[161] Rodríguez, et. al.

Additionally, data on race and ethnicity of all community engagement partners (i.e., collaborators from non-profit groups, professional networks, researchers, as well as BIPOC community members) can help government stakeholders understand the extent to which engagement efforts are including and centering BIPOC.

Data to evaluate community engagement. Finally, stakeholders should use data to evaluate whether community engagement is leading to the desired outcomes and impacts set out at the start of the engagement. Together, collaborators should determine how to measure the degree to which engagement activities are:

1) Leading to more equitable inclusion of BIPOC community members, and
2) Leading to community-led decisions.

Stakeholders will need to lean on more qualitative data sources to measure outcomes and impacts[162] including regular feedback from community partners.

B. Alignment of County's Community Engagement Process to Best Practices

As described in Chapter 1, the RESJ Action Plan Regulations established a community engagement process for the County. The regulations provide a definition for community engagement in the County. The regulations also establish a recommended process for departments to submit community engagement plans for evaluation and approval by the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ).

The RESJ Action Plan Regulations reflect several best practices for equitable community engagement presented in this chapter. Specific elements of the regulations that align with best practices include:

- **Develop a shared understanding of RESJ.** The regulations require eight hours of RESJ training annually for all County staff.

- **Make equitable community engagement an organizational priority.** The regulations established a community engagement process for County departments.

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[162] Sean Stannard-Stockton, "Getting Results: Outputs, Outcomes and Impact," Stanford Social Innovation Review, July 26, 2010.

- **Center BIPOC and empower collaborators.** The regulations define community engagement is a two-way exchange of information, ideas, and resources that should offer opportunities for communities to have a meaningful role in decision-making. They also define that community diversity, including culture and ethnicity, should be considered in community engagement. Department community engagement plans must explain who is most impacted by, involved in, or has a specific interest in the relevant issue area and why. The plans must also explain how historically excluded communities will be included in the initial decision-making phase.

- **Build relationships and trust.** Department community engagement plans must identify intended stakeholders and partners for community engagement. Departments must also follow-up with community engagement participants after the conclusion of the engagement to acknowledge participants for their contributions and provide them with opportunities for on-going communication and collaboration.

- **Make it easier for people to participate.** The regulations define community engagement should remove barriers that may have previously prevented community members from successfully working with County government. Department community engagement plans must identify known barriers and risks to participation and strategies to address language and literacy needs.

- **Co-create and enforce an equitable community engagement policy.** Department community engagement plans are reviewed and approved by ORESJ. Approved plans must be made available to the public.

- **Use tools to operationalize equitable community engagement.** Following the guidelines established for community engagement plans can help departments to operationalize RESJ in community engagement.

- **Use data to inform strategies and track results.** Department community engagement plans must present research and background information on affected communities, including language or dialect spoken, customs, historical or geographical data and other relevant data.

Given the alignment with best practices, following the community engagement process in the RESJ Action Plan Regulations can help departments to carry out equitable community engagement practices that advance RESJ.

Chapter 4. Local BIPOC Community Partner Perspectives

This chapter describes local BIPOC community partner perspectives on the extent of equitable community engagement in the County based on feedback from focus groups conducted by OLO.

This chapter is presented in two sections:

- **Section A** provides an overview of the focus groups conducted by OLO with BIPOC community partners, the organizations that participated in the focus groups, and the demographics of focus group participants; and

- **Section B** summarizes the feedback shared by focus group participants about the County's current engagement with BIPOC communities and perspectives on how their own organizations carry out equitable community engagement.

One key finding emerges from the information reviewed in this chapter:

- BIPOC community partners perceive the County primarily relies on one-way community engagement methods that do not target BIPOC communities.

A. Overview of Focus Groups and Participants

OLO conducted three focus groups (one in-person and two virtual) with representatives from local organizations whose programs serve and/or benefit BIPOC communities. Many of these organizations work closely with and/or receive funding from the County and are BIPOC-led and staffed. Organizations that participated in the focus groups included:

- **480 Club LLC.** 480 Club's mission statement is that "one day can do a lot." By providing a safe space, positive youth development, sports and mentoring, we can empower, educate and create positive experiences, which can turn youth into positive adults and community members. For more information, visit https://www.480club.com/.

- **CASA, Inc.** With over 155,000 lifetime members across 46 US states, CASA is a national powerhouse organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class: Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities. CASA creates change with its power building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy in order to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For more information, visit https://wearecasa.org/.

- **Center for the Rights of Ethiopian Women (CREW).** CREW's mission is to promote the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of Ethiopian women in Ethiopia and abroad. Research, peace and conflict resolution, and advocacy against human rights violations are major areas of intervention. CREW also facilitates conferences on issues such as gender-based violence, human trafficking and women's empowerment to raise public awareness on gender issues and bring change in policy and practice. For more information, visit https://centerforethiopianwomen.org/.

- **Montgomery County Collaboration Council.** The mission of the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families is to promote the well-being of community through collaborative partnerships. For more information, visit https://collaborationcouncil.org/.

- **Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee (RESJAC).** RESJAC advises the County Council, the County Executive, and County agencies about racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in the County. RESJAC recommends policies, programs, legislation, or regulations necessary to reduce racial and social justice inequity; develops and distributes information; and promotes educational activities and recommends strategies. For more information, visit https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/boards/sites/RESJ/.

- **Rose Pedals Consulting, Inc.** Rose Pedals facilitates future-focused thinking to drive conversations that foster collaboration, community, and co-creation of equitable spaces and outcomes. Rose Pedals has unparalleled experience incorporating perspectives of multiple communities and knowledge of what inequitable policies, procedures and practices cost everyone. Rose Pedals has facilitated learning for audiences as large as 600 on race, poverty, class, and restorative practices. For more information, visit https://rosepedalsconsulting.com/.

Community partners from three additional local organizations also participated in the focus groups.

OLO administered a demographic survey to focus group participants that requested information on race, ethnicity, and other demographics. Of the 11 participants:[163]

- 55 percent (6 participants) were Black, 27 percent (3 participants) were Latine, and 18 percent (2 participants) were Asian.[164] No focus group participants identified as White alone, though one Latine participant identified as Native American and White.

- 64 percent (7 participants) were native-born and 36 percent (4 participants) were foreign-born. Additionally, 27 percent (3 participants) spoke other languages in addition to English, including Spanish and Amharic.
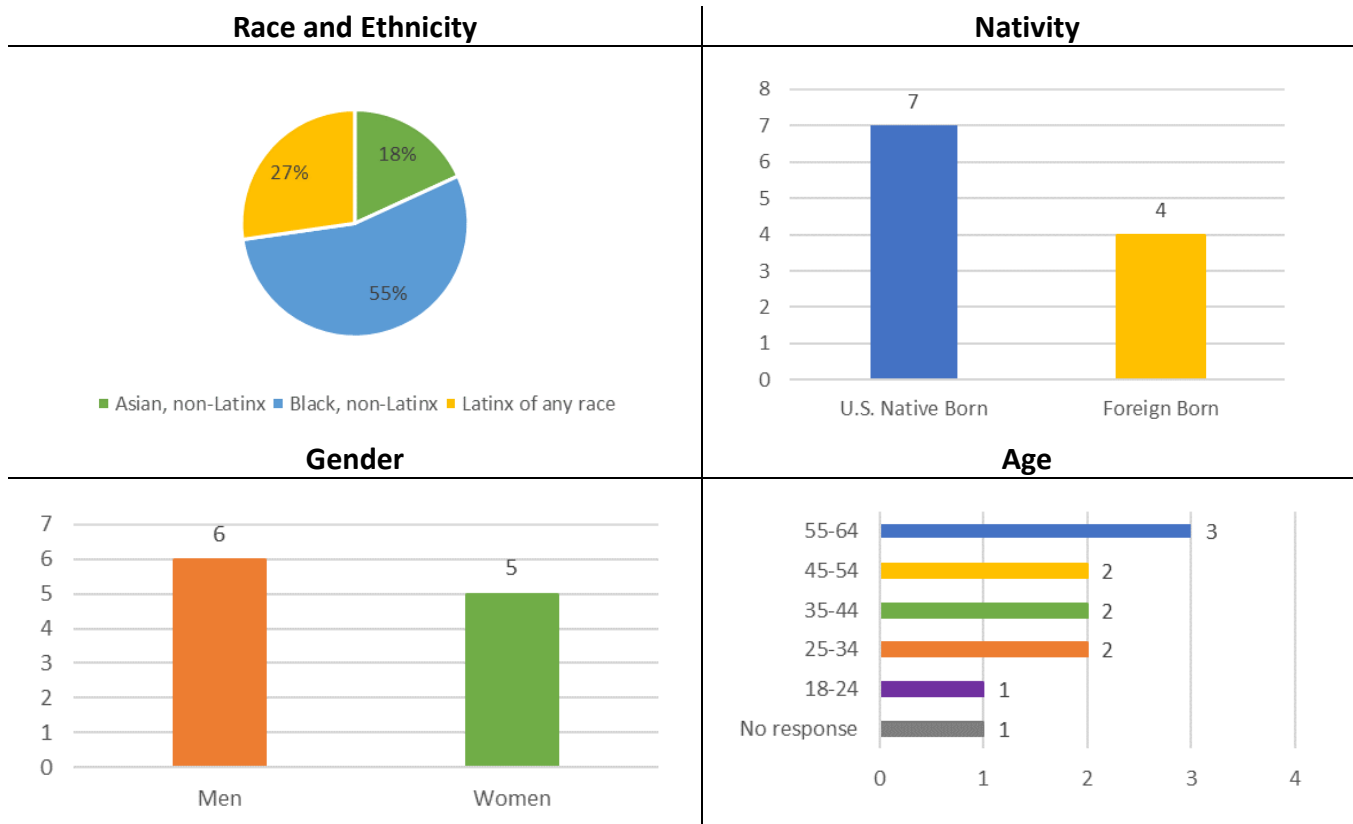
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[163] OLO staff estimated demographics for one representative who did not submit a survey based on existing knowledge and observations.
[164] Latine people are not included in other racial groups for this data point.

- 55 percent (6 participants) identified as men and 45 percent (5 participants) identified as women. Only three participants were 34 years of age or younger.

- Five participants were executives, one was a manager or supervisor, four were professionals and one was a service worker.

Figure 4.1 provides charts summarizing select participant demographics.

Figure 4.1. Demographics of Focus Group Participants

Race and Ethnicity

- Asian, non-Latinx ■ Black, non-Latinx ■ Latinx of any race

Nativity

Gender

Age

In keeping with best practices for equitable community engagement, OLO co-created the focus groups with participants by inviting them to edit meeting agendas, objectives, group agreements, and potential questions prior to the sessions. OLO also compensated each participant for their time with a $20 VISA gift card.[165]

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[165] OLO acknowledges that the amount of time and space it dedicated for co-creating focus groups with BIPOC leaders and community members did not align with best practices. Ideally, community members would have had more time to develop meeting goals, formats, plans for implementation, and accountability measures prior to the sessions.

B. Focus Group Feedback

As part of the focus groups, OLO invited community partners to share their perspectives on the County's strengths and challenges with engaging BIPOC communities, how they rate the County's current engagement practices relative to the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* (described in Chapter 1), and promising practices they use to engage BIPOC communities. Participants responded to the following prompts:

- Where do you feel County departments' community engagement is on the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* and why?

- How would you describe you or your organization's current engagement with the County?

- What practices, strategies, or methods do you or your organization use to help BIPOC engage with your programs? With government decision-making? Do you follow any formal models or best practices?

- What practices, strategies, or methods used by the County have been effective in engaging BIPOC?

- Is there anything else you would like to share with regards to community engagement with BIPOC?

The remainder of this section summarizes feedback shared by BIPOC community partners during the focus groups.

1. Perceptions of County departments' community engagement practices relative to the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

Community partners discussed how they would rate County departments' community engagement practices on the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. Four themes emerged from their comments, described below.

Participants overwhelmingly rated County departments at the lower end of the Spectrum. Based on their experiences working with the County, many participants felt departments' engagement efforts fell between Stage 0, Ignore (i.e., deny community access to decision-making) and Stage 2, Consult (i.e., gather input from the community) on the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*.

Specifically, many participants rated County efforts around youth services (e.g., substance abuse treatment, rehabilitation services, homelessness prevention) at Stage 0, stating the common methods departments use to engage youth ignore populations most at risk (i.e., minors who are BIPOC and/or low-income, unhoused, unaccompanied, and/or not enrolled in Montgomery County Public Schools). As a result, participants stated many BIPOC youth fall through the cracks and do not get the services they need. Participants observed even if it is not a department or program's goal to explicitly deny access to community members, common engagement methods can still result in ignoring BIPOC because County staff are generally unaware that it is happening.

Participants rated several departments at Stages 1 through 2, which are more representative of one-way community engagement. Participants observed one-way channels (i.e., info sheets, emails, or brochures) are often ineffective because information is sent to a general audience instead of targeted to the constituents who may benefit the most from a particular program or service. Additionally, participants noted these communications are often not designed with BIPOC audiences in mind, and thus are not culturally competent. For example, communications may use high-level English that is difficult for community members to understand.

Finally, participants perceived common channels of engagement (e.g., public hearings) that fall under Stage 2, Consult, are not necessarily accessible to BIPOC community members. Some participants voiced the opinion that departments' engagement with BIPOC seems superficial and done merely to "check a box"; departments may offer BIPOC a seat at the decision-making table but do not engage them in a meaningful way to effect change.

Political motivation may shape Councilmember engagement. Participants described varied experiences engaging with Councilmembers. Some perceived engagement with Councilmembers to be authentic and on the collaborative end of the *Spectrum* (Stage 4, Collaborate). Others felt instead of developing sincere, on-going channels of engagement, legislators engage with the BIPOC communities only when it serves their political agendas. For example, participants described instances where Councilmembers publicly cited their organizations as "partners" to generate community support for a particular initiative.

Equitable community engagement is inconsistent within County departments. Focus group participants generally agreed that different offices within County departments can employ varying levels of equitable engagement, suggesting departments lack an overall standard for implementation. Furthermore, participants often rated specific programs or initiatives within departments rather than departments as a whole higher on the *Spectrum* (i.e., Stages 4 through 5, Collaborate through Defer To). For example, several participants felt the Department of Environment and Protection's Community Justice Academy used equitable engagement practices, like investing in BIPOC partner organizations. The Minority Health Initiatives in the Department of Health and Human Services were also mentioned as carrying out highly equitable community engagement. OLO also observed some participants consistently rated County departments higher on the *Spectrum*, suggesting their organizations may

have better success at collaborating with departments than other organizations represented in the focus groups. OLO observed these community organizations may have long-standing relationships with the County and therefore benefit from having higher levels of input in County decision-making.

Community organizations often fill gaps left by County departments. In addition to County departments, participants also rated community organizations on the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. Most community organizations that were rated were placed on the higher end of the *Spectrum* (Stages 3 through 5, Involve through Defer To), suggesting these organizations practice higher levels of equitable engagement than County departments. Everyday Canvassing was mentioned by several participants as an example of an organization that uses engagement strategies tailored to the cultural norms of BIPOC communities (e.g., soliciting resident feedback door-to-door) to gather authentic feedback.

Participants also described the role community organizations play in advocating for BIPOC and filling service gaps left by the County. Participants noted County departments are generally more responsive to community leaders (e.g., heads of community organizations) than to individual constituents, so it often falls on community leaders to engage community members on issues, identify service needs and gaps, and bring these to the attention of County officials. Participants also noted community-led programs often serve BIPOC communities who are not reached through typical County engagement.

2. Equitable engagement practices used by community organizations.

Community partners discussed promising practices, strategies, and methods that their organizations use to engage BIPOC. Four major themes emerged from this discussion, described below.

Involved engagement versus information sharing. Multiple participants shared that effective community engagement requires two-way communication. Some participants noted their organizations avoid relying solely on one-way communications, where they share information with the public and assume the individuals most in need have received it. Instead, participants reported they actively listen to community members, especially those experiencing hardship, and try to involve them in finding solutions. Some also noted that learning about communities before engaging with them helps their organizations make better informed decisions about programs and services.

Build and leverage relationships. Participants described building relationships at multiple levels in BIPOC communities. For example, participants noted in some cultural communities (e.g., the Ethiopian community, or the African American community), religious leaders are highly trusted and respected community influencers. Developing relationships with houses of worship is an effective way to share information with these communities. Some participants also noted they often partner with other groups and organizations who are already doing work on the ground in certain communities and have existing relationships.

Hire diverse staff from the communities the organization serves. Several participants described how their organizations prioritize hiring BIPOC leadership and staff from the communities they serve. For example, one community partner described their organization requires more than half of its board of directors to be from the Latine community. According to participants, staff who are from the community have valuable lived experiences, skills, and relationships that make them more attuned to the needs and priorities of that community. Many participants also described hiring former clients who have first-hand knowledge of how the organization's programs and services impact people on the ground. Participants also observed community members tend to feel more comfortable with and relate better to staff who are from the same community. This helps build trust and increases the likelihood that people in the community engage with the organization's programs.

Collect data from community. Focus group participants underscored the importance of sustaining on-going, two-way communication with BIPOC community members. Collecting feedback from community members and using it to monitor, improve, and inform programs, helps organizations understand and serve a community's needs and priorities. Data collection methods participants mentioned include surveys, focus groups, resident interviews, and structured community conversations.

3. Challenges, needs, and/or issues with County methods for engaging BIPOC.

When asked how effective the County is in engaging BIPOC, community partners voiced various challenges, needs, and issues with departments' engagement methods. Four themes, described below, emerged from this feedback.

