CITY OF ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

EQUITY AND INCLUSION ASSESSMENT: ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE SURVEY DATA

Government Alliance on Race & Equity

7/19/18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February - April 2018, employees of the City of Asheville participated in an Equity Assessment Survey as part of the City's equity work in partnership with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). The survey instrument was developed by GARE and has been tested and implemented with other jurisdictions that are a part of the GARE Membership Network. Specifically, the survey provides information about employee:

- Understanding of racial equity;
- Knowledge of the jurisdiction's policies and practices to advance racial equity;
- Awareness of the jurisdiction's and their departments' plans to advance racial equity; and
- Knowledge and perceptions of the jurisdiction's efforts to engage the broad community, including its communities of color, and community partnerships to advance racial equity.

Overall, the Assessment's findings indicate that city of Asheville employees have a solid understanding of the importance of addressing the impact of race, and the underpinning racial equity concepts. Those that have participated in racial equity work—tools, action plans, or working groups—have demonstrably seen its efficacy, and there is a solid opportunity to improve staff confidence in these tools. With over half of all staff actively working towards advancing racial equity, there is momentum for carrying the work further, identifying new mechanisms to engage additional staff, and empowering those currently involved to deepen their skills.

The findings indicate that efforts should be made to close communications gaps between leadership and managers/non-managers and assess how different racial groups may interpret communication about racial equity from leadership and management. There was general agreement on steps that departments could take to demonstrate greater institutional commitment to racial equity and support employee engagement. The Assessment also highlights room for growth for departments working to improve services for communities of color and increase community input into decision-making.

Finally, the results suggest that active leadership and more robust communication across all levels will facilitate stronger partnerships, staff engagement, and improved outcomes for all. The data yielded from this survey are useful for shaping a long-term organizational equity strategy and informing the work of the Racial Equity Core Team in advancing the City's initiatives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, the City of Asheville completed a staff-wide Equity Assessment in order to assess staff knowledge, skills, and experiences related to race and equity. This Assessment is the first phase in a longer-term capacity-building initiative to support the implementation of City Council's Vision 2036 and ensure that Asheville's employees and departments can advance a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse city government.

The survey gathered feedback from employees on their levels of understanding of racial equity, their knowledge of the City's policies and practices to advance racial equity, their awareness of departmental plans, and their awareness of the City's efforts to engage the broader community. The results of the assessment provide a baseline measurement to assist the City Council, the Equity and Inclusion Manager, and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) develop strategic trainings, learning opportunities, and action plans to move the City's racial equity efforts forward.

BACKGROUND

GARE is a national network of local governments working to advance racial equity and increase opportunities for all. Across the country, nearly 100 jurisdictions are participating in the peer-network to exchange information, collaborate to advance their practice, and develop solutions to racial equity challenges in their institutions and communities. GARE offers pathways for new jurisdictions to begin doing racial equity work, including contractual technical assistance and year-long learning cohorts, and facilitates local and regional collaborations that are broadly inclusive and focused on achieving racial equity. GARE is a joint project of the new Race Forward[1] and the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at UC Berkeley (HIFIS). GARE has effective approaches for building the capacity of City government staff and institutions to eliminate structural racism and advance racial equity. GARE offers trainings and organizational development through introductory workshops, extended learning curriculums, and partners with jurisdictions to help advance specific Racial Equity Action Plans and Initiatives.

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[1] *The new Race Forward (merged July 2017) advances racial justice through policy development, sector transformation, research, movement and capacity building, and narrative strategy. Founded in 1981, the historic Race Forward brings systemic analysis and an innovative approach to complex race issues to help people take effective action toward racial equity. Founded in 2002, the historic CSI works with community, government, and other institutions to craft and apply strategies and tools to achieve racial equity. As one organization, we are dedicated to transforming institutions and empowering community in order to move policy, culture, and narrative for racial equity.*

CITY OF ASHEVILLE EQUITY ASSESSMENT

This Assessment has provided a baseline understanding of staff capacity, readiness, and willingness to advance racial equity. The assessment is a critical step in enhancing the City's ability to proactively advance equity as part of the City Council's Vision 2036. As a Core Member of GARE, the findings from Asheville will also be used to gauge the capacity and progress of members across the country and contribute to an overall analysis of local government's work to advance racial equity and inclusion.

The survey developed by GARE addressed a variety of factors regarding equity, including but not limited to: employee understanding of equity, race and racism, motivation to be engaged in equity work, employee perceptions of institutional/leadership commitment to equity work, awareness of official activities undertaken by employees in support of equity, perceptions of utility and self-efficacy in doing equity work, community accountability, and more.

> *This survey should be understood within the context of the broader methodology of organizational learning:*
>
> *1) Normalizing a shared understanding of racial equity, 2) Organizing to enhance internal skills and commitment and to better partner across communities and institutions, and 3) Operationalizing racial equity within policies, programs and practices in Asheville.*

This report presents key data points as well as a full summary of results in the appendix and data per each department. The information provided to Asheville leadership, the Equity and Inclusion Manager, and the Racial Equity Core Team will set the basis for implementation of Asheville's Racial Equity Action Plan, and guide a series of trainings and technical assistance opportunities over the course of the next year.

RACIAL EQUITY APPROACH

WHY RACE?

Across many sectors, large disparities in opportunities and outcomes exist—from the workplace, education, and health, to criminal justice and housing. There are many ways in which groups of people can be marginalized, including based on gender, sexual

orientation, age, disability and others. Consistently across the country and in Asheville, race predicts how well one does in life, from birth outcomes to life expectancy. And despite the significant impact of these disparities on communities of color, race continues to be an issue that provokes racial anxiety, and many find difficult to discuss in productive ways. For us to meaningfully address racial inequities, it is vital that we are able to talk about race; we need to both normalize conversations about race and operationalize racial equity through the use of data and a racial equity tool on policy, practice, and procedure.

While GARE centers race in its approach, we recognize that there are multiple and intersecting inequities built into institutions that marginalize people based on their gender, sexual orientation, and other identities. Using a framework such as normalize, operationalize, and organize to address individual, institutional, and structural racism can also provide us with an approach that works to address other forms of oppression and marginalization such as sexism, heterosexism, classism and ageism. While there are some similarities between institutional and structural racism, sexism, and heterosexism, the strategies used to address barriers and achieve equity differs. Addressing areas of marginalization on a structural basis requires sets of targeted and intentionally specific strategies for the respective area of marginalization.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity is important and has been a central focus for many institution's work around race since the Civil Rights movement. Diversity plays the critical role of ensuring that people of color are well represented in and across the breadth and depth of the workforce. Diversity is one potential mechanism for thinking about workforce equity but does not adequately measure whether or not outcomes for people of color in the community are improving. In fact, diverse communities where people of color are well represented throughout the workforce can continue to have racial disparities across outcomes such as promotional opportunities, unemployment, and income. Diversity focuses on representation and can help determine whether the workforce mirrors the community, but it is not a substitute for achieving measurable outcomes of equity.

Inclusion focuses on ensuring that people are part of the decision-making process, have access to information and opportunities, and feel accepted or a sense of belonging in their work environment. Inclusion focuses on ensuring that people's voices are heard and that they have access to resources and positional power.

This survey and resulting pilot projects focus specifically on institutional and structural racism and transforming institutions, and thus we put racial equity front and center in the assessment, analysis, and recommended next steps. While staff are often familiar with other entry points for addressing equity, such as diversity and inclusion, GARE defines the term "racial equity" as a state whereby gaps no longer exist between life outcomes for white people and people of color, where race no longer predicts one's success, and outcomes for all racial groups improve. When we use a racial equity analysis, we ask a different set of questions about root causes and use a broader range of strategies than if we were to focus on diversity or inclusion alone.

Equity goes beyond diversity and inclusion. Ensuring the workforce is representative of the community and includes People of Color does not automatically yield improved outcomes for staff or community in Asheville. All three are important, but equity focuses on improving outcomes.