County departments seem comfortable with more one-way engagement methods. Many participants held the opinion County departments are hesitant to try new community engagement methods that may better reach BIPOC constituents because they perceive these methods to require a lot of time and work. Participants noted examples where departments continually employ one-way engagement practices, such as waiting to finalize programs or policies before reaching out to BIPOC communities for feedback.

Participants noted this unwillingness on the part of departments to engage BIPOC in program planning may result in services that do not necessarily meet the needs of community members. For example, participants described how one County department has resisted shifting the time of a program to start outside of the department's regular hours despite receiving feedback from community stakeholders that a later start time will reach the community members most in need of services.

Better oversight and accountability measures are needed. Several participants felt the County needs better measures to adequately identify community need, inform program requirements, and measure program success. Some noted that because traditional quantitative metrics (e.g., number of people served, or dollars spent) do not always provide a full picture of outcomes, creating data collection methods with communities may result in better measurement of program impacts.

Participants also discussed how the County needs to strengthen its oversight and accountability of RESJ efforts, including equitable community engagement. Specifically, some participants felt the RESJ Advisory Committee lacks the capacity for adequate oversight because half the committee are volunteers and half have other full-time employment responsibilities with the County. Participants also perceived inconsistency in RESJ competency among staff tasked with leading RESJ efforts within departments and noted many of these staff lacked positions of power to make lasting change.

Lack of diversity in County departments. Some participants perceive the County's challenges with equitable community engagement center around a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in County leadership. Participants specifically noted seeing few Latine and Asians, especially South Asians, in leadership positions. These participants felt this lack of diversity among government decision-makers reflects a lack of commitment in the County for RESJ.

Programs are resource constrained. Some participants observed that County departments and their community partners must often implement programs and services with limited resources, within short, often rushed timelines, and with an emphasis on results. This comes at the cost of equitable community engagement, a process-oriented endeavor that requires time and resources when done effectively.

4. Additional thoughts regarding the County's community engagement with BIPOC.

Finally, BIPOC community partners shared two additional thoughts and concerns about the County's approach to equitable community engagement discussed below.

Progress on RESJ in the County has slowed. An overarching concern shared by many focus group participants was that progress on RESJ in the County seemed to be at a standstill. Some felt the County was stuck in its RESJ journey; that departments needed to pursue deep learning about the roots of racial inequity and the role of White supremacy in upholding structural racism to be able to move to higher stages of equitable community engagement. Participants also observed the County seems to have made little progress in addressing racial disparities despite passing the RESJ Act in 2019. Many questioned whether and how County departments were being held accountable for implementing the law.

County government must prioritize BIPOC communities. Participants felt the County must prioritize direct and ongoing relationships with communities, particularly with communities who are most impacted by its policies and programs. One participant even suggested that every department employ community organizers tasked with developing relationships with BIPOC communities and integrating their voices into department decision-making. Other participants suggested the County could provide resources to community organizations already working in BIPOC communities to be their partners in relationship-building.

Chapter 5. County Practices

This chapter describes the extent of equitable community engagement in the County based on information gathered by OLO from interviews with County staff and document reviews of County policies, programs, and practices.

This chapter is presented in two sections:

- **Section A** describes the demographics of County staff interviewed and provides a brief overview and snapshot of community engagement with BIPOC for each department that was studied for the project; and

- **Section B** describes themes that emerged on the extent of equitable community engagement in the County based on the practices of County departments studied for the report.

Three key findings emerge from the information reviewed in this chapter:

- County departments primarily carry out one-way community engagement practices. A few strategies that center BIPOC in community engagement are commonly used across County departments. However, there appear to be racial and ethnic disparities in common engagement practices.

- County staff experience several challenges in carrying out equitable community engagement. Several challenges align with feedback from BIPOC community partners.

- Despite challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement, County staff are using several promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work to varying degrees.

A. Overview of County Departments Studied

To understand community engagement practices in the County and how BIPOC are centered in community engagement, OLO identified the following twelve County departments that have a higher level of engagement with community members in general or BIPOC community members in particular:

- Legislative Branch
    - Legislative Information Office within the Montgomery County Council

- Executive Branch
    - Office of Community Partnerships (not interviewed)
    - Public Information Office
    - Office of Human Rights
    - Regional Services Centers (Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Mid-County, and East County)
    - Department of Environmental Protection

- o Community Action Agency within the Department of Health and Human Services
- o Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice
- o Board of Elections

- Other Entities
  - o Montgomery County Planning Department

The Montgomery County Parks Department (Montgomery Parks) also offered a description of their community engagement practices, which is included in Appendix A.

OLO interviewed 21 County staff within 11 of 12 departments identified for the report. The Office of Community Partnerships did not respond to OLO's requests for an interview. To understand the characteristics of staff informing this report, OLO administered a demographic survey that requested information on race, ethnicity, and other demographics. Of the 21 staff members that were interviewed:[166]

- 43 percent (9 staff) were White, 19 percent (4 staff) were Black, 29 percent (6 staff) were Latine and 10 percent (2 staff) were multiracial.[167] One multiracial staff member identified as Black and White, and the other identified as Black and some other race. No staff members identified as Asian and one Latine staff member identified as Native American.

- 71 percent (15 staff) were native-born and 29 percent (6 staff) were foreign-born. Additionally, 29 percent spoke other languages in addition to English, including Spanish, Croatian, and Fulani.

- 47 percent (10 staff) identified as men and 52 percent (11 staff) identified as women. Only two staff were 34 years of age or younger.

- Nine staff were executives, five were managers or supervisors, and seven were professionals who directly worked in engaging community members.

Figure 5.1 provides charts summarizing select staff demographics.

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[166] OLO staff estimated demographics for three department staff members who did not submit surveys based on existing knowledge and observations.
[167] Latine people are not included in other racial groups for this data point.

Figure 5.1. Demographics of County Staff Interviewed

Race and Ethnicity	Nativity

Race and Ethnicity
- 19% Black, non-Latinx
- 43% White, non-Latinx
- 9% Multiracial, non-Latinx
- 29% Latinx of any race

Nativity
- U.S. Native Born: 15
- Foreign Born: 6

Gender
- Men: 10
- Women: 11

Age
- 65 and older: 1
- 55-64: 5
- 45-54: 5
- 35-44: 6
- 25-34: 2
- No response: 2
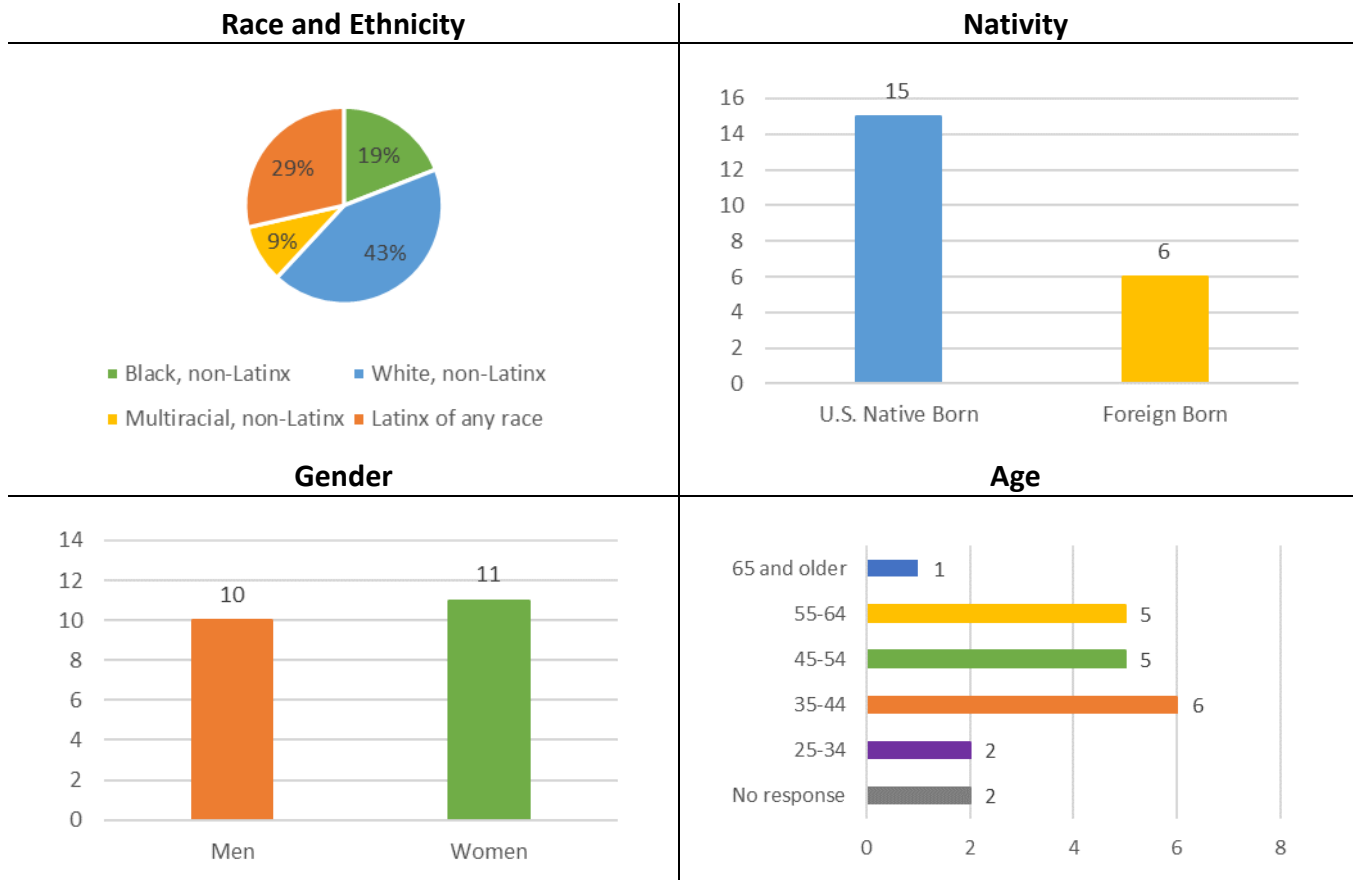
The remainder of this section provides a brief overview and snapshot of community engagement with BIPOC for each department that was studied for this project.

1. Legislative Information Office

The Legislative Information Office (LIO) within the Montgomery County Council was established through a non-department account (NDA) in 2012 to strengthen the capacity of the Legislative Branch to "inform constituent communities about issues that directly affect them and to ensure that these communities' concerns are considered." [168] LIO carries out various communications and outreach activities for the Council, including:[169]

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[168] Memo to Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee, "FY24 Operating Budget: Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA," May 2, 2023.
[169] Internal Document, Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA Overview, Legislative Information Office.

- Publishing press releases and legally required public notices;

- Managing the Council's social media sites;

- Increasing access by following disability-inclusive communication guidelines and providing language access services for constituents;

- Producing multimedia and multicultural content for the Council across different platforms, including a weekly radio show in Spanish, heritage commemorations, and programming for County Cable Montgomery;

- Conducting media relations and maintaining an up-to-date list of all media partners;

- Coordinating the five-week Latino Civic Project curriculum; and

- Participating in community events and hosting resource tables around the County.

Six of 14 LIO staff members are part of the Language Access Liaisons (formerly Multicultural Communications Team) dedicated to working with BIPOC community members, including:[170,171]

- One **Multicultural Communications and Outreach Manager** who is overseeing a strategic plan for the Council that leverages multicultural communications and prioritizes outreach to BIPOC communities, as intended by the County's RESJ Act.

- Three **Public Information Officers** – two focused on Spanish-speaking communities and one focused on Amharic and French-speaking communities – that "craft, produce, translate, interpret, and share information" with media and community contacts "in a culturally proficient manner."

- One **Translator/Interpreter** focused on Spanish-speaking communities who does simultaneous interpretation of select Council events and translation of press releases and other Council communications materials into Spanish.

- One **Latino Civic Project Coordinator** who delivers a five-week civics curriculum designed to "strengthen and empower the civic participation of the Spanish-speaking Latine immigrant community in the decision-making process."

One equitable community engagement initiative highlighted by LIO staff was the Community Outreach Pop-Ups, a pilot initiative where staff are visiting majority-BIPOC communities to educate community members about the Council and gather feedback on their needs and concerns. The LIO plans to continue this engagement and compile feedback that can help guide the Council on policies to prioritize for robust community engagement similar to that of the RESJ Act. The Multicultural Communications and Outreach Manager has primarily carried out this initiative in LIO with support

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[170] Ibid.
[171] "FY24 Operating Budget: Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA"

from LIO staff and one Councilmember staffer. At the time of the interview in 2023, LIO had held seven pop-ups engaging nearly 400 community members. Other equitable engagement efforts referenced by LIO staff were the Latino Civic Project, the Design for Civic Change Cohort through the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and language access capacity, which has the strongest funding in Spanish.[172]

2. Public Information Office

The Public Information Office (PIO) facilitates much of the County's outgoing communication by supporting the County Executive and other departments in the Executive Branch with activities such as:[173]

- Creating and coordinating press releases and media requests;
- Assisting with mass media advertising;
- Posting on social media and disseminating newsletters;
- Coordinating special events and announcements; and
- Producing videos and cable television shows on County Cable Montgomery.

The PIO also provides constituents with information about government services through the County's MC311 Customer Service Center. MC311 answers questions about nonemergency issues via its call center and website. While MC311 offers more direct communication with constituents compared to outgoing communication channels, the program mainly functions as a tool to disseminate information to community members and to direct them to departments that can help address their questions and concerns. MC311 is staffed by customer service representatives who can serve community members in English and Spanish. As discussed in Chapter 2, data on MC311 calls suggests it is adequately meeting the Spanish-language needs of constituents. The number of calls MC311 receives in Spanish is proportionate the to the percentage of Spanish speakers with limited English proficiency in the County.

One of the 18 staff members in PIO is a **Public Information Officer** focused on "Latinx media, outreach, and translation of press releases and graphics."[174] Specific activities of the Latine-focused Public Information Officer include daily communications with Spanish-language media, hosting a weekly radio show in Spanish, and supporting with management of the County's Spanish-language Facebook page and WhatsApp group.

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[172] Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA Overview

[173] Blaise DeFazio and Kristen Latham, OLO Report 2023-3: How the County Communicates to Its Residents, Office of Legislative Oversight, February 28, 2023.

[174] Ibid.

The Latine-focused Public Information Officer also leads a cross-departmental group of staff who are focused on communications and outreach to Latine community members. The group originally emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic to centralize in-house capacity for quickly translating press releases, graphics, and other messages to Spanish. Today, the group continues to meet weekly, and has evolved to share information on upcoming events and activities, strategize on messaging, and coordinate efforts to develop communications resources and reach Latine community members through various channels. The Latine-focused Public Information Officer is working to coordinate a similar effort with staff that are focused on communications and outreach to Black and Asian community members.

3. Office of Human Rights

The Office of Human Rights enforces local human rights laws that make discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, and commercial real estate illegal on the basis of "race, color, religion, ancestry, sex, age, national origin, marital status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, genetic status, family responsibilities, gender identity, and (in housing only) source of income and presence of children."[175] Major activities of the office include:[176]

- *Community Mediation and Public Affairs:* Providing staff support to several Boards, Committees, and Commissions, including the Human Rights Commission, the Committee Against Hate and Violence, the Interagency Fair Housing Coordinating Group, and the Commission on Remembrance and Reconciliation.

- *Compliance:* Receiving, investigating and resolving formal complaints of discrimination in employment, real estate, public accommodations, criminal record screening in housing and employment and hair styles in employment.[177]

- *Fair Housing:* Overseeing the County's Fair Housing Program, which provides education to housing stakeholders and community members on local, state, and federal fair housing laws and periodically tests for discrimination "in the rental or sale of housing, home mortgage financing and compliance with architectural guidelines."[178]

The office also organizes several high-profile events in the County, including the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. and Juneteenth celebrations.

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[175] About the Office of Human Rights, Montgomery County Office of Human Rights.
[176] Memo to Health and Human Services Committee, "FY24 Operating Budget - Office of Human Rights," April 17, 2023.
[177] Compliance & Complaints, Montgomery County Office of Human Rights.
[178] Fair Housing, Montgomery County Office of Human Rights.

Of 11 staff members in the office, eight support compliance efforts. Most community engagement activities are carried out by the Director and one staff member that is assigned to outreach and engagement half-time with administrative support from one Compliance Manager.[179]

Because of the office's scope addressing discrimination complaints – most of which are race-based – by default, the office carries out most of its community engagement with BIPOC communities. Further, the office is often called upon to participate in efforts to help address community-level issues affecting BIPOC. For instance:

- In 2016, the Director moderated a town-hall discussion on policing and race with 250 community members and participated in subsequent community conversations on this topic.[180,181] Staff explained raw conversations that took place during these events were an important step for addressing the Montgomery County Police Department's (MCPD) fraught relationship with BIPOC communities.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the director was active in coordinating targeted efforts to reach Black community members with public health information and resources to help mitigate the disproportionate impact of COVID on Black and Latine communities.

- More recently, the Director was appointed to the Anti-Hate Task Force by the County Council,[182] which was convened to "prioritize policies that promote safety and combat hate crimes," including "racism, anti-Black hate, AAPI hate, anti-Latino hate, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia, or transphobia."[183]

4. Regional Services Centers

The County's five Regional Services Centers (RSCs) were created to be an extension of the County to improve access to government. The RSCs aim "to represent the County in their respective regions by providing effective, timely liaison" between the County and community members "to provide information, identify and assess regional problems and issues, and recommend and/or implement solutions."[184] RSCs represent both the voice of County government and the voice of community members in their respective regions.

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[179] "FY24 Operating Budget - Office of Human Rights"

[180] Andrew Metcalf, "Residents Say Montgomery County Not Immune to Police and Race Issues," MoCo360, July 20, 2016.

[181] Mitti Hicks, "A Conversation About Community Policing Continues," Montgomery Community Media, December 12, 2016.

[182] Action Staff Report for Resolution Appointing a Montgomery County Anti-Hate Task Force, Montgomery County Council, June 27, 2023.

[183] Montgomery County Anti-Hate Task Force, Montgomery County Council.

[184] Regional Services Centers, Montgomery County, Maryland.

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

The RSCs are part of the County's Community Engagement Cluster (CEC), a group of County departments that are responsible for managing urban district operations, engaging community members, maximizing the "communities' assets – time, talents, and other resources" and "working collaboratively to address and resolve community issues."[185] The CEC also includes the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP), which is organized around staff liaisons and community advisory groups that represent the African, African American, Asian Pacific, Caribbean American, Latine, LGBT and Middle Eastern communities.[186] The Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center and Language Access Services are also part of OCP. CEC staff meet regularly to share updates and collaborate on various efforts. RSC directors also meet regularly with staff in the County Executive's office to discuss and address emerging issues and exchange information in each region. All key staff members with the County Executive's office attend the meetings.

RSCs are geographically distributed throughout the County. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the regions and zip codes served by each RSC.

Figure 5.2. Regional Services Centers Service Regions and Zip Codes
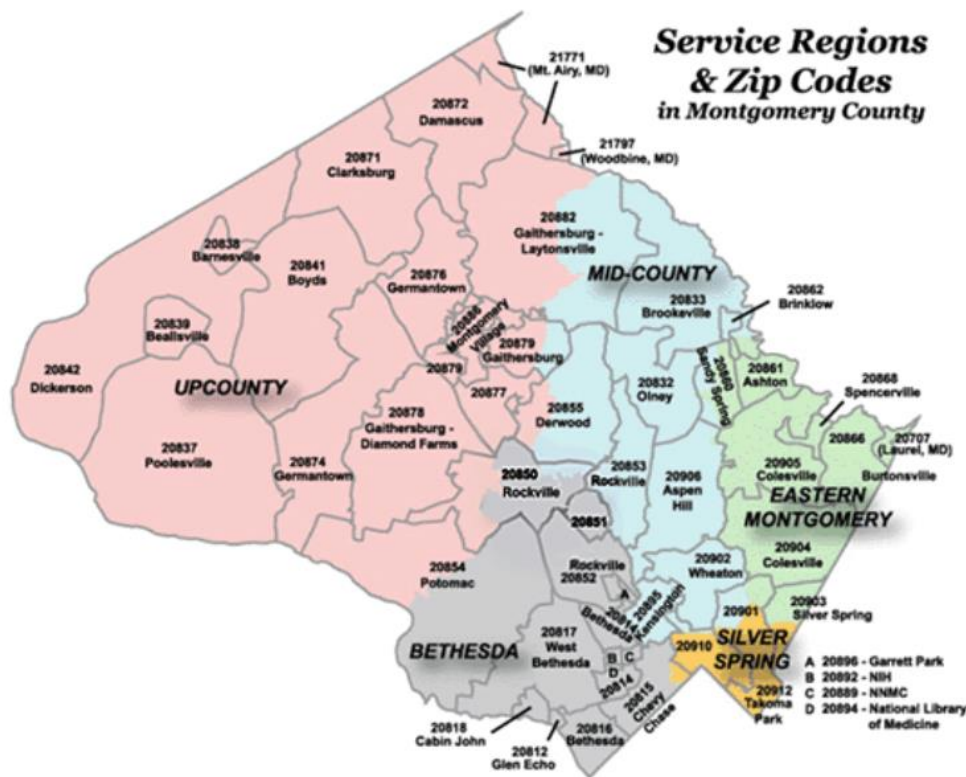
Source: Montgomery County Regional Services Centers.

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[185] The Community Engagement Cluster includes the Office of Community Partnerships, Commission for Women, Regional Services Centers, Urban Districts, and Volunteer Center. From Community Engagement Cluster, Montgomery County, Maryland.

[186] Advisory Groups, Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships.

Each RSC is staffed by one director and one program manager, for a total of 10 full-time staff members across the five RSC.[187] The Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Silver Spring, and Mid-County RSC each have one additional staff member that is specifically focused on urban district operations in their service areas. OLO interviewed staff within three RSCs serving communities with distinct racial and ethnic demographics: the Bethesda-Chevy Chase RSC, which covers a service area that is disproportionately White; the East County RSC, which covers a service area that is disproportionately Black, including African American and Black immigrant communities; and the Mid-County RSC, which covers a service area that is disproportionately Latine. [188]

RSC staff noted the following common strategies for engaging community members:

- Maintaining relationships with various individuals and groups in their respective regions, including community associations, service providers, and business groups.

- Regularly interfacing with community members through coordinating and participating in various Boards, Committees, and Commissions, including the five 15 to 20 member Citizens Advisory Boards that cover each region.

- Maintaining strong internal and external communication, strategic planning and collaborative partnerships with community-based service providers and County departments, including OCP, the Department of Recreation, Libraries, Health and Human Services, Worksource Montgomery, and the Service Consolidation Hubs.

- Facilitating engagement events in each region, such as the County Executive's annual budget forums and listening sessions with County officials. On occasion, RSCs also facilitate engagement events on emerging issues, such as the recent community conversation on "mental health, addiction, public safety, and violence among youth" hosted by the Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee.[189]

- Publishing newsletters and maintaining a social media presence to provide subscribers with information on County programs and upcoming events pertinent to their respective regions.

The interviewed RSCs varied in their practices for engaging BIPOC community members in particular. The Bethesda Chevy-Chase RSC, which covers a service area where 36 percent of constituents are BIPOC – including 15 percent Asian, 11 percent Latine, and 6 percent Black – mainly relies on its on-going interaction with OCP and other CEC partners, as well as local nonprofits such as Nourishing Bethesda, Interfaith Works (Twinbrook HUB), and Bethesda Cares, to reach BIPOC communities with information and resources. Staff also noted regularly interacting with and assisting community

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[187] Memo to Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee, "FY24 Recommended Operating Budget Worksession: Community Engagement Cluster [CEC]," April 19, 2023.
[188] Regional Services Centers Area Analytics, 2019 Silver Spring Neighborhood Analytics, Montgomery County CountyStat.
[189] Marijke Friedman, "Community Conversation in Wheaton to Focus on Supporting Youth," Montgomery Community Media, July 10, 2023.

members and businesses in historically Black communities located in the service area, including the Scotland and Lincoln Park communities. Staff are currently working on developing a language access plan to reach constituents who speak languages other than English.

The Mid-County RSC, which covers a service area where 57 percent of constituents are BIPOC – including 25 percent Latine, 16 percent Black, and 12 percent Asian – regularly interacts with local non-profits and participates in community events to connect with BIPOC community members and understand their needs. For instance, staff occasionally participate in food distribution events organized through the County's Service Consolidation Hubs and directly interact with participating community members. Staff also hold quarterly meetings with local non-profits to understand gaps in County programs and services. Staff also noted using demographic data compiled by Montgomery Planning as a resource for coordinating RSC programming, primarily to understand and accommodate language needs.

The East County RSC, which covers a service area where 72 percent of constituents are BIPOC – including 40 percent Black, 14 percent Latine, and 14 percent Asian – executes an intentional strategy for engaging BIPOC community members; this strategy includes:

- Building and maintaining lasting relationships with trusted messengers in BIPOC communities, including faith leaders (Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, etc.), community leaders, civic groups, service providers and business owners. This involves regular interaction with trusted messengers and participation in grassroots events and meetings organized by community groups.

- Leveraging demographic data (compiled by Montgomery Planning) and relationships in the community to understand the cultural, social, and economic identities of BIPOC community members, preferred engagement channels, and barriers to engagement with government.

- Tailoring outreach and engagement to specifically reach marginalized BIPOC community members, overcoming barriers to engagement and making engagements more accessible, enjoyable, and rewarding. This also involves making it easier for community members to engage through meeting them where they are.

Similar to the Mid-County RSC, the East County RSC also holds on-going meetings with community service providers and stakeholders that serve as a forum to share information about available programs, resources, and services in the community and to identify service needs and gaps for advocacy. The East County's RSC strategy to engaging BIPOC community members is driven by the RSC's director, who has extensive experience engaging African American and BIPOC immigrant communities and training in various models of community engagement.

5. Department of Environmental Protection

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is responsible for protecting and improving the County's air, water, and land through programs and services that promote sustainability, smart growth, and healthy communities.[190] DEP's major activities include recycling and resource management, water management (i.e., watershed restoration, water supply, and wastewater programs), and climate and energy programs.

One of the approximately 130 staff members in DEP is a **Partnership and Engagement Manager** who also serves on DEP's Racial Equity Core Team.[191] In this capacity, the Partnership and Engagement Manager informally shares resources on RESJ with the entire department, including tips for reaching out to diverse audiences, information on how to use demographic data for outreach activities, and best practices for language interpretation at events. DEP staff report that providing language translation and interpretation, particularly in Spanish, has become a departmental focus at DEP's community events (e.g., presentations, workshops, tabling events).

Staff observed DEP has not yet established a department-wide process for community engagement because the department is currently focused on developing a shared understanding of RESJ among staff. Among other efforts, the Community Justice Academy (CJA)[192] is an example of an initiative the department is pursuing related to equitable community engagement. DEP launched the CJA after BIPOC community leaders urged the County to center equitable decision-making and involve BIPOC community members in the development of its Climate Action Plan (CAP). In an open letter to the County from The Montgomery County Racial Equity (MORE) Network and supported by 28 other community organizations, BIPOC community leaders noted the CAP overlooked "the lived experiences, priorities, and voices of BIPOC organizations and residents[…]" and therefore should be revised to include "the wisdom, expertise, and lived experiences of immigrants, working class communities, and communities of color […] for the co-leadership of approaches for restorative environmental justice."[193]

The shortcomings with the CAP process and the racial inequities it perpetuated led DEP to pursue what it dubs "a paradigm shift from top-down, conventional planning to bottom-up, community-led planning."[194] DEP staff involved in the implementation of the CAP, in partnership with community leaders, are working with BIPOC communities to co-create the CJA and a related CJA Fund so that residents most impacted by climate and racial injustice are deeply integrated into planning processes

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[190] About the Department of Environmental Protection, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection.
[191] Racial Equity Core Teams are leadership teams within each County department who are responsible for examining their department's policies, procedures, and practices using a racial equity lens, and driving the development of their department's racial equity action plans. Racial Equity Core Team One-Pager.
[192] DEP staff notes that the name "Community Justice Academy" is a placeholder until the initiative develops further.
[193] Letter to County Executive Marc Elrich, Ms. Adriana Hochberg, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, and Ms. Tiffany Ward, Chief Equity Officer, The Montgomery County Racial Equity (MORE) Network, Apr. 20, 2021.
[194] Internal document, "Co-Creating a Community Justice Academy & Fund for Transformative Impact in Montgomery County," Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection.

as collaborators and co-creators with the government. The CJA also intends to build community capacity and train leaders in frontline BIPOC communities to work with people from their communities to "conceive of and co-create integrated health, equity and high quality of life solutions in their communities that contribute to a resilient climate-ready region for all."[195]

DEP staff report the CJA effort is using Facilitating Power's *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* and the Popular Education and Community Leadership Development process to create a community-driven collaborative governance model with potential applicability in many other areas of DEP and the County government.

6. Community Action Agency

The Community Action Agency (CAA) within the Office of Community Affairs of the Department of Health and Human Services works "to advance social and economic mobility among communities and neighbors through services, partnerships, and advocacy using an equity lens."[196] As the County's federally designated anti-poverty agency, the CAA is part of a nationwide network of public and nonprofit CAAs who are funded by the federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).[197]

The CAA is comprised of 15 staff members who monitor contracts with nonprofit partners, provide administrative support to the agency, or directly serve community members through the Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center, the Head Start Program, the Community Advocacy Institute, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program, and the Navigation Program.[198,199] The 31 nonprofit partners with contracts monitored by the CAA "serve the low-income community, delivering food, clothing, and social services," as well as "legal assistance, employment training, education, and work toward community engagement."[200]

The national network of CAAs was created through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society agenda, which was largely rooted in the Civil Rights Movement and aimed to put "an end to poverty and racial injustice." [201] Since their inception, CAAs pursued maximum feasible participation as a core tenet, allowing people in poverty themselves to determine what would help them the most.[202] Today, CAAs are monitored on maximum feasible participation to receive federal CSBG funding and are required to demonstrate compliance to multiple

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[195] Ibid.

[196] Montgomery County Community Action Agency, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

[197] About the National Community Action Partnership, Community Action Partnership.

[198] FY24 Approved Community Action Agency Program Personnel Costs & Operating Expenses, Montgomery County Open Budget.

[199] Overview of CAA Programs and Partners, 2022-2025 Community Needs Assessment, Montgomery County Community Action Agency.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Jovita A. Tolbert, "A Brief History of Community Action," National Association for State Community Services Programs.

[202] History, Maryland Community Action Partnership.

standards under the categories of consumer input and involvement, community engagement, and community assessment.[203]

To comply with maximum feasible participation and ensure community needs are being addressed through the agency's services, the County's CAA conducts a needs assessment every three years that involves interviewing program participants to gather their input on CAA programs and services.[204] The CAA also collects on-going input on programs and services through collecting surveys and evaluations from program participants and debriefing with nonprofit service providers.[205]

Further, the CAA is governed by the 18-member Community Action Board (CAB), which contributes to and reviews the strategic direction for CAA and regularly monitors CAA activities. The CAB also advocates for issues impacting community members with low incomes through taking positions on legislation and engaging elected officials through letters, public testimony, and other channels. Per federal statute, one-third of CAA governing boards must represent public officials, one-third must represent low-income persons, and one-third must represent other major interests and groups in the community.[206] The current CAB is majority BIPOC, with 10 board members who are Black, three who are Latine, and three who are White. CAA often recruits from the Community Advocacy Institute – an eight-month program organized by the CAB that teaches "advocacy skills to lower-income residents with lived experience" – [207] to fill vacancies on the CAB.

Staff also noted language accessibility as an important strategy for engaging BIPOC community members. For instance, for the annual VITA program, CAA works to recruit volunteers that can serve program participants in their preferred language. With support from DHHS communications staff, they carry out a multimedia campaign promoting the VITA program in seven languages, partnering with multilingual media outlets and groups that are well connected to linguistically diverse community members, such as the Latino Health Initiative, to reach community members. Staff explained that content produced in languages other than English undergo multiple reviews to ensure they are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

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[203] FY22 CSBG Organizational Standards & Technical Assistance Plans, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, June 15, 2023.

[204] Interview Findings from CAA Program Participants, 2022-2025 Community Needs Assessment, Montgomery County Community Action Agency.

[205] 2022 CAA Assessment Submission, Montgomery County Community Action Agency.

[206] Community Services Block Grant Program, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

[207] Community Advocacy Institute, Community Action Board, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

7. Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) was created in 2019 through the RESJ Act "to help reduce and ultimately eliminate racial and other disparities experienced by residents of color across Montgomery County."[208] To achieve this, ORESJ has focused on strengthening the capacity of County departments to adopt the GARE framework for advancing racial equity, which includes:

- *Normalizing* conversations on race and other equity issues through training all County staff on structural racism and advancing RESJ in government;

- *Organizing* staff to work together for transformational change through training and supporting RESJ Core Team leaders within County departments; and

- *Operationalizing* practices, policies and procedures that are RESJ centered through RESJ assessment of department budgets and special and supplemental appropriations.

ORESJ is responsible for overseeing the RESJ Action Plan Regulations described in Chapter 1, which established a recommended process for departments to carry out equitable community engagement for County efforts. As described in Chapter 3, the regulations reflect several best practices for equitable community engagement. The office is in the process of hiring one **Community Engagement Manager** that would join the current staff of six and focus on providing training and technical assistance to County departments on equitable community engagement and review community engagement plans submitted by departments.[209] The manager would also serve as a liaison between the office and community members and support the office with external communications, including through creating and managing the office's social media presence.

Most of ORESJ's current community engagement is done through providing staff support to the RESJ Advisory Committee (RESJAC), which was also created through the County's RESJ Act. RESJAC is comprised of 10 community members and seven County staff and is required by law "to reflect the racial, economic, and linguistic diversity of the County's communities."[210] RESJAC's responsibilities include:[211]

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[208] The Purpose, Montgomery County Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice.
[209] Memo to Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee, "Office of Racial Equity Social Justice FY23 Operating Budget," April 28, 2022.
[210] Montgomery County Code § 27-83
[211] Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee, Office of the County Executive.

- Developing and distributing information about RESJ in the County.

- Promoting educational activities that increase the understanding of RESJ in the County.

- Recommending coordinated strategies for reducing racial and social justice inequity in the County.

- Advising the Council, the Executive, and County agencies about RESJ in the County, and recommending policies, programs, legislation, or regulations necessary to reduce racial and social justice inequity.

- Meeting periodically with the racial equity and social justice lead for each department and office.

RESJAC has organized various engagement events for the public, including a virtual community forum in 2022, which included sessions on combating food insecurity, health justice, housing, and reparations.[212]

8. Board of Elections

The mission of the Board of Elections (BOE) is to register voters, conduct elections, assist persons seeking elective office with candidate filings and campaign fund reports, assist citizens seeking to place questions on the ballot, and preserve election data.[213] The department's major activities include:[214]

- *Elections Operations:* ensuring the success of early voting and Election Day by managing polling places, recruiting and training election judges, and conducting voter outreach to the public.

- *Voter Services:* maintaining accurate voter registration records, coordinating all aspects of mail-in voting and provisional ballots including ballot counting, training volunteer registrars, responding to voter and candidate requests and questions, and ensuring compliance with election law and other state procedures and requirements.