This report presents key data points as well as a full summary of results in the appendix and data per each department. The information provided to Asheville leadership, the Equity and Inclusion Manager, and the Racial Equity Core Team will set the basis of a series of trainings and technical assistance opportunities over the course of the next year as well as guide the implementation of the recently adopted Racial Equity Action Plan.

II. METHODOLOGY

All Asheville staff members, including both full and part-time employees, were invited to participate in this survey. 661 City of Asheville employees completed the survey. Individual responses to the survey were anonymous and the identities of participants are protected. The survey was administered online and made available in hard copy form. While the survey was open, number of completions were monitored, and special outreach was conducted to departments that had low levels of participation. Designated City of Asheville employees entered the hard copy survey data into the online tool for further analysis by GARE staff. Raw data was analyzed exclusively by designated GARE staff. Open-ended responses will be shared only at an aggregate level and will not be shared at the departmental level to protect the identity of staff.

DISAGGREGATED DATA

Where noted, this report parses out differences in responses based on race, gender, supervisor level, and other variables. Points of low or high agreement between White respondents and People of Color are noted where applicable, with disaggregation when there was significant variation across racial groups. For the purposes of disaggregation, respondents identifying as "Middle Eastern" have been categorized as People of Color in all subsequent analysis. In certain cases, due to small % of respondents in racial categories, groups have been categorized as "Other" (these include Middle Eastern, Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Native American). With low response rates from larger departments, questions may seem skewed in one direction across the city, but certain results should not be weighed too heavily without reviewing data disaggregated by department and racial group.

III. SURVEY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics of survey participants were collected, including department, demographics, and employment characteristics, i.e., years of employment with the city of Asheville and supervisory status. This information was analyzed to determine if there were areas of under-representation and to assess differences in perceptions and experiences between groups.

DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATION

As of December 2017, City of Asheville employed 1,216 (full and part-time, not seasonal or temporary) staff. 54% of all staff completed this assessment, with a total of 661 respondents for an overall participation rate of 54.4%. The departments with the highest rates of participation were the City Manager's Office (100%), Planning & Urban Design (100%), Information Technology (80%), and Development Services (77%).

Larger departments (Police, Fire, Water Services and Public Works) had lower rates of participation. Given that over two-thirds of the city's workforce is in one of these four larger departments, additional assessment may be useful.

At the same time, however, lower response rates from larger departments is a pattern we have noted with other jurisdictions, reflecting the reality that communication flow to frontline staff may not be as easy and many employees in these departments are not in

office environments. The City Attorney's Office, although a small department, had the lowest overall participation, with just a single employee participating.

> *Follow-up meetings with management and focus groups with employees in these four departments could lead to a better qualitative understanding of the low response rate and racial equity considerations unique to each department.*

DEPARTMENT **	# OF STAFF	# SURVEY RESPONDENTS	% DEPARTMENT PARTICIPATION**
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE (INCLUDES CITY CLERK, COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND OFFICE OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION)	17	17	100%
PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN	12	12	100%
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	24	21	88%
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	52	40	77%
HUMAN RESOURCES	21	16	76%
GENERAL SERVICES	38	28	74%
PARKS AND RECREATION	89	65	73%
FINANCE	32	22	69%
COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	36	22	61%
CITY COUNCIL	7	4	57%
TRANSPORTATION	42	21	50%
CAPITAL PROJECTS	14	6	43%
WATER SERVICES	147	54	37%
PUBLIC WORKS	122	41	34%
POLICE	293	88	30%
FIRE	271	67	25%
CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE	6	1	17%

**136 survey respondents declined to identify their department. This may reflect a respondent's wish to further protect their anonymity and identity, particularly in smaller departments.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY DEPARTMENT