- *Information Technology:* supporting the security of voting data, maintaining all voting equipment, and implementing technology that sends voting information to voters' mobile devices and provides real-time polling place updates on Election Day.

A team of two-to-three staff members, led by the **Community Engagement/Public Relations Officer**, manage the department's community engagement efforts. Temporary volunteers also assist BOE staff during election times. BOE's community engagement activities largely revolve around outreach to voters and future voters in the County. The BOE attends community events year-round to encourage

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[212] Accomplishments to Date, RESJAC 2022 Annual Report, Montgomery County Government, December 1, 2022.
[213] Memo to Government Operations & Fiscal Policy Committee, "Board of Elections (BOE) FY24 Operating Budget; Supplemental Appropriation to the FY23 Operating Budget; Public Election Fund NDA," April 27, 2023.
[214] Ibid.

voter registration, distribute information about where and how to vote, recruit poll workers, encourage youth participation, and answer general questions from constituents. Staff align outreach activities with important deadlines on the election calendar (e.g., the close of voter registration and the deadline to request mail-in ballots) and with special days like National Poll Workers Recruitment Day and National Voter Registration Day. Staff regularly attend County and BIPOC community-led events during Hispanic Heritage month, Black History month, and on holidays like Juneteenth.[215]

While BOE's outreach spans the entire County, data on the number of outreach events during the 2022 election cycle show in-person efforts were concentrated in Silver Spring and Rockville. Out of 254 total outreach events, 42 events (17 percent) were located in Silver Spring and 29 events (11 percent) were located in Rockville. Notably, most outreach events during the 2022 election cycle – 72 events, or 28 percent – happened virtually.[216]

Staff mentioned the department works closely with local organizations and other County departments like the Regional Services Centers to increase engagement in regions of the County that would benefit from more election outreach and voting access. For instance, staff described how state legislation passed in 2021 allowed BOE to increase the number of early voting sites in the County to 14.[217,218] Based on an overlay of different Census demographic data points, BOE intentionally placed early voting sites in historically disenfranchised, underserved communities (as defined by Montgomery Planning).[219] BOE also targets outreach to historically marginalized groups, including:[220]

- Bilingual individuals (to recruit as poll workers);
- Voters with disabilities;
- Older adults;
- Newly naturalized citizens;
- Linguistically diverse communities; and
- Students and youth.

One community engagement practice highlighted by BOE staff is building and leveraging relationships with community members and local organizations. Over the last twenty years, the Community Engagement/Public Relations Officer has established relationships with hundreds of organizations across the County, including faith-based groups, BIPOC community organizations, advocacy organizations, small businesses, and large corporations, as well as liaisons in state and local government. These partners help the department identify and engage diverse communities around

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[215] Interviews with BOE staff.
[216] 2022 Gubernatorial Election Outreach Zip Code Breakdown, Montgomery County Board of Elections, July 2023.
[217] Article II, Section 17(b) of the Maryland Constitution - Chapter 43.
[218] Early Voting, Montgomery County Board of Elections.
[219] The Equity Focus Areas Analysis, Montgomery Planning, M-NCPPC.
[220] Staff Overview 2022 Election Cycle (preliminary research), Montgomery County Board of Elections Presentation, January 2023.

their specific voting and election needs. BOE also reported that it works closely with other County departments (e.g., Office of Community Partnerships, Office of Human Rights, Department of Recreation, Montgomery County Public Libraries, etc.) to access and engage different groups of constituents. Additionally, BOE visits Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) twice a school year to register students to vote and recruit volunteer poll workers.

After every election cycle, staff brief community stakeholders, the BOE, and the general public on the department's activities, including outreach and engagement. Staff present findings on voting patterns, emerging trends, areas for improvement, and data to inform future elections, and gather input from community members.

Many of BOE's community engagement strategies focus on language accessibility, in particular Spanish-language accessibility. Montgomery County is required under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act to provide all information "about the electoral process, including registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, or assistance, as well as information provided at the polling places and the voting booths" in Spanish as well as in English.[221,222] In 2002, the BOE hired the Community Engagement/Public Relations Officer specifically to oversee the translation of all voting-related materials into Spanish and to strengthen engagement and outreach with Spanish-speaking communities in the County.

Over the last two decades, the department has prioritized proving language access for constituents with LEP in the County, and according to staff, persuaded the State Board of Elections to translate election documents into Chinese, Korean, and French in addition to Spanish. During the 2020 Election, the BOE engaged LEP constituents through the following methods:[223]

- Placed more than 500 Spanish-speaking poll workers at early voting sites and nearly 300 Spanish-speaking poll workers on Election Day to assist voters with LEP who spoke Spanish;

- Launched a bilingual MoCo Voter App that allows constituents to register to vote, update their voter record, and receive voting information like ballot drop box and polling locations in English and Spanish. The app also allows users to access the vote by mail ballot application and check their ballot status in both languages.

- Used bilingual SMS texting to provide much of the same information described above in English and Spanish;

- Offered virtual information sessions in nine languages to 15,000 participants; and

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[221] Letter to Jerrold S. Garson, Montgomery County Board of Elections President, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, October 11, 2011.

[222] "Board of Elections (BOE) FY24 Operating Budget; Supplemental Appropriation to the FY23 Operating Budget; Public Election Fund NDA"

[223] Internal Document, Community Engagement Overview, Montgomery County Board of Elections, April 4, 2021.

- Executed a multilingual media campaign in 14 languages through Google, newspapers, and the radio.

One of BOE's community engagement programs is its Future Vote Initiative, which aims to increase youth participation in elections. Since 2004, the program has recruited over 48,000 young people to participate in elections and nearly 11,000 young people (over the age of 16) to serve as Election Judges.[224] Students grade 6-12, called Student Election Aides, receive student service learning (SSL) hours for assisting with setting up polling places, greeting and guiding voters through polling centers, and more. Table 5.1 compares the racial and ethnic composition of Student Election Aides during the 2022 Election Cycle with that of Montgomery County Public School students. The data show that Asian, White, and multiracial students are overrepresented in Future Vote participants, whereas Black and Latine students are underrepresented.

Table 5.1. Race and Ethnicity of BOE Future Vote Participants and MCPS Students

Race and ethnicity	Future Vote Student Election Aides	MCPS Students
White	31%	24%
Latino	13%	35%
Black or African American	17%	22%
Asian	30%	14%
Native American	1%	0%
Multiracial	7%	5%

Source: BOE Staff Overview 2022 Election Cycle (preliminary research) Presentation and Montgomery County Public Schools.

Though the initiative centers engagement with youth, programmatic factors may contribute to disparities in student participation by race and ethnicity. First, parents or guardians must register their children online and attend a mandatory one-hour training, in addition to providing transportation when the student is scheduled for a shift. This could be challenging for BIPOC families who may not have ready access to time, resources, or transportation needed to apply and participate. Moreover, the lack of monetary compensation may deter BIPOC students with low incomes from participating.

9. Montgomery County Planning Department

The Montgomery County Planning Department (Montgomery Planning) is part of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and is responsible for land use planning and development review for the majority of the County. The department has 150 staff members. As part of its activities, Montgomery Planning creates master and sector plans for communities throughout the County, and countywide functional plans, such as for transportation, environment, and historic

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[224] "Board of Elections (BOE) FY24 Operating Budget; Supplemental Appropriation to the FY23 Operating Budget; Public Election Fund NDA"

preservation. Plans provide recommendations for land uses, zoning, transportation, and public facilities, as well as address issues like housing, historic preservation, and trails.

The Montgomery County Planning Board, appointed by the County Council, is the five-member decision-making body that oversees Montgomery Planning and Montgomery Parks. The Planning Board has final decision-making authority over most development applications and serves as land use advisors to the Council, which makes final decisions on master plans and zoning. The Planning Board meets weekly to consider new and future development in the County and review and provide feedback on draft master plans and zoning changes that go before the Council. These meetings are open to the public and also provided online live and on-demand. Constituents can sign-up to comment in person or virtually during meetings or submit written comments on Planning Board agenda items.

To support national recognition of the role land use planning played in creating inequitable communities and the need to address it, Montgomery Planning developed the Equity Agenda for Planning in 2018. The Equity Agenda provides direction for integrating RESJ into all planning processes and operations, including community engagement. Shortly thereafter, the Planning Board adopted Montgomery Planning's Equity Agenda for Planning Framework to support the Planning Board's requirement to consider racial equity during its review of master plans. Staff noted that the department's approach to equitable engagement was refined further during the update to the County's General Plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*.

The communications strategy for *Thrive Montgomery 2050* pushed Montgomery Planning to develop an Equitable Engagement Guide that compiles lessons learned from the department's existing equitable engagement efforts and offers planners a model for integrating community engagement into master plans (Figure 5.3). Planning staff report each plan begins with a demographic analysis of the specific plan area that then informs the creation and implementation of a communications strategy. Staff note this data-centered approach has helped them target populations typically left out of master planning initiatives and evaluate their efforts by monitoring who they are communicating with and how those individuals reflect both the demographics of the plan area and the audiences identified in the communications strategy. The approach has also allowed staff to adjust and/or supplement engagement efforts to better reach historically underrepresented people in the plan area.

Figure 5.3. Montgomery Planning Master Plan Engagement Model
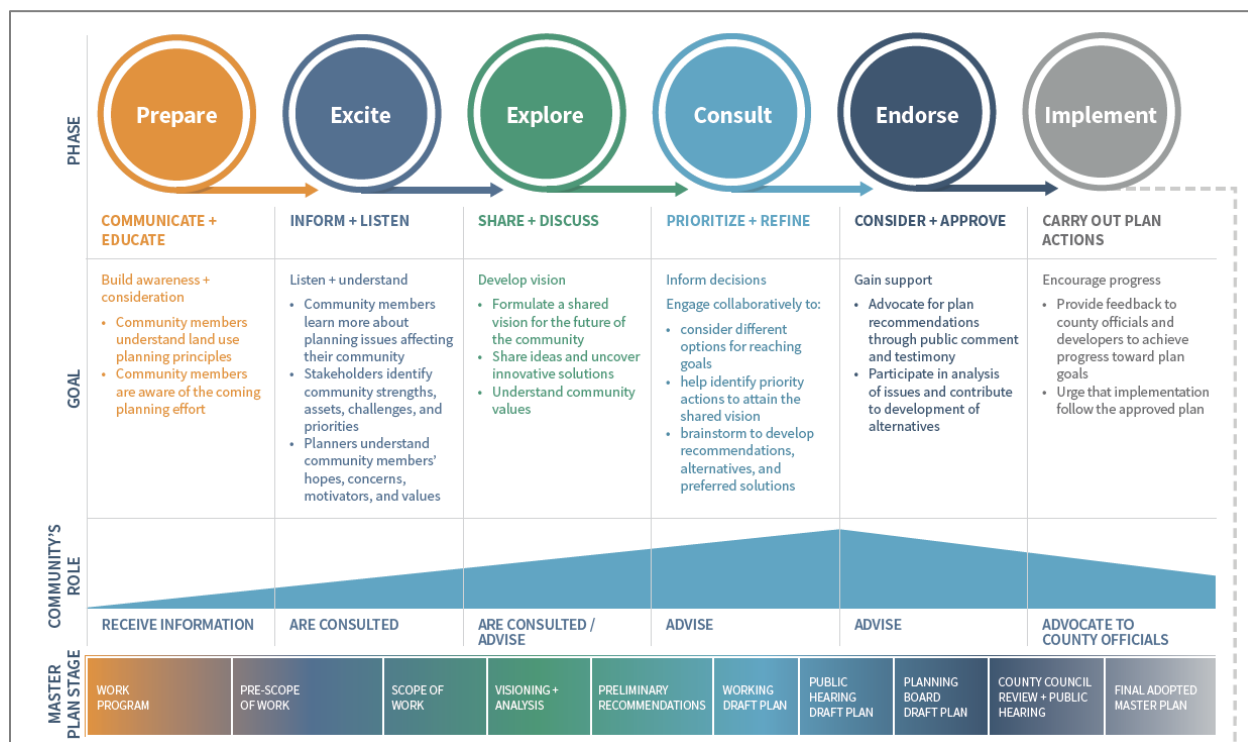
Source: Montgomery Planning Equitable Engagement Guide 2023, M-NCPPC Montgomery Planning

One community engagement practice highlighted by Planning staff was language accessibility. Using demographic data for the plan area, Montgomery Planning translates plan materials, including community surveys and plan documents, into other languages such as Spanish, Amharic, Chinese, Farsi, French, and Korean and promotes plans in local ethnic media. The department also offers professional live language interpretation for its community meetings and has held bi-lingual community meetings. Staff noted the department is currently developing a language policy for the translation and interpretation of messaging, materials, and other communications for communities in master plan areas who have limited English proficiency.

OLO observed while it is the department's policy and expectation that all staff adhere to the standards set forth in the Equity Agenda for Planning, the extent to which engagement practices center BIPOC appear to vary by master plan. For instance, while Black community members were proportionately represented in listening sessions for the Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan,[225] they were largely underrepresented in listening sessions and other engagements for the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Master Plan.[226] Differences in participation by race and ethnicity could be due

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[225] Black people accounted for 50 percent of constituents in the plan area and 49 percent of listening session participants. Refer to Planning Board Draft of Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan, Montgomery Planning, June 2023 and Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan Community Engagement Report, Montgomery Planning, February 3, 2022.
[226] Black people accounted for 30 percent of constituents in the plan area and 8 percent of listening session participants. Refer to Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan Update, Montgomery Planning, December 20, 2020.

to differences in staff skill and capacity for carrying out equitable community engagement. Some staff noted that planners who have more experience, knowledge, and comfort with equitable engagement are more intentional in planning for and carrying it out as part of their master plan efforts. Some staff also noted that master plan timelines proposed by department leadership and set by the Council often do not allow enough time to meaningfully engage BIPOC in collaborative planning efforts, which can cause planners to lean on more familiar engagement strategies in the interest of time.[227]

B. Equitable Community Engagement in the County

This section describes themes that emerged on the extent of equitable community engagement in the County based on the practices of County departments studied for the project. Themes emerged around the following four areas:

- How the County commonly engages community members and strategies that are commonly used to center BIPOC community members;

- How departments are held accountable for carrying out equitable community engagement;

- Challenges County staff experience with carrying out equitable community engagement; and

- Promising practices County staff use to carry out equitable community engagement.

1. Community Engagement and Equitable Community Engagement in the County

County departments studied for this project used a range of community engagement practices that reflect the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* described in Chapter 1. This section describes common community engagement practices used across County departments and common strategies that are used to center BIPOC community members within these practices. This section is presented in four parts to describe community engagement practices in the County relative to stages within the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*.

Stage 1, Inform practices: department communications and outreach. Department communications and outreach are characteristic of Stage 1, Inform of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* through serving as a one-way channel of information from County stakeholders to community members. Most departments have some capacity – in terms of time, resources, and/or staffing – to inform community members about County policies, programs and other efforts.

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[227] Department leadership noted that a shorter timeline and limitations with in-person engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the underrepresentation of Black community members in engagements for the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Master Plan.

Common communications and outreach practices cited by staff include providing information on websites, sending press releases and e-newsletters, posting on social media, and sharing presentations, handouts, and other materials at community events. MC311 also primarily serves as a one-way communication channel through disseminating information to community members and directing them to departments that can help address their questions and concerns.

OLO observed that departments vary in how much capacity they have for communications and outreach. Some departments have dedicated staffing for communications and outreach while others balance these efforts along with other responsibilities. In the Executive Branch, some departments also receive communications support from the Public Information Office (PIO). OLO Report 2023-3: *How the County Communicates to Its Residents*, provides a detailed overview of communications capacity for each department in the County and the channels of communication they use.[228]

Centering BIPOC in Stage 1 practices. One main strategy cited across departments for centering BIPOC in communications and outreach was language accessibility through producing County information and materials in languages other than English. A few departments are able to contract with consultants to provide information and materials in multiple languages. However, OLO observed that most of the County's internal capacity for translation and interpretation appears to be dedicated specifically to producing information and materials in Spanish. While staffing is available for communications in Spanish, little to no staffing is available for communications in other languages spoken by community members, such as Mandarin and Amharic.

Another strategy noted by some departments was use of targeted communications channels to reach specific populations. For instance, staff in the PIO and Legislative Information Office (LIO) maintain relationships with local ethnic media outlets to distribute information to culturally and linguistically diverse community members. Some staff also maintain relationships with community groups that represent or serve BIPOC community members – such as Greek-letter, faith-based, and nonprofit organizations – and share information through their networks.

OLO observed stronger staffing for communications and outreach in Spanish enabled the creation of more direct and on-going channels of communication between the County and community members who speak Spanish. For instance, while the County currently staffs several communications resources in Spanish – including two weekly radio shows, a WhatsApp group, and a Facebook page – similar channels of communication are not available for BIPOC community members who speak other languages, including English, Mandarin, Amharic, and other languages. Several staff noted there is a significant gap in targeted communication and outreach to Black community members in particular.

During the pandemic, the County strengthened and centralized in-house resources for timely communications and outreach in Spanish and has maintained much of this increased capacity since.

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[228] Blaise DeFazio and Kristen Latham, OLO Report 2023-3: How the County Communicates to Its Residents, Office of Legislative Oversight, February 28, 2023.

While it is difficult to measure the success of communications efforts in reaching specific BIPOC communities, the sustained increase in Spanish-language calls to MC311 since the start of the pandemic (described in Chapter 2) suggests the County's investment in reaching Spanish-speaking community members has been effective.

Figure 5.4 summarizes common community engagement practices, common strategies for equitable community engagement, and notable observations for Stage 1 practices.

Figure 5.4. Summary of Stage 1, Inform Community Engagement Practices in the County

	Stage 1, Inform
Common Practices in County Departments	• Websites • Press releases • E-newsletters • Social media • Sharing presentations and materials at community events • MC311
Common Equitable Community Engagement Strategies	• Language accessibility • Use of targeted channels to reach BIPOC community members
OLO Observations	• Departments have varying capacity for communications and outreach • Departments have stronger staffing and resources for non-English communications and outreach in Spanish

Stage 2, Consult practices: public hearings, meetings, and forums. A few departments hold public hearings, meetings, and forums characteristic of Stage 2, Consult of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. These engagement opportunities create a one-way channel of information from community members to County stakeholders by allowing community members to provide input on County policies, programs, and other efforts. For instance:

- A few departments – such as the County Council, the Planning Board, and the Board of Elections – regularly hold public hearings and meetings where community members can provide written or in-person testimony on new laws, master plans, budgets, or policies. Public testimony provides an opportunity for community members to advocate for their views and potentially influence decision-making. Testimony provided at public hearings and meetings also becomes part of the public record.

- Some departments occasionally hold public forums to facilitate discussion around County efforts or other issues of public interest. These gatherings are organized and led by County staff and/or elected officials and have previously focused on topics ranging from the County's Operating and Capital Improvements Budgets, to rent stabilization and transportation planning. The amount of time given for input from community members varies by the type of forum. For example, public forums and town halls held by the Council are reserved mainly for community member questions. In contrast, forums held by departments or the County Executive often allot time for community member questions after a presentation on County efforts.

Though these engagement opportunities allow community members to have more voice in County efforts, input provided by community members through these channels do not guarantee changes to County policies, programs, and practices. Nonetheless, these engagement channels can be influential because they are close to decision-makers.

Centering BIPOC in Stage 2 practices. As with communications and outreach, a main strategy for centering BIPOC in public hearings, meetings, and forums is providing interpretation services at events and translating accompanying materials to languages other than English. For instance, for the FY25 Operating Budget, the County Executive plans to host dual-language forums separately for community members in Amharic, Chinese, and Spanish.[229] OLO again observed that most capacity in this area is dedicated to translation and interpretation of events to Spanish. For instance, LIO has in-house staffing to provide simultaneous interpretation of select Council public hearings only to Spanish. Interpretation and translation in other languages is provided upon request through contract services.

An occasional strategy for centering BIPOC in public hearings, meetings, and forums is physically locating public events in proximity to BIPOC communities. For instance, while the Council typically holds public hearings at the Council Office Building in Rockville, Planning staff arranged for the public hearing for the Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan – a planning area where 80 percent of community members are BIPOC –[230] to take place at the East County Community Recreation Center in Briggs Chaney.[231] As another example, considering community feedback, Planning staff organized a

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[229] Community Conversations Calendar: FY25 Operating Budget Discussions, Office of Public Information, Montgomery County, Maryland.

[230] Planning Board Draft of Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan, Montgomery Planning, June 2023.

[231] "Montgomery County Council to Hold a Public Hearing on the Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan on Sept. 27, 2023 at 7 p.m.," Montgomery County Council, September 21, 2023.

public hearing for the Takoma Park Minor Master Plan that was jointly live streamed to and from the Planning Board in Wheaton and the City Council's chambers in Takoma Park.

Staff noted that generally, participation in public hearings, meetings, and forums is not representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the County, with White community members being overrepresented among participants. For instance, Planning staff noted that participation in Planning Board public hearings is often less diverse than participation in master plan engagement events. Further, as discussed in Chapter 2, data on constituent testimony and correspondence with the Council suggest there is higher engagement from areas of the County that are disproportionately White and lower engagement from areas that are disproportionately BIPOC.

Figure 5.5 summarizes common community engagement practices, common strategies for equitable community engagement, and notable observations for Stage 2 practices.

Figure 5.5. Summary of Stage 2, Consult Community Engagement Practices in the County

	Stage 2, Consult
Common Practices in County Departments	• Regular public hearings and meetings (structured in a few County departments) • Public forums (occasional department practice)
Common Equitable Community Engagement Strategies	• Language accessibility • Locating public events in proximity to BIPOC communities
OLO Observations	• Departments have stronger staffing for translation and interpretation of events to Spanish • White community members are often overrepresented among participants of public hearings, meetings, and forums

Stage 3, Involve practices: Boards, Committees, and Commissions. Departments frequently cited Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCCs) as a typical practice for on-going engagement with community members. BCCs serve as a channel for two-way engagement by providing a forum for on-going and direct discussion between County stakeholders and community members. Understanding the effectiveness of BCCs to shape County policies, programs, and practices was beyond the scope of this project. However, while citizen advisory committees (the general category BCCs fall under) are listed as an example activity in Stage 4, Collaborate of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, department feedback suggests they are likely more characteristic of Stage 3, Involve on the *Spectrum*.

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

There are over 80 BCCs in the County focused on a range of issues in the community, from childcare and historic preservation to mental health and water quality.[232] As described by the Office of the County Executive, generally, "BCCs meet one or two evenings per month, have three-year terms, and are advisory in nature." Further, "[m]ost members of BCCs are not compensated but mileage and dependent care expenses may be reimbursed."[233]

Most members of BCCs are appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council.[234] Many BCCs require a certain number of their appointees be members of the public and/or representatives of non-governmental organizations who can represent the views and needs of their respective communities. BCC proceedings are facilitated by departments and staff are often required to actively participate in BCCs through serving as ex-officio members. Generally, BCC staffing is part-time as department staff usually manage support to BCCs along with other responsibilities.

Centering BIPOC in Stage 3 practices. While BCCs provide a channel for two-way engagement with community members, several staff noted BCC membership was often not racially diverse or representative of the community, with a few specifically citing that BCCs staffed by their departments were primarily comprised of older White community members.

A few BCCs, including the RESJ Advisory Committee (RESJAC) and the Advisory Commission on Policing, are legally required to reflect the diversity of the County. Generally, County Code and BCC Policies and Procedures specify that "diversity of background and professions," "geographic balance," and "gender and ethnic balance" should be considered when making appointments to BCCs. [235,236] However, it is unclear whether there are standards for each of these categories and how the County Executive's office monitors compliance. Of note, Project 14 in OLO's FY24 Work Program is focused on studying how members of the County's BCCs are selected and analyzing the demographic and geographic composition of BCC members.[237]

Figure 5.6 summarizes common community engagement practices, common strategies for equitable community engagement, and notable observations for Stage 3 practices.

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[232] Board, Committees, and Commissions List, Montgomery County Office of the County Executive.
[233] Boards, Committees, and Commissions, Montgomery County Office of the County Executive.
[234] Some committees are appointed by the Council, including the Montgomery County Planning Board, the Board of Appeals, and the Merit System Protection Board. The Council also appoints six of the eleven members of the Charter Review Commission. Refer to Policies and Procedures, Boards, Committees, and Commissions, Montgomery County Office of the County Executive.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Montgomery County Code § 2-148
[237] Project #14: Review of the Composition of County Government Boards, Committees and Commissions, FY24 OLO Work Program, Office of Legislative Oversight.

Figure 5.6. Summary of Stage 3, Involve Community Engagement Practices in the County

	Stage 3, Involve
Common Practices in County Departments	• Boards, Committees, and Commissions
Common Equitable Community Engagement Strategies	• Requiring diverse membership (required by law for a few BCCs)
OLO Observations	• BCCs serve as channel for on-going and direct discussion between County stakeholders and community members • White community members may be overrepresented among BCC members

Other two-way engagement practices. Outside of BCCs, departments generally have limited channels for on-going two-way engagement with community members, especially those that are more characteristic of later stages of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. Two-way community engagement initiatives cited by staff were often ad-hoc and not sustained permanently. For instance, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) carried out community engagement for the County's Climate Action Plan, which was completed in 2021 after the enactment of the RESJ Act.[238] However, as previously described, the response of BIPOC community leaders to the Climate Action Plan implies that equitable community engagement was not prioritized in this effort.

Two studied departments – Montgomery Planning and the Community Action Agency (CAA) – are structured to have more on-going two-way engagement with community members. For instance:

- Montgomery Planning has an engagement budget for each master plan that funds activities for Planning staff to gather on-going input from community members. Engagement activities can include workshops, charrettes, questionnaires or surveys, speakers' series, and sessions with a graphic recording artist. Depending on the needs of community members, engagement activities take place in the geographic plan area or Montgomery Planning's headquarters in Wheaton. Input from the community gathered from these activities is used to directly inform preliminary master plan recommendations. However, as previously described, OLO observed that the centering of BIPOC in community engagement appeared to vary across master plan efforts.

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[238] Montgomery County Climate Action Plan, Montgomery County Government, June 2021.

- As previously described, the CAA is governed by the Community Action Board (CAB), which contributes to and reviews the strategic direction for the CAA and regularly monitors CAA's activities. The CAB also advocates on behalf of community members with low incomes through taking positions on public issues and engaging elected officials. Per federal statute, one-third of CAA governing boards must represent public officials, one-third must represent low-income persons, and one-third must represent other major interests and groups in the community. The current CAB is majority BIPOC.

2. Accountability for Equitable Community Engagement

On understanding accountability for equitable community engagement in the County, themes emerged around formal requirements for equitable community engagement and data collection on equitable community engagement. A description of these themes follows.

Formal requirements for equitable community engagement. A few of the studied departments have formal requirements for community engagement related specifically to constituent participation in public hearings and meetings, for instance:

- County law requires the Council to hold public hearings before enacting legislation.[239] The Council President must provide "reasonable notice" of when and where the public hearing will take place and how the public may register to speak at the hearing.[240] Members of the public who wish to testify must sign up in advance on the Council's website and follow specific rules to participate live at the public hearing or to submit written or pre-recorded audio or video testimony.

- The Board of Elections bylaws prescribe that the Board President may allow public participation at board meetings.[241] While the bylaws require the public be notified of board meetings at least one week prior to the meeting taking place, in practice, the annual schedule for board meetings is posted in advance on the Board of Elections' website.[242] Similar to the County Council, members of the public who wish to testify during the public comment period of the board meeting must sign up in advance on the Board of Elections website and follow specific rules to participate live at the board meeting.

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[239] Montgomery County Code, Part I. Charter of Montgomery County, Maryland, Article 1. Legislative Branch, Sec. 111 Enactment of Legislation.

[240] Montgomery County Code, Appendix C. Rules of Procedures of County Council.

[241] Bylaws of the Montgomery County Board of Elections, Montgomery County Board of Elections, Adopted September 16, 2019.

[242] Board Meeting Information, Montgomery County Board of Elections.

- According to the Planning Board's Rules of Procedure, the Planning Board must include public participation during its weekly meetings where it considers applications for new and future development, reviews draft master plans, and manages the County's park system. Individuals wishing to testify in-person or virtually can sign up on the Planning Board's [website](#) beginning ten days or more before the hearing date, depending on the type of item being discussed.[243]

As previously described, there is evidence that public meeting participation is not representative of the County's racial and ethnic diversity. However, none of the formal requirements for public meeting participation prescribe practices for ensuring that participation is racially and ethnically equitable. Nonetheless, OLO observed that more mechanisms may be in place to consider input from public testimony more carefully than input from other engagement channels that may be more representative of BIPOC perspectives. For instance, Planning staff summarize feedback from community engagement activities to brief the Planning Board throughout the master plan process. However, comments from public hearings in particular are considered more meticulously, with each comment being organized into a matrix that includes a direct response from Planning staff. Further, the Planning Board's direct engagement with community members is primarily through public hearings in the later stages of the master planning process. Thus, working drafts of master plans developed through an equitable community engagement process can later be changed based on public hearing input that may not be as representative of community member perspectives.

A few other departments had formal accountability requirements for community engagement, for instance:

- To receive funding, the CAA must demonstrate compliance to maximum feasible participation of program participants in advising CAA programs and services. Federal legislation intends for CAAs to tailor services for the most vulnerable members within the communities they serve, regardless of racial or ethnic demographics. Thus, while maximum feasible participation requirements provide some accountability for community engagement in CAA, they do not specifically require that community engagement center BIPOC community members.

- Montgomery Planning staff typically brief the Planning Board on engagement activities at different checkpoints throughout the master planning process. However, the content and details of master plan engagement reports vary, including with respect to equitable community engagement. Thus, while staff have some accountability to report on their engagement activities to the Planning Board, there do not appear to be clear standards for staff to demonstrate their efforts carrying out equitable community engagement.

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[243] Chapter IV: Rules of Procedure for Public Hearing, [The Montgomery County Planning Board Rules of Procedure](#), pg. 6.

Beyond these instances, accountability for equitable community engagement primarily rests with the few staff members within some departments who were specifically hired to engage BIPOC communities, such as the LIO's Language Access Liaisons.

Given the general lack of accountability for equitable community engagement, OLO observed that staff who made efforts to center BIPOC in community engagement did so to varying degrees and at their own discretion. Few staff mentioned the County regulations that established an equitable community engagement process for departments. Awareness of the regulations among staff may improve with the hire of the Community Engagement Manager in ORESJ who will be responsible for guiding departments on equitable community engagement and reviewing department community engagement plans. However, even when the staff member is hired, there are currently no standards for ORESJ to evaluate and report department progress on carrying out equitable community engagement.

Data collection on equitable community engagement. The lack of formal requirements for equitable community engagement generally translates to a lack of data collection for understanding community engagement by race and ethnicity and measuring progress on equitable community engagement. Most departments studied do not collect data on community engagement activities. While a few departments do complete some data collection, at best, data is often only able to provide an indirect understanding of community engagement by race and ethnicity. Further, OLO observed that much of this data did not appear to be collected or analyzed for the purpose of understanding and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in community engagement. For instance:

- As described in Chapter 2, the Council collects data on constituent testimony and correspondence by geography. To OLO's knowledge, this data has not previously been analyzed, including for the purpose of understanding disparities in constituent engagement through these channels.

- For MS4 reporting to the Maryland Department of the Environment,[244] DEP collects and reports data on outreach events, including the topic, zip code, and number of attendees.[245] While the DEP staff that OLO interviewed individually use this data to understand potential gaps in engagement, they noted this is not a systematic practice across the department.

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[244] Maryland's NPDES Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permits, Maryland Department of the Environment.
[245] National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System MS4 Permit FY22 Annual Report, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection.

Among departments studied, OLO observed Montgomery Planning has the most consistent practice of collecting and analyzing data on community engagement activities by race and ethnicity. For community engagement on master plans, Planning staff administer demographic surveys to participating community members, which allows for a closer understanding of participation in engagements by race and ethnicity, among other demographics. For instance:

- For the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan, Planning staff collected demographic information from 244 of 400 (61 percent) community members participating in listening sessions, office hours, online surveys, and community meetings. Based on this data, Planning staff estimated 81 percent of engagement participants were White, 8 percent were Black, 6 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, 3 percent were Latine, and 1 percent were Native American.[246]

- For the Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan, Planning staff collected demographic information from 50 of 104 (48 percent) community members participating in listening sessions. Based on this data, Planning staff estimated 49 percent of listening session participants were Black, 33 percent were White, 9 percent were Latine, and 9 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander.[247]

Of note, several staff expressed hesitation with collecting data on participant race and ethnicity during engagement events. For instance, Planning staff noted that race and ethnicity data is not collected for all engagements, as it can have a "chilling" effect on participants sharing input during events such as pop-ups. Further, staff within other departments shared concerns on the effect data collection could have on relationship-building with community members.

3. Challenges Carrying Out Equitable Community Engagement

On understanding challenges carrying out equitable community engagement, themes emerged regarding racial inequities in common channels of community engagement, lack of capacity and structure for equitable community engagement, and lack of widespread commitment to RESJ in the County. A description of these themes follows.

Racial inequities in common channels of community engagement. Engaging through the typical community engagement channels can be effective as they can offer community members opportunities to potentially influence decision-making. Yet, staff generally noted that while common engagement channels tend to foster strong engagement among White community members, they are often not conducive to fostering engagement among BIPOC community members. For instance:

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[246] Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan Update, Montgomery Planning, December 20, 2020.
[247] Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan Community Engagement Report, Montgomery Planning, February 3, 2022.

- Messages and print materials are sometimes written in complex and technical language that may alienate BIPOC community members.

- Engagement events such as public hearings typically take place at times and locations that are generally inconvenient for BIPOC community members and fail to accommodate needs such as childcare that could encourage more participation.

- BCCs have a complex appointment process that White community members have more familiarity and comfort navigating.

Refer to Chapter 2 for a more complete list of racial inequities in common community engagement practices in the County based on feedback from BIPOC community partners, County staff, and OLO's observations.

Lack of capacity in departments for equitable community engagement. Staff noted there is often insufficient capacity – in terms of time, resources, and/or staffing – to successfully carry out equitable community engagement in a sustained manner. For instance:

- Timelines mandated by decision-makers for projects such as master plans typically do not accommodate long-term relationship building required to center BIPOC in community engagement. Further, more value is often placed on showing results and completing projects in a short timeframe than on important process activities like building trust among BIPOC community members.

- There is often minimal capacity for departments to analyze Census and administrative data by race and ethnicity to carry out more strategic and targeted community engagement with BIPOC communities. Further, there is often minimal funding for things like childcare and compensation that could increase participation among BIPOC in community engagement activities.

- The work of centering BIPOC in community engagement tends to rest with a few County staff who either have specific responsibilities for engaging BIPOC communities or who are using equitable engagement practices at their own discretion, sometimes on top of their primary responsibilities. As equitable community engagement practices are not widespread among staff, staff who are carrying out this work must often put additional effort to engage BIPOC communities, which is likely not sustainable.