% of Department Participation in Survey

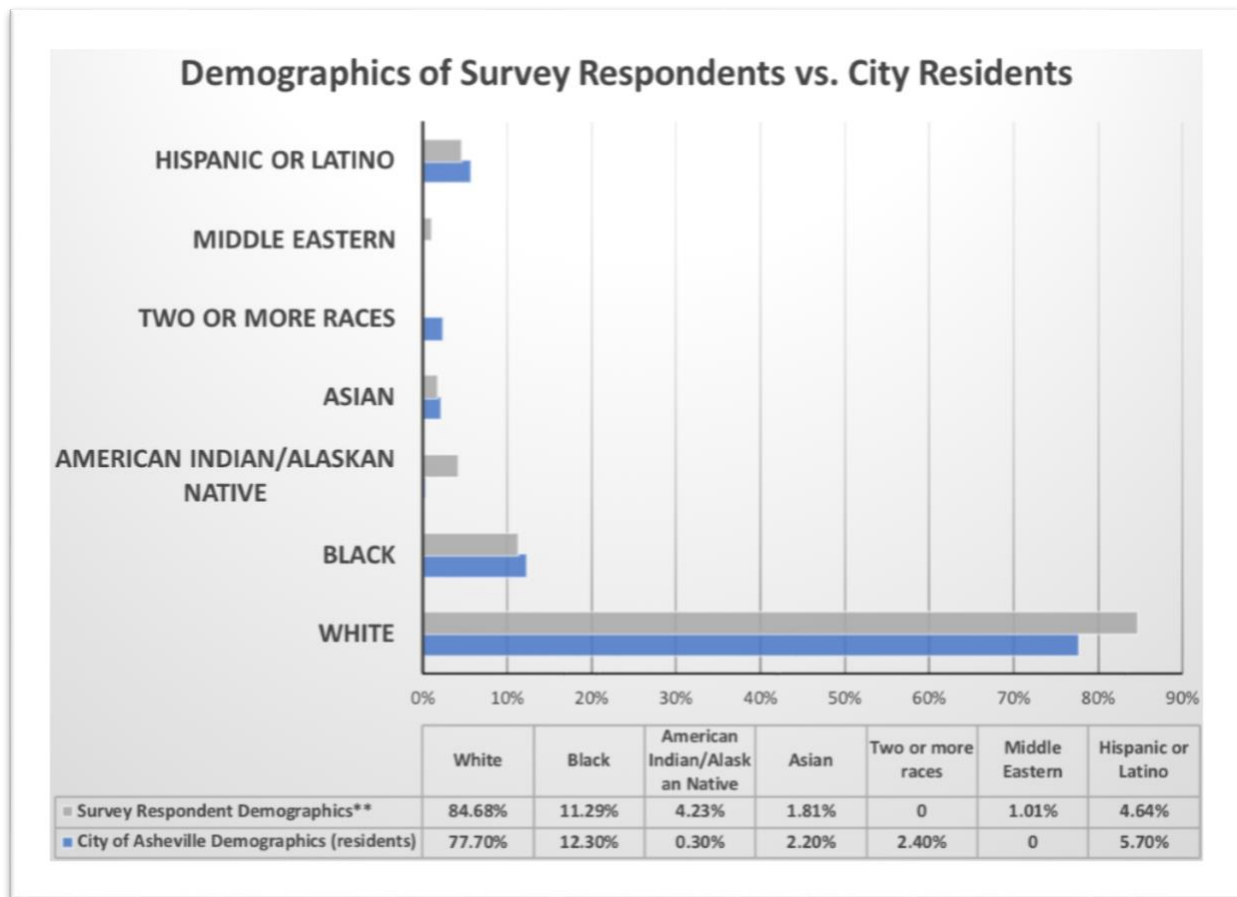| Department	% Department participation
CAPITAL PROJECTS	43%
CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE	17%
CITY COUNCIL	57%
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE	100%
COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	61%
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	77%
FINANCE	69%
FIRE	25%
GENERAL SERVICES	74%
HUMAN RESOURCES	76%
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	88%
PARKS & RECREATION	73%
PLANNING & URBAN DESIGN	100%
POLICE	30%
PUBLIC WORKS	34%
TRANSPORTATION	50%
WATER SERVICES	37%

RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS: SURVEY RESPONDENTS

COMPARED TO CITY RESIDENTS

As of December 2017, Asheville employees were 89% White (1,083) and 11% People of Color (133). Amongst the People of Color, the largest number of survey respondents were African-American (56), Latina/o (23) and Native American (21). Because of the very small number of employees in some categories (9 Asian employees, 5 Pacific Islander, and 5 Middle Eastern), these categories have been combined into an "other" category for the remainder of the analysis to preserve confidentiality,

City staff responding to the survey consist of a slightly higher percentage of White employees compared to the overall demographics of City residents (*see below*). Participants were also given the opportunity to share any other race or ethnicity that

they identified with, and these included Multi-racial, Irish American, Caribbean, Norwegian, and Jewish.[2]

Demographics of Survey Respondents vs. City Residents

	White	Black	American Indian/Alask an Native	Asian	Two or more races	Middle Eastern	Hispanic or Latino
Survey Respondent Demographics**	84.68%	11.29%	4.23%	1.81%	0	1.01%	4.64%
City of Asheville Demographics (residents)	77.70%	12.30%	0.30%	2.20%	2.40%	0	5.70%

According to US Census July 1, 2017 Population Estimates
**165 survey respondents out of 661 elected not to identify their race.*

OTHER RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey also asked respondents to provide additional information about their identity, including gender, sexual orientation, and disability. 61% of respondents identified as male, 39% as female, and less than 1% of respondents identified as Transgender or Gender Fluid. 152 respondents chose not to identify a gender. 91% of respondents identified as straight and 9% identified as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer,

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[2] *Throughout this report, respondents who identified as "Black, African American or Black African" will be referred to as "Black" and respondents who identified as "American Indian, Alaska Native, or First Nations" will be referred to as "American Indian."*

and/or Questioning, and 157 respondents chose not to answer. 7% of respondents indicated that they have a disability, and 139 respondents did not provide an answer.

Respondents were also asked whether they managed or supervised people. 40% or respondents reported managing or supervising people, and 60% reported not -managing or supervising people (110 respondents skipped this question).
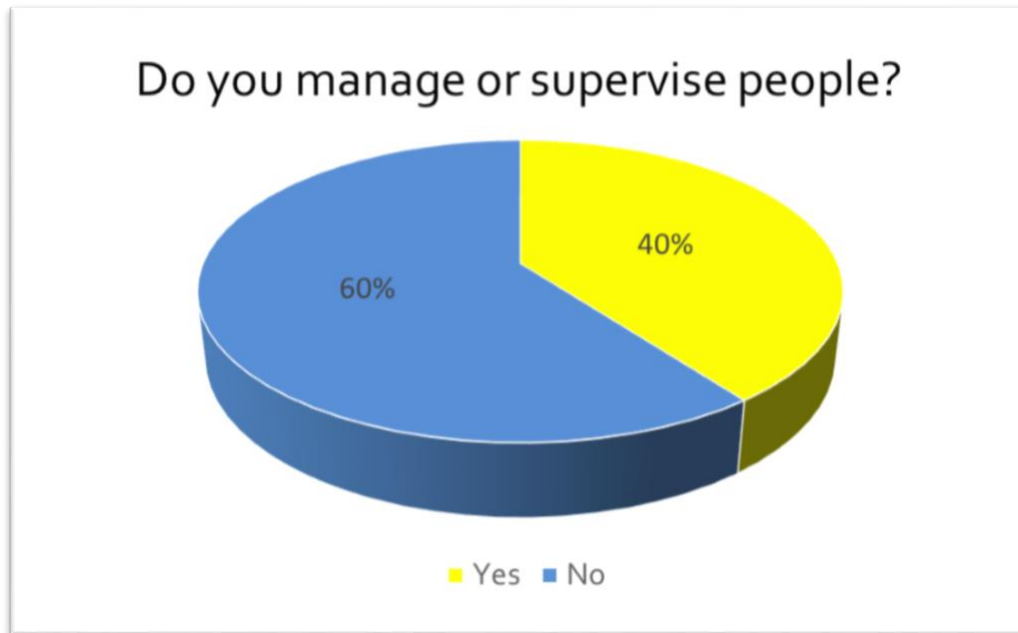
Regarding tenure, 10% of respondents have worked for the City for less than one year, compared to 33% of respondents who have worked for the City for 1-5 years, 19% who have worked there for 6-10 years, and 38% of respondents who have worked for the City for 11+ years.