Lack of structure for equitable community engagement. Staff noted that a lack of structure for equitable community engagement, including a lack of a clear policy, methodology, metrics, and data collection and reporting requirements has hindered equitable community engagement in the County.

Specifically, regarding data collection, a few staff noted when requested, existing resources such as CountyStat have not provided sufficient guidance on how to properly collect, manage, and analyze race and ethnicity data from participants during community engagement events. As previously discussed, staff also expressed hesitancy with collecting data on participant race and ethnicity during engagement events for fear of having a chilling effect on participants sharing input or having a negative effect on relationship-building. Staff also shared the difficulty of quantifying more intangible efforts that are important to equitable community engagement, such as long-term relationship-building.

Lack of widespread commitment to RESJ. Staff noted that despite the RESJ Act, there is still significant reluctance within departments to centering race and prioritizing racial equity in County operations, including in community engagement. Staff expressed that effectively centering BIPOC in community engagement requires staff to understand RESJ, become comfortable with it, and adopt it as a core value that is embedded throughout department policies, programs, and practices. Yet, staff observed departments are generally more comfortable with the status quo and have not fully bought in to centering race in addressing inequities and disparities among community members. A few staff noted a lack of cultural competency training and awareness among staff, supervisors, and management is a major contributing factor. Further, a few staff also mentioned facing active resistance to embedding RESJ in their work from department leadership.

4. Promising Equitable Community Engagement Practices Used by County Staff

Despite challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement, OLO observed that staff used several promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work. Aside from language accessibility practices, equitable community engagement practices carried out by staff were typically not documented or structured into department practice. Instead, staff used equitable engagement practices to varying degrees and at their own discretion. On understanding promising equitable community engagement practices used by County staff, the following seven themes emerged, many of which align with best practices described in Chapter 3 and promising practices shared by BIPOC community partners described in Chapter 4.

Staff skillset, characteristics, and commitment to RESJ. Many staff noted the importance of staff skillset and characteristics in carrying out equitable community engagement. Skills cited by staff included cultural and linguistic competency, adaptability, listening, patience, empathy and humility. Additionally, some staff in leadership positions noted the importance of hiring staff from within BIPOC communities who have firsthand understanding of systemic barriers to community engagement faced by community members. Some staff in leadership positions also noted the importance of having diverse representation on BCCs and sometimes provided technical assistance to community members in the BCC appointment process.

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

OLO observed that a commitment to RESJ was prevalent among interviewed staff who were making efforts to center BIPOC in community engagement. This included considering RESJ from beginning to end of community engagement – from how engagements are promoted to attract BIPOC community members, to how engagements are structured and facilitated to encourage equitable participation and how follow-up is done with community members after engagements to build trust.

Long-term, intentional relationship building with BIPOC communities. Many staff noted the importance of long-term, intentional relationship building with BIPOC communities for carrying out equitable community engagement. Many staff worked to build relationships with groups that have strong ties to BIPOC communities, including faith-based organizations, Greek-letter organizations, non-profit service providers, and County-affiliated groups such as the minority health initiatives. Some staff also worked to build individual relationships with BIPOC community members, including trusted leaders within BIPOC communities. Relationship building often involved staff creating a direct line of communication to BIPOC groups and/or individual community members and being responsive to their concerns. At the community-level, it sometimes involved creating a space for BIPOC community members to have authentic and unfiltered conversations on their concerns, such as the town-hall discussion on policing and race moderated by the Office of Human Rights.

Physically proximate engagement. Several staff noted the importance of physical proximity to BIPOC for carrying out equitable community engagement. Practices cited by staff included door-to-door canvassing at homes or small businesses in BIPOC communities, in-community pilot projects and placemaking events, participating in grassroots events and meetings organized by community groups, and holding engagement events, such as public hearings and forums, in BIPOC communities. Specifically, regarding canvassing, Planning staff noted that in addition to being an effective channel for gathering input from BIPOC community members for master plans, canvassing efforts also provided the best data on participant race and ethnicity. Of note, Montgomery Planning contracts with grassroots organizations to conduct door-to-door canvassing, which typically hire canvassers from within the master plan community.

Culturally and linguistically competent engagement. As previously noted, language accessibility was a practice commonly noted by staff for carrying out equitable community engagement. Practices cited by staff included translating messages and written materials, simultaneous interpretation of public events held in English, or holding dual-language public events. Language accessibility practices also included writing materials and messages in plain language that avoided technical jargon and conveying information in various ways, including through infographics. Some staff were also intentional in relaying messages through communications channels that BIPOC community members are connected to, such as groups with close ties to BIPOC communities and ethnic media outlets.

Understanding BIPOC communities and tailoring community engagement to meet their needs.
Several staff noted the importance of understanding BIPOC communities and tailoring engagement to
meet their needs for carrying out equitable community engagement. Some staff worked to better
understand the needs of BIPOC community members through their relationships with community
groups and trusted leaders in BIPOC communities. Some staff also used demographic data from the
Census and other sources to understand potential barriers to participation and determine the most
effective ways to reach BIPOC community members. Barriers to participation cited by staff included
limited time and resources, distrust of government, lingering fear among immigrant community
members who fled repressive governments, childcare needs, and language and literacy needs.

A few staff also mentioned that understanding BIPOC communities also led to innovative community
engagement practices that were more effective in reaching BIPOC community members, such as the
PIO's Spanish-language WhatsApp group and the photo contest for the Fairland and Briggs Chaney
Master Plan.[248]

Follow through practices. A few staff noted the importance of follow through practices for carrying out
equitable community engagement. Follow through practices involved staff efforts to demonstrate how
community member input was taken into consideration for policies, programs, and practices. Staff
noted that follow through practices are particularly helpful for building trust among BIPOC community
members.

Other promising practices. Other promising practices for carrying out equitable community
engagement noted by staff included:

- Programs such as the Latino Civic Project in LIO and the Community Advocacy Institute in CAA
  that work to build the capacity of BIPOC community members to advocate for their needs and
  priorities through common community engagement channels.

- Programs such as Future Vote in the Board of Elections, which can create a network of
  engagement inclusive of BIPOC communities through engaging BIPOC youth and their families.

- Compensating community members for their participation and input, such as DEP's
  compensation of Community Justice Academy participants and Montgomery Planning staff
  occasionally offering small gift cards to community members giving input on master plans.

- Using surveys to collect input that is racially and ethnically representative of community
  demographics, such as the surveying strategies used by Montgomery Parks (Appendix A).

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[248] Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan Community Engagement Report

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

Promising equitable community engagement efforts. Throughout the course of the interviews, staff noted several past and present community engagement efforts that were successful in centering BIPOC community members, including:

- Community Justice Academy in DEP;
- Latino Civic Project and Community Outreach Pop-ups in LIO;
- Community Advocacy Institute in CAA;
- Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan;
- Outreach and communications to BIPOC communities on COVID-19 testing and vaccines;
- Development of the RESJ Act; and
- Community Conversation on Policing moderated by the Office of Human Rights.

Chapter 6. Findings and Recommendations

Equitable community engagement is community engagement that advances racial equity and social justice (RESJ) by centering the needs, leadership, and power of Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) and community members with low incomes.

This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report describes:

- What equitable community engagement is and why it is important for advancing RESJ the County;

- The historical and current context of racial inequities in community engagement and available data on local racial disparities in community engagement;

- Best practices for equitable community engagement developed by organizations, researchers, and local jurisdictions;

- Perspectives of local BIPOC community partners on the extent of equitable community engagement in the County; and

- An overview of the extent of equitable community engagement in the County based on interviews with County staff and a review of policies, programs, and practices in select departments.

Based on interviews with County staff and BIPOC community partners, an analysis of local data, and a review of department policies, programs, and practices, OLO finds there are racial inequities and disparities in community engagement in the County. Common community engagement practices in the County generally amplify the voice and power of White community members while marginalizing the voice and power of BIPOC community members in government decision-making. County departments primarily carry out one-way community engagement that centers BIPOC community members in limited and inconsistent ways. While staff experience several challenges to carrying out equitable engagement practices, some are using several promising practices to center BIPOC in community engagement to varying degrees.

This chapter is presented in two parts to describe the project's ten key findings and to offer one main recommendation and six supporting recommendations for Council discussion and action.

A. Key Project Findings

Finding #1: **Community engagement exists on a spectrum that ranges from one-way to two-way community engagement practices. Two-way community engagement practices that center BIPOC community members and lift their voice and power in shaping government policies and programs has the most potential to advance RESJ.**

Community engagement refers to a broad range of methods used by government stakeholders that allow h community members – including individual constituents, community organizers and advocates, community organizations, businesses, special interest groups, and other stakeholders – to become more informed about and/or influence government decision-making.

In *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, Facilitating Power proposes five developmental stages of community engagement. The stages can be classified into no community engagement, one-way community engagement, and two-way community engagement. With one-way community engagement practices, community members may have the opportunity to weigh-in on government policies, programs, and practices but have limited opportunities to shape them. With two-way community engagement practices, community members can be more influential in shaping policies, programs, and practices. Figure 6.1 outlines the stages of *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* by the three levels of community engagement along with examples of common one-way and two-way community engagement practices in the County.

Equitable community engagement refers to community engagement that advances RESJ by centering the needs, leadership, and power of BIPOC and community members with low incomes. Both one-way and two-way engagement practices can contain elements of equitable community engagement. However, two-way engagement practices that center BIPOC community members and lift their voice and power in shaping government policies and programs has the most potential to advance RESJ.

Figure 6.1. Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership Stages by Level of Community Engagement

No community engagement
• **Stage 0, Ignore:** Deny community access to decision-making processes.
One-way community engagement Common County practices: websites, press releases, e-newsletters, social media, presentations, print materials, MC311, public hearings, public meetings, forums
• **Stage 1, Inform:** Provide the community with relevant information. • **Stage 2, Consult:** Gather input from the community.
Two-way community engagement Common County practices: Boards, Committees, and Commissions
• **Stage 3, Involve:** Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process and inform planning. • **Stage 4, Collaborate:** Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in the implementation of decisions. • **Stage 5, Defer To:** Foster democratic participation and equity through community driven decision-making; bridge divide between community and governance.

Finding #2: **Equitable community engagement is important for strengthening democracy and the effectiveness of County policies and programs to advance RESJ; for adhering to the County's RESJ Action Plan Regulations; and for responding to the County's changing racial and ethnic demographics.**

Racial inequities in community engagement exacerbate racial inequities and disparities in the County through perpetuating policies, programs, and practices across County departments that reflect the needs and priorities of White community members and ignore the needs and priorities of BIPOC community members. Centering BIPOC in community engagement strengthens democracy through ensuring that policy decisions accurately represent the needs and priorities of all community members. Centering BIPOC in community engagement is also necessary for County policies and programs to effectively address racial inequities and disparities and advance RESJ.

The County has recognized the importance of advancing RESJ through establishing a community engagement process in the RESJ Action Plan Regulations. The community engagement process established through the regulations provide a definition for community engagement in the County. The regulations also establish a recommended process for departments to submit community engagement plans for evaluation and approval by the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ).

Demographic patterns in the County also point to the importance of equitable community engagement. From 1960 to 2020, the County's racial and ethnic demographics have drastically shifted from a population that was once 96 percent White and 4 percent BIPOC to a population that is today 41 percent White and 59 percent BIPOC. By 2045, the population of community members who are Black, Latine, White, and Other Race is expected to be roughly equal. Understanding the characteristics of community members by race and ethnicity provides some insight into differing capacity and needs they may have for community engagement with the County.

As BIPOC community members increasingly become a larger part of the County population, equitable community engagement will be necessary for the County's sustainability to ensure that County policies, programs, and practices are adequately responding to the needs of community members.

Finding #3: **There is a deep history of government at all levels empowering and disempowering people in government by race. Racial inequities and disparities in community engagement rooted in this legacy of structural racism are evident today.**

A deep history of empowering and disempowering people by race at all levels of government in the U.S. has created structural racial inequities in how the government engages with constituents and which voices have been empowered or disempowered to shape government policies, programs, and practices.

Key events in American history related to race, citizenship, and the right to vote illustrate how race has historically defined inclusion and participation in government. While the government structurally empowered White people, and in particular White men, with a voice in government, they structurally excluded the voice of BIPOC. Black people in particular were often at the center of this exclusion. Maryland history is consistent with the national history of structural racism in citizenship and the right to vote.

Because White community members have historically been included and connected to government over centuries, they often have the capacity – in terms of time, resources, familiarity, and trust – to easily engage in government. In contrast, BIPOC community members, who have historically been excluded and disconnected from government require community engagement practices that intentionally include them in government through centering their needs and priorities and through relationship building that mends the distrust embedded by government throughout history.

OLO finds there are racial inequities in common community engagement practices used in the County. Generally, common community engagement practices privilege community members who have the time and resources to regularly review County content, advocate for their needs and priorities through the typical channels, and volunteer for Boards, Committees, and Commissions without compensation. Common community engagement practices also privilege community members who are familiar navigating government processes while alienating culturally and linguistically diverse community members who have less familiarity and trust in government. These inequities work to amplify the voice and power of White community members while marginalizing the voice and power of BIPOC community members in government decision-making.

Finding #4: **An analysis of available data suggests that racial and ethnic disparities characterize community engagement in the County.**

Insufficient data is collected to fully understand community engagement participation in the County by race and ethnicity. However, feedback from department staff (Finding 8) and an analysis of available data on constituent engagement with the County Council suggest that racial and ethnic disparities characterize community engagement locally.

To estimate potential racial and ethnic disparities in constituent engagement with the Council, OLO used ZIP code information from constituent engagement data to analyze how constituent engagement from predominantly White communities compared to engagement from predominantly BIPOC communities. Using Census ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs), OLO identified three ZCTAs with the highest proportion of White constituents and four with the highest proportion of BIPOC constituents among ZCTAs with a population over 30,000.

The top three predominantly White ZCTAs were:

- **20814**, which includes addresses in Bethesda, and North Bethesda, Chevy Chase, and in South Kensington;
- **20815**, which includes Chevy Chase, Bethesda, and Friendship Village; and
- **20817**, which includes the Bethesda suburbs and some addresses in Potomac.

The top four predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs were:

- **20877**, which includes Gaithersburg and surrounding areas;
- **20886**, which includes Montgomery Village and surrounding areas;
- **20904**, which includes areas around Silver Spring including White Oak, Colesville, and Fairland; and
- **20906**, which includes Aspen Hill, Layhill, and some addresses in Wheaton.

Collectively, the predominantly White ZCTAs accounted for 10 percent of the County population but 15 percent of uploaded testimony and correspondence to the Council. Conversely, while the predominantly BIPOC ZCTAs accounted for 20 percent of the County population, they accounted for 8 percent of constituent engagement with the Council through the same channels.

Based on this analysis, OLO finds that common channels of engagement in the Council foster stronger engagement among White constituents than among BIPOC constituents. Even when BIPOC are accounting for a larger portion of the population, engagement from BIPOC communities is buried by the overabundance of engagement from White communities through these channels. This pattern likely extends to similar channels of engagement in other departments.

OLO suspects the absence of equitable community engagement requirements for County departments likely contributes to the absence of community engagement data by race and ethnicity. Most departments studied for the project did not collect data on community engagement by race and ethnicity. Further, several staff interviewed by OLO shared they were hesitant to collect participant data by race and ethnicity during engagement activities because they feared it could have a chilling effect on participants sharing input and potentially undermine relationship-building.

Finding #5:   A review of research and literature reveals eight best practice themes for advancing equitable community engagement.

Based on a review of research and literature from organizations, researchers, and local jurisdictions, OLO identified the following eight best practice themes for equitable community engagement:

1. **Develop a shared understanding of RESJ.** Equitable community engagement requires government stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of RESJ and why it is important to integrate into all aspects of government work. Stakeholders develop this internal capacity through training on structural racism and governments' role in maintaining racial inequity.

2. **Make community engagement an organizational priority.** Governments must demonstrate that community engagement is an organizational priority by creating an environment in which it is valued and dedicating the time and resources needed to develop sustained, meaningful, and permanent collaboration with BIPOC communities.

3. **Center BIPOC and empower collaborators.** Equitable community engagement centers the needs and expertise of BIPOC community stakeholders and gives them ownership of the decision-making process. Governments can help BIPOC communities lead change by resourcing community organizations and training local leaders.

4. **Build relationships and trust.** To generate sustained and permanent involvement with BIPOC, governments must develop and maintain relationships and trust across various BIPOC stakeholder groups, both formal and informal.

5. **Make it easier for people to participate.** Equitable community engagement is accessible and inclusive. Equitable practices include meeting BIPOC in their communities; removing language, technology, and transportation barriers; compensating participants; creating a welcoming and safe environment; and using creative, two-way engagement methods.

6. **Co-create and enforce an equitable community engagement policy.** Government and BIPOC community stakeholders should co-create polices and protocols for equitable community engagement. Once adopted, stakeholders should hold themselves and each other accountable for implementing community engagement policies.

7. **Use tools to operationalize equitable community engagement.** Resources like community engagement toolkits and community needs assessments can help governments operationalize equitable community engagement in all aspects of their work.

8. **Use data to inform strategies and track results.** Governments can use data to both inform and evaluate their community engagement efforts. Data can help stakeholders target their engagement efforts based on the characteristics and needs of BIPOC communities. Data can also measure the extent to which engagement efforts are equitable and evaluate whether they are achieving desired outcomes.

Finding #6: **The RESJ Action Plan Regulations reflect several best practices for equitable community engagement.**

The RESJ Action Plan Regulations established a community engagement process for County departments. The regulations provide a definition for community engagement that aligns with several best practices for equitable community engagement, including:

- **Centering BIPOC and empowering collaborators** through defining community engagement as a two-way exchange of information, ideas, and resources that should offer opportunities for communities to have a meaningful role in decision-making, and that community diversity, including culture and ethnicity, should be considered in community engagement; and

- **Making it easier for people to participate** through defining that community engagement should remove barriers that may have previously prevented community members from successfully working with County government.

The regulations also establish a recommended process for departments to submit community engagement plans for evaluation and approval by ORESJ. The process aligns best practices for equitable community engagement such as:

- **Building relationships and trust** by requiring departments to identify intended stakeholders and partners for community engagement in community engagement plans and to follow-up with engagement participants after the conclusion of the engagement to acknowledge participants for their contributions and provide them with opportunities for on-going communication and collaboration; and

- **Using data to inform strategies and track results** by requiring departments to present research and background information on affected communities in community engagement plans, including language or dialect spoken, customs, historical or geographical data and other relevant data.

OLO finds that following the community engagement process in the RESJ Action Plan Regulations can help departments carry out equitable community engagement practices that advance RESJ.

Finding #7:   BIPOC community partners perceive the County primarily relies on one-way community engagement methods that do not target BIPOC communities.

When asked how they would rate the County's current engagement practices relative to the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, local BIPOC community partners overwhelmingly rated County departments at the lower end. Feedback included:

- Community partners felt departments generally employ ineffective one-way community engagement methods that either do not reach BIPOC communities most in need, or unintentionally exclude BIPOC entirely;

- While some community partners perceived engagement with Councilmembers to be on the collaborative end of the *Spectrum*, some felt Councilmember engagement with BIPOC is largely politically motivated; and

- Community partners generally agreed that equitable community engagement is inconsistent within County departments, suggesting departments lack an overall standard for implementation.

When asked how effective the County is at engaging BIPOC community members, community partners voiced the following challenges, needs, and issues:

- Many community partners held the opinion County departments are hesitant to try new community engagement methods that may better reach BIPOC constituents because they perceive these methods to be work and time intensive;

- Community partners felt the County needs to strengthen its oversight and accountability of RESJ efforts, specifically the capacity of the RESJ Advisory Committee, and co-create engagement metrics with BIPOC communities;

- Some community partners observe the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among County leaders reflects a lack of commitment in the County for RESJ; and

- Community partners observed the resource- and time-constrained nature of most County and community programs comes at the cost of equitable community engagement, which requires longer timeframes and dedicated staff resources.

Community partners also shared the following promising practices, strategies, and methods their organizations use to equitably engage BIPOC:

- Community partners explained two-way communication and active listening are required for effective and equitable community engagement;

- Community partners described building relationships within BIPOC communities and leveraging the networks of other BIPOC community organizations;

- Local community partners said their organizations prioritize hiring BIPOC leadership and staff from the communities they serve; and

- Community partners described the importance of using the feedback gathered from on-going, two-way communication with BIPOC community members to inform, monitor, and improve services.

Finding #8:   **County departments primarily carry out one-way community engagement practices. A few strategies that center BIPOC in community engagement are commonly used across County departments. However, there appear to be racial and ethnic disparities in common engagement practices.**

To understand community engagement practices in the County and how BIPOC are centered in community engagement, OLO studied 11 County departments that have a higher level of engagement with community members in general or BIPOC community members in particular. Figure 6.2 on page 114 summarizes community engagement practices in the County relative to the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* based on OLO's review of the 11 departments.

OLO finds most community engagement practices in County departments fall under Stage 1, Inform and Stage 2, Consult of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. Stages 1 and 2 of the *Spectrum* are more representative of one-way community engagement where at best, community members may have the opportunity to weigh-in on policies, programs, and practices but have limited opportunities to shape them (Finding 1). This observation is consistent with feedback from BIPOC community partners (Finding 7).

Community Engagement for Racial Equity and Social Justice

OLO finds language accessibility is a common strategy departments use to center BIPOC in one-way community engagement practices. Other common strategies to center BIPOC in one-way community engagement include using targeted communications channels to reach BIPOC community members and locating certain public events in proximity to BIPOC communities.

OLO finds there is a gap in targeted communications and outreach to BIPOC community members who speak languages other than Spanish, including English, Mandarin, Amharic, and other languages. Several staff noted there is a significant gap in targeted communications and outreach to Black community members in particular. Staff also noted White community members are often overrepresented among participants of public hearings, meetings, and forums.

OLO finds Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCC) are a common practice in departments for on-going engagement with community members. BCCs, which fall under Stage 3, Involve of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, serve as an avenue for two-way engagement by providing a forum for on-going and direct discussion between County stakeholders and community members. However, department feedback suggests White community members may be overrepresented among BCC members.

OLO finds with a few exceptions (Montgomery Planning and Community Action Agency), departments generally have limited channels for on-going two-way engagement with community members outside of BCCs, especially those that are more characteristic of later stages of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* where community members can be more influential in shaping policies, programs, and practices. Other two-way community engagement initiatives cited by staff were often ad-hoc and not sustained permanently.

Figure 6.2. Summary of Community Engagement Practices in the County

	Stage 1, Inform	Stage 2, Consult	Stage 3, Involve
Common Practices in County Departments	- Websites - Press releases - E-newsletters - Social media - Sharing presentations and materials at community events - MC311	- Regular public hearings and meetings (structured in a few County departments) - Public forums (occasional department practice)	Boards, Committees, and Commissions
Common Equitable Community Engagement Strategies	- Language accessibility - Use of targeted channels to reach BIPOC community members	- Language accessibility - Locating public events in proximity to BIPOC communities	Requiring diverse membership (required by law for a few BCCs)
OLO Observations	- Departments have varying capacity for communications and outreach - Departments have stronger staffing and resources for non-English communications and outreach in Spanish	- Departments have stronger staffing for translation and interpretation of events to Spanish - White community members are often overrepresented among participants of public hearings, meetings, and forums	- BCCs serve as channel for on-going and direct discussion between County stakeholders and community members - White community members may be overrepresented among BCC members

Finding #9: **County staff experience several challenges in carrying out equitable community engagement. Several challenges align with feedback from BIPOC community partners.**

OLO finds that County staff experience several challenges in carrying out equitable community engagement. For example:

- As described in Finding 3, staff generally noted that **common channels of community engagement are racially inequitable**. While common engagement channels tend to foster strong engagement among White community members, they are often not conducive to fostering engagement among BIPOC community members.

- Staff noted there is often **insufficient capacity** – in terms of time, resources, and/or staffing – to successfully carry out equitable community engagement in a sustained manner. This aligns with feedback from BIPOC community partners on how the resource- and time-constrained nature of most County and community programs prevents equitable community engagement (Finding 7). As equitable community engagement practices are not widespread among staff, staff who are carrying out this work must often put additional effort to engage BIPOC communities, which is likely not sustainable.

- Staff noted a **lack of structure for equitable community engagement**, including a lack of a clear policy, methodology, metrics, and data collection and reporting requirements has hindered equitable community engagement in the County. The lack of an overall standard and accountability aligns with feedback from BIPOC community partners on the inconsistent practice of equitable community engagement within County departments (Finding 7).

- Staff noted despite the RESJ Act, there is still significant **reluctance within departments to centering race and prioritizing racial equity** in County operations, including in community engagement. Staff observed departments are generally more comfortable with the status quo and have not fully bought in to centering race in addressing inequities and disparities among community members. This aligns with feedback from BIPOC community partners on the need for the County to strengthen oversight and accountability for RESJ efforts (Finding 7).

Finding #10: **Despite challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement, County staff are using several promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work to varying degrees.**

Despite challenges to carrying out equitable community engagement, OLO finds County staff are using several promising practices to center BIPOC in their community engagement work. Aside from language accessibility practices, equitable community engagement practices carried out by staff were typically not documented or structured into department practice. Instead, staff used equitable engagement practices to varying degrees and at their own discretion. Many of the promising practices align with best practices for equitable community engagement (Finding 5) and promising practices shared by BIPOC community partners (Finding 7). Promising practices noted by staff included:

- Many staff noted the importance of **staff skillset and characteristics** in carrying out equitable community engagement. Skills cited by staff included cultural and linguistic competency, adaptability, listening, patience, empathy and humility. Some staff in leadership positions noted the importance of hiring staff from within BIPOC communities who have firsthand understanding of systemic barriers to community engagement faced by community members and making efforts to have diverse representation on BCCs. OLO finds a **commitment to RESJ** was prevalent among interviewed staff who were making efforts to center BIPOC in community engagement.

- Many staff noted the importance of **long-term, intentional relationship building with BIPOC communities** for carrying out equitable community engagement. Many staff worked to build relationships with groups that have strong ties to BIPOC communities, including faith-based organizations, Greek-letter organizations, non-profit service providers, and County-affiliated groups such as the minority health initiatives. Some staff also worked to build individual relationships with BIPOC community members, including trusted leaders within BIPOC communities.

- Several staff noted the importance of **physical proximity to BIPOC** for carrying out equitable community engagement. Practices cited by staff included door-to-door canvassing at homes or small businesses in BIPOC communities, in-community pilot projects and placemaking events, participating in grassroots events and meetings organized by community groups, and holding engagement events, such as public hearings and forums, in BIPOC communities.

- **Language accessibility** was a practice for centering BIPOC in community engagement that was more structured in departments (Finding 8). Practices cited by staff included translating messages and written materials, simultaneous interpretation of public events held in English, or holding dual-language public events. Language accessibility practices also included writing materials and messages in plain language that avoided technical jargon and conveying information in various ways, including through infographics.

- Several staff noted the importance of **understanding BIPOC communities and tailoring community engagement to meet their needs** for carrying out equitable community engagement. Some staff worked to better understand the needs of BIPOC community members through their relationships with community groups and trusted leaders in BIPOC communities. Some staff also used demographic data from the Census and other sources to understand potential barriers to participation and determine the most effective ways to reach BIPOC community members.

- A few staff noted the importance of **follow through practices** for carrying out equitable community engagement. Follow through practices involved staff efforts to demonstrate how community member input was taken into consideration for policies, programs, and practices.

Other promising practices noted by staff included **programs that build community member capacity to advocate** through common community engagement channels, programs that **engage BIPOC youth and their families**, **compensating community members** for their participation and input, and **using surveys** to collect input that is racially and ethnically representative. Staff also noted several past and present community engagement efforts that were successful in centering BIPOC community members, including the Department of Environmental Protection's **Community Justice Academy**, **outreach and communications on COVID-19 testing and vaccines** to BIPOC communities during the height of the pandemic, and community engagement for the development of the **RESJ Act**.

B. Project Recommendations

While common community engagement practices in the County tend to foster strong engagement among White community members, they are often not conducive to fostering engagement among BIPOC community members. This is because community engagement in government today was born from a legacy of racial inequity that embedded engagement structures that were designed to include White people in government decision-making while excluding BIPOC.

OLO finds the status quo of community engagement for government decision-making in the County is racially inequitable. Racially inequitable community engagement practices exacerbate racial inequities and disparities in the County by perpetuating policies, programs, and practices that reflect the needs and priorities of White community members and ignore the needs and priorities of BIPOC community members. For the County to achieve its RESJ goals, community engagement practices across County departments must be transformed to center the needs, leadership, and power of BIPOC community members.

Based on these findings, OLO offers one main recommendation and six supporting recommendations for implementing the main recommendation. It is important to emphasize these recommendations are meant as a starting point from which more robust work must be done with the community to develop, implement, and evaluate equitable community engagement. If the County seeks to transform community engagement to follow the principles of equitable community engagement described in this report, the solutions must come from the people who know how to do it best: BIPOC leaders and community members.

Recommendation #1: The County Council and County Executive convene a collaborative effort with County and BIPOC community stakeholders to jointly develop, implement, and evaluate an equitable community engagement framework that builds on the County's existing community engagement process.

The County has developed an infrastructure for advancing RESJ in community engagement through the RESJ Action Plan Regulations. The RESJ Action Plan Regulations established a recommended process for departments to submit community engagement plans for evaluation and approval by the ORESJ. ORESJ will also provide training and technical assistance on equitable community engagement to County departments.

The RESJ Action Plan Regulations reflect several of the best practices for equitable community engagement presented in this report. As such, OLO recommends the County Council and County Executive convene a collaborative effort with County and BIPOC community stakeholders (the "Collaborative") to build on the existing community engagement process through jointly developing, implementing, and evaluating a framework to embed equitable community engagement across County departments. This work could leverage existing efforts such as the Department of Environmental Protection's Community Justice Academy, which is already organizing County staff and BIPOC community partners towards understanding the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* and integrating BIPOC community members as collaborators and co-creators with government.

The overarching objective of the Collaborative would be to develop a framework and standards for equitable community engagement to be adopted by all County departments. OLO suggests County representatives from ORESJ, the Public Information Office, the Office of Community Partnerships, department public information and community engagement staff, and RESJ Core team leaders are included in the Collaborative. OLO also suggests BIPOC community partners that contributed to this report are invited to participate in the Collaborative, including the 480 Club, CASA, the Collaboration Council, the Center for the Rights of Ethiopian Women, the RESJ Advisory Committee, and Rose Pedals Consulting.

In line with best practices for equitable community engagement, OLO recommends County and community collaborators be compensated for their participation in developing the framework. Additionally, OLO recommends the Collaborative be in control of determining the timeline for developing the framework.

OLO recommends the Collaborative consider the following six supporting recommendations in developing the equitable community engagement framework for the County. Departments seeking to embed equitable community engagement practices more readily could also consider individually implementing these recommendations as appropriate while a Countywide framework is established. These recommendations are primarily based on suggestions provided by BIPOC community partners, some of which are included in Appendix B. OLO recommends the Collaborative use this report and other resources to inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of the equitable community engagement framework for County departments.

Recommendation #2: Encourage the Collaborative to design and implement learning pathways and resources to guide County staff on equitable community engagement.

OLO recommends the Collaborative consider designing and implementing learning pathways and resources such as toolkits to guide Core Teams, department leadership, and department staff on understanding and implementing equitable community engagement. Learning pathway topics suggested by BIPOC community partners include:

- An asset-based approach to working with community members that shifts away from top-down decision-making approaches towards approaches that value the perspectives, cultures, and lived experiences of community members and focuses on relationship-building and collaboration to co-create solutions and new approaches;

- The historical roots of systemic racism and the harmful effects of White supremacy culture;

- The different forms of power, how power flows, and how power and decision-making can be shared with the community;

- The *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* and how County staff can move department polices, programs, and practices along the *Spectrum* and drive sustained systemic change; and

- Studying promising collaborative governance efforts that are currently taking place in the County.

Recommendation #3: Encourage the Collaborative to recommend County support for programs that build the capacity of BIPOC community members to organize and advocate for their needs and priorities.

OLO recommends the Collaborative identify and recommend the County to support grassroots programs that build the capacity of BIPOC community members to organize and advocate for their needs and priorities on a sustained basis. BIPOC community partners describe that more community members need to move through a grassroots power-building process to be able to participate in collaborative governance efforts with the County and more effectively push policies, programs, practices, and accountability structures that advance RESJ. For example, the Collaborative could propose that the Council support these programs by funding community-based efforts and/or by building on County initiatives such as the Community Justice Academy and Latino Civic Project.

Recommendation #4: Encourage the Collaborative to propose strategies to strengthen channels for one-way community engagement between the County and BIPOC community members.

As described in Finding #8, OLO finds departments have stronger staffing and resources for targeted communications and outreach to community members who speak Spanish than to BIPOC community members who speak English, Mandarin, Amharic, and other languages. In particular, County staff noted a significant gap in targeted communications and outreach to Black community members.

OLO recommends the Collaborative explore ways to strengthen channels of one-way engagement between County departments and BIPOC community members. Ideas proposed by BIPOC community partners include digital platforms that can make information, resources, and engagement opportunities more accessible to community members and creative communications channels such as podcasts, virtual town halls, and interactive social media campaigns.

The Collaborative could also consider replicating or adapting the strategies County departments used during the pandemic to strengthen and centralize in-house resources for timely communications and outreach in Spanish and which has been maintained since. As described in Chapter 2, MC311 call data show a sustained increase in Spanish-language calls since the start of the pandemic, suggesting the investment in reaching Spanish-speaking community members has been effective. Comparable investments in reaching BIPOC community members who speak languages other than Spanish may yield similar outcomes.

Recommendation #5: Encourage the Collaborative to develop new channels for two-way community engagement between the County and BIPOC community members.

As described in Findings #3 and #8, there are racial inequities in Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCCs) – the County's primary avenue for sustained two-way community engagement with community members. Further, feedback from County staff suggests White community members may be overrepresented in BCCs.

OLO recommends the Collaborative consider developing alternative channels to BCCs for sustained two-way community engagement between County departments and BIPOC community members, with a focus on building efforts that are more characteristic of later stages of the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*. Ideas proposed by BIPOC community partners include:

- Community-led advisory panels composed of BIPOC community members who can provide direct input and feedback on County initiatives; and

- Community-led hubs and project incubators that bring together County departments and BIPOC community members to co-create and implement initiatives that directly address identified gaps.

OLO recommends two-way engagement efforts be led by skilled facilitators who are grounded in the *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* and who can hold spaces that effectively bridge the unequal power dynamics and complex history between County stakeholders and BIPOC community members. OLO also recommends these efforts remove all barriers to participation for BIPOC community members, including through providing compensation and accommodations such as childcare and interpretation and through scheduling meetings at times and locations that are convenient to BIPOC community members.

Recommendation #6: Encourage the Collaborative to develop a structure for holding County staff accountable to equitable community engagement.

OLO recommends the Collaborative consider establishing standards, metrics and data collection protocols for departments to understand community engagement participation by race and ethnicity and measure progress towards implementing equitable community engagement. Data points that can potentially be tracked for each engagement activity include host department(s), topic, activity location, activity type, *Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership* level, and demographics of participating community members. OLO also recommends the Collaborative establish standards for departments to publicly report data and progress on equitable community engagement.

Recommendation #7: Encourage the Collaborative to determine resource needs for departments to successfully carry out equitable community engagement.

OLO recommends the Collaborative determine the resources that will be necessary for departments to successfully carry out equitable community engagement. Resource needs that could be considered include:

- Funding to increase staffing of skilled community organizers and facilitators who can lead equitable community engagement efforts from within departments;

- Funding for BIPOC community-based groups that can support the County's equitable community engagement efforts;

- Funding to help remove barriers to participation for BIPOC community members, such as to compensate community members for participation in engagement activities; and

- Mobilizing resources such as CountyStat to provide departments with support to more effectively target engagement activities and collect and report data on equitable community engagement.

Based on its determination of needs, OLO recommends the Collaborative propose a budget to the Executive that can in turn be recommended for the Council to fund.

Chapter 7. Agency Comments

OLO shared final drafts of this report with staff from Montgomery County Government and local community organizations. OLO appreciates the time taken by staff to review the draft report and provide technical feedback. This final report incorporates technical corrections and feedback from government and community stakeholders.

The written comments received from Montgomery Planning are attached in their entirety beginning on the following page.

Written comments from the Chief Administrative Office are forthcoming.

Montgomery Planning
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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March 6, 2024

Chitra Kalyandurg
Legislative Analyst
Office of Legislative Oversight

Janmarie Peña
Performance Management and Data Analyst
Office of Legislative Oversight

Dear Ms. Kalyandurg and Ms. Peña,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this report. Montgomery Planning staff appreciates the methodical and thoughtful approach to this important work, and we value the extensive coordination between the Office of Legislative Oversight and our department.

Montgomery Planning recognizes and acknowledges the historical role that our plans and policies have played in creating and perpetuating racial inequity in Montgomery County. We are committed to transforming how we work to address, mitigate, and eliminate past and persistent inequities and to developing planning solutions that create equitable communities for the future. With this in mind, we have developed several policies and tools to guide our work.

Montgomery Planning's Equity Agenda for Planning institutionalizes the department's application of equity in all its work. This initiative provides direction, tools, and strategies to support Montgomery Planning staff in incorporating racial equity and social justice considerations in its planning processes and in operating as a department.

Montgomery Planning developed its Equity in Master Planning Framework in 2020, and the Planning Board approved it that year. This action plan establishes a framework for viewing master plans through an equity lens that will continue to be improved and refined.

The newly created Equitable Engagement Guide leans on best practices from the American Planning Association, Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), and the National Park Service to provide guidance on audience-centric communications, engagement, and outreach during the master planning process.

The following are principles that guide Montgomery Planning's engagement approach to equity:

- **Equity in planning cannot exist unless there is equity in our communications and engagement with community members.** Montgomery Planning is committed to better

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understanding our diverse audiences so that we may meet them where they are and create messages, information, and outreach and engagement strategies that include all residents in the planning process, especially those who have been historically excluded or experienced barriers to participation.

- **Trust is central to equitable communications and planning.** Community members are not likely to participate in planning processes if they do not believe that their participation can influence the decisions, plans, and policies. Therefore, we must honor people's time and capacity for participation, taking an audience-centric approach to honest and transparent outreach and engagement. This includes building awareness of and trust in Montgomery Planning with ongoing communications to clarify Montgomery Planning's role and value to all stakeholders and to increase equitable community stakeholder engagement with the planning process.
- **Meeting the needs of diverse populations requires us to embrace a learning culture and remain adaptable and flexible.** While there is urgency behind our efforts to create more equitable outreach and engagement, we celebrate learning while doing, constantly building and evolving as we learn more about and from community members. We must develop short- and long-term strategies, making meaningful progress each day.
- **A focus on outcomes is essential to effective, equitable communications.** Equitable outreach and engagement require thoughtful planning and cooperation among planners and communications staff. This starts with identifying and understanding distinct audiences, then clearly defining desired outcomes so that we may develop appropriate and targeted strategies to design and activate equitable, audience-focused outreach and engagement. An outcomes-focus is also needed to measure our efforts and progress to develop best practices further and identify opportunities for improvement.
- **A strong network of partners is crucial to success.** To achieve equity, Montgomery Planning must work with a network of partners: institutions, other government agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, education, nonprofits, and others to reach and engage diverse audiences so that they may inform and strengthen our work.

Montgomery Planning appreciates the opportunity to have participated in this evaluation, and we value the continued collaboration and teamwork with OLO and all county agencies. We look forward to further discussions on advancing equitable engagement to welcome as many people as possible into the planning process.

Sincerely,

Jason K. Sartori

Jason K. Sartori
Montgomery Planning Director

Appendix A: Description of Community Engagement Practices in Montgomery Parks

The Montgomery County Parks Department (Montgomery Parks) provided OLO with a description of their community engagement practices. OLO has included this description below:

Montgomery Parks is part of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and owns, manages and operates 420 parks over 37,000 acres. The Montgomery County Planning Board exercises oversight authority over the Parks Department, approving its capital and operating budgets, the acquisition and disposition of new parkland, and Parks-related master and functional plans, including the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS), which is the Parks Department's primary planning policy document.

The 2022 PROS Plan sets out three primary purposes of parks: promoting physical activity, fostering social connections and civic engagement, and protecting the natural environment. In implementing these goals, the PROS Plan states that parks and recreation opportunities should be widely accessible and equitably distributed. To achieve this, the Parks Department uses data driven tools including Equity Focus Areas, the Community Equity Index, and the Energized Public Spaces Plan methodology to ensure that capital and operating budget resources are used in a way that promotes equity goals. The Parks Department's outreach strategy is aligned with equity goals, which means ensuring that its engagement process doesn't solicit or favor the views of a narrow segment of residents, and that it gives equal consideration to people who lack the time or ability to actively participate in traditional public outreach.

The Parks Department uses a variety of community engagement and outreach methods to help set priorities, along with other tools and sources of information, including data collection, market research, staff expertise, pilot projects, and customer service feedback. The specific public outreach and engagement methodology used depends on the scope and type of project and can include a variety of tools such as public meetings, random and intercept surveys, focus groups, engaging with community organizations, county agencies and key stakeholders, tabling at events, door-to-door canvassing, and web-based outreach (for example, Open Town Hall). Often, content is translated into multiple languages and interpreters are available at meetings and events.

While public meetings can be a useful tool, a fundamental weakness of both in-person and virtual meetings is the tendency for this type of engagement to amplify the voices of people with the strongest – but not necessarily the most representative – opinions. Public meetings can also leave out people who might have an interest in a topic but have other conflicting work or family obligations or face other barriers to participation.

To mitigate this, the Parks Department has been relying more heavily on other engagement tools, including soliciting input at Parks and community events and engagement through social media, pilot projects, and surveys. Door-to-door canvassing can be very effective in engaging residents living in multi-family buildings who might otherwise not attend community meetings or be aware of an upcoming project but is highly resource-intensive and should be targeted where it's most needed. In addition, the quality of the feedback can vary depending on the skill and training of the canvassers as well as how the questions are framed. Reliance on canvassing is also, like some other forms of outreach, subject to bias and can be less than representative of broader views. Even so, canvassing should be considered a useful tool when combined with other methods, like surveys and pilot projects.

Parks generally prioritizes the investment in door-to-door canvasing when neighbors live in multi-family housing, speak a variety of languages, and previous less-resource-intensive attempts at outreach resulted in low engagement. There are several recent examples. One is Johnson's Local Park in a historically African American community that was affected by urban renewal and is now largely Spanish speaking for a park renovation project that aims to tell the rich history of the park and strengthen a contemporary sense of place. Another was the Long Branch Parks Initiative, a ten-park planning effort in a significant equity area in the County. When door-knocking was combined with in-park event surveys and an online Open Townhall survey, the overall respondent demographics reflected neighborhood demographics. A third example was Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville Local Park where initial outreach resulted in largely white and older community meeting attendance and survey responses and targeted door-knocking was needed to hear from more diverse apartment building residences. Due to limited resources, it is important to target projects where community input has been demonstrably limited in the absence of such techniques. Parks anticipates employing door-to-door canvasing once or twice a year based on the complexity and specific needs of a project.

Surveys – both random and intercept - are a particularly cost-effective and efficient way of reaching a broader audience. Well-designed random surveys can closely reflect the demographics of the community and prevent the introduction of bias that can influence the quality of the feedback. For example, for the PROS Plan, parks relied on a series of surveys to evaluate public opinion about a variety of parks-related questions and issues. The main randomized mail-in survey received 831 responses from a sample of residents that closely mirrored the county's demographics a (the overall results for 831 households have a precision of at least +/-3.4% at the 95% level of confidence). In addition, there were 825 intercept surveys, 164 online surveys, and a survey of 200 MCPS high school students. Together, these survey results provided valuable, representative information that formed the basis of the Plan's findings and recommendations.

In some cases, in-park pilot projects are effective at reaching historically under-represented residents. For example, in the Quebec Terrace neighborhood, considered "highly disadvantaged" in the County's Community Equity Index, temporary soccer goals were placed on a section of unused pavement in a small park to gauge community feedback. Would the soccer goals be used? Would their use bother neighbors whose apartment doors open onto the area? An in-park meeting, with free ice cream provided, a survey in English and Spanish revealed the goals were overwhelmingly popular and caused few problems. Demonstrating the proposal allowed residents to respond to real-world conditions instead of speculating on a hypothetical.

Overall, the Parks Department's equitable outreach strategy depends on combining multiple approaches to craft engagement plans that provide opportunities for more residents of every background and demographic to participate in a process that provides useful, actionable input to Parks staff as they plan, design, and implement parks projects and programs to serve the community's needs.

Appendix B: Community Partner Recommendations for Implementing Equitable Community Engagement in the County

Following the focus groups, OLO posed this question to participating community partners: If you had a magic wand, what would you want to see happen for County departments to address community engagement gaps with BIPOC community members?

Six community partners gave OLO permission to share the full text of their responses anonymously. Their responses follow.

Community Partner A

Equitable share of funds not to one demographic to disburse, leader representatives of color in the county departments, a community led hub created.

Community Partner B

What I want to see happen is that BIPOC women's experiences, needs, challenges, perceptions etc. of have to be an integral part of policy, program, legislation and community engagement interventions, which requires strong commitment and perhaps affirmative action. In return the household, communities and the nation can benefit from the potential of empowered women.

Community Partner C

At a minimum, everyone appointed to advance Racial Equity and Social Justice on behalf of their department need workshops on driving systemic inclusion. I think the Racial Equity Institute Trainings were excellent for providing historical context. But the RESJ department leads need not only historical context, but they also need to understand what interventions would be most effective to drive sustained systemic change.

Community Partner D

Recognizing that the further an individual's/group's identity is from a Eurocentric/ableist/male/youthful model, the higher disparities they face in every area of their existence. Also, recognizing that systems start with this model in mind, and identifying ways to dismantle a supremacist system. This work is not about integrating "them" into "our" space, but recognizing the value in everyone's perspective, culture, and being - everyone is valuable, as is. We need to adjust, not them.

Community Partner E

For equitable community engagement to fully take root in Montgomery County, we need to be working simultaneously for change at both the grass tops and the grassroots, and then work to bring the two groups together into intentional cocreation and collaborative governance opportunities. My recommendations fall into the following 3 general categories:

1. **Support for Organizational and Systems Transformation Efforts**. It is essential that organizations and systems be transformed from soul-less, lifeless bureaucracies into human-centered places of creativity and innovation that are equipped to engage community voices, ideas, and life experiences in planning and decision-making. Because Montgomery County is so systems-heavy, it is especially important to focus on the grass tops so that people in positions of power with access to resources are able to shape programs and policies in authentic partnership with communities towards needed change. The burden cannot only be placed on grassroots communities to activate their power and voice. We need people in systems to also be going through their own change and transformation process to learn how to share power and decision-making with impacted community members.

For this culture shift to happen, we need to invest in thoughtfully designed learning and education spaces that will support government leaders and staff through an awareness building and change process. Some of the topics/areas these learning spaces might encompass include:

- The need to shift away from status quo systems efforts aimed at "fixing" people and top-down approaches, and towards an asset-framing approach when working in and with communities. Rather than fixating on people's needs and deficiencies and making top-down decisions without community perspective and input, government should focus instead on building relationships with community members, drawing out people's gifts, strengths and aspirations, and collaborating with residents in co-creating solutions, and reimagining new approaches together.

- The roots of systemic racism and the damaging effects of white supremacy culture that foster and perpetuate cultures of disconnect and dehumanization.

- Power Literacy and Analysis – to understand different forms of power and how it flows – a necessary foundation for learning how to share power and decision-making with the community.

- The behavioral and operational shifts and practices that are necessary for equitable community engagement to take root - utilizing the [Engagement to Ownership Spectrum](#) as the guiding framework.

- Sharing of experiences, insights and learnings from promising collaborative governance efforts that are currently taking place in the County – including Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)'s Climate Justice Academy (CJA), and Collaboration Council's new strategic framework and transformation journey towards becoming community-centered and driven.

A starting point might be to map out what educational opportunities currently exist in all these areas, and then generate creative ideas for how best to connect and build upon these existing efforts, as well as fill gaps with new opportunities.

In addition to education and training, government agencies should invest in hiring highly skilled community organizers or community engagement specialists on their staff with the power and agency to effectuate transformational change internally.

2. **Invest in and Support Grassroots Power Building.** Some important efforts over the last several years have helped to seed a movement of people organizing and advocating for more equitable policies and systems (i.e., the establishment of the MORE Network that helped lead to the passage of racial equity legislation). However, much more needs to be done to further strengthen the grassroots base of low-income BIPOC people who are leveraging their voice and power to organize and advocate on a sustained basis. We need to vastly increase the number of grassroots residents who are moving through a power-building process so they can both participate in collaborative governance efforts in partnership with County government, and organize and advocate more forcefully for equitable laws, policies, and practices – including holding government agencies accountable to developing meaningful racial equity goals and plans and evaluating/measuring their outcomes. It would be worthwhile to map out what promising efforts already exist that are focused on grassroots power-building (i.e., popular education workshops being developed out of the CJA; Everyday Canvassing; MORE Network), build upon what exists, and generate creative ideas for capacity gaps that need to be filled.

Other ways to support grassroots power building is to direct more funding to community-led efforts and projects.

3. **Seed and Support Collaborative Governance Opportunities.** Skilled weavers and connectors (in the form of either organizations or individuals) have an important role to play in identifying opportunities to connect the grassroots to the grass tops and steering both groups towards participation in cocreation and collaborative governance efforts across potentially multiple issue areas and agencies. In addition, we should focus and invest in training and growing a pool of local, skilled facilitators grounded in the E2O spectrum. Strong facilitation skills are needed to effectively hold and support spaces where groups are brought together across such vast power divides, with long histories of community mistrust of government.

When involving community members in collaborative governance processes, government must also work to remove all barriers to participation, including:

- Financially compensating community members for their time, perspectives, and knowledge
- Providing interpreters, childcare, transportation and food at all convenings and meetings.
- Scheduling meetings at times that are convenient for community members, particularly evenings and weekends.

Community Partner F

If I had a magic wand to address community engagement gaps between County departments and Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian community members, I would envision a transformative approach that seamlessly integrates innovation, inclusivity, and strategic thinking. Here are a few visionary recommendations and instead of using the collective term "BIPOC," I will employ the specific names of each community—Black, Indigenous, Latina/o/e, Asian, etc. This not only respects the distinct identities of these communities but also ensures clarity and precision in our communication. Then I will focus on the following:

Digital Inclusivity Platforms:

Develop a cutting-edge digital platform specifically designed to bridge communication gaps between County departments and the Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian community. This platform would incorporate multilingual capabilities, accessibility features, and user-friendly interfaces, ensuring that information, resources, and engagement opportunities are easily accessible to everyone.

Culturally Competent Training Programs:

Implement comprehensive, ongoing training programs for County employees to enhance cultural competence and understanding. These programs would go beyond traditional diversity training, delving into the historical context and lived experiences of Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian communities. The goal is to empower County staff with the knowledge and skills needed to engage authentically and respectfully with diverse communities.

Community-Led Advisory Panels:

Establish community-led advisory panels composed of BIPOC representatives who can provide direct input and feedback on County initiatives. These panels would act as a bridge, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of the community are integrated into decision-making processes. This collaborative approach fosters trust and co-creates solutions that genuinely address the needs of Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian individuals.

Innovative Communication Channels:

Explore innovative communication channels such as podcasts, virtual town halls, and interactive social media campaigns to disseminate information in a way that resonates with diverse audiences. Leveraging technology and modern communication methods can break down barriers and create more engaging platforms for dialogue between County departments and the Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian community.

Equitable Resource Allocation:

Implement data-driven strategies to identify and address resource disparities within Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian communities. By utilizing technology and analytics, County departments can pinpoint areas with the greatest needs and allocate resources in an equitable manner. This ensures that initiatives are targeted and impactful, addressing the root causes of engagement gaps.

Collaborative Project Incubators:

Establish collaborative project incubators that bring together County departments, Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian community leaders, and local organizations. These incubators would serve as dynamic spaces for co-creating and implementing initiatives that directly address the identified gaps. This collaborative model fosters a sense of shared ownership and commitment to positive change.

In essence, my magic wand envisions a future where County departments proactively embrace innovation, cultural understanding, and collaboration to create an inclusive and engaged community. By weaving these elements into the fabric of operations, we can build a foundation for sustainable change that empowers and uplifts Black/Latino/a/e, Indigenous and Asian community members.