IV. KEY FINDINGS

The following findings are organized around the principles of normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing racial equity:

- **Normalizing** a shared understanding of racial equity concepts and creating a sense of urgency to improve outcomes;
- **Organizing** to create internal infrastructure across the breadth and depth of the organization and strengthen external partnerships;
- **Operationalizing** racial equity within policies, practices, and procedures using data and racial equity tools and action plans.

GARE's experience in administering numerous other organizational surveys has demonstrated that the more we can have open conversations about differences in experience, the better able we will be to develop appropriate strategies to advance racial equity.

Demographics, position, and life experiences matter. Thus, the survey data was analyzed by demographic characteristics and supervisory status: this provides a deeper understanding of the organizational environment, considering the diversity of lived experiences and intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.
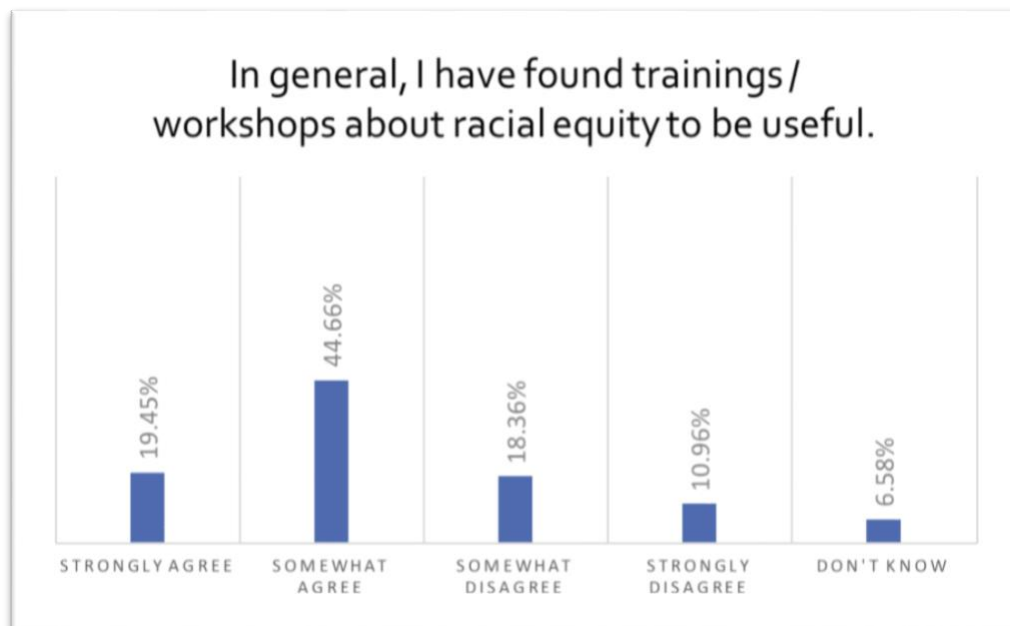
INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES & PERSPECTIVES

RACIAL EQUITY TRAININGS

Creating a sustainable and wide-spread equity practice requires building concrete skills. Providing training can build and strengthen skills and can set the ground work for broader cross-departmental progress.

The survey provides an overview of staff experience with racial equity trainings. 45% of respondents have never *participated in a racial equity training*, whereas 34% have participated in one or two racial equity trainings, and 21% have attended three or more. Just having attended a training is not that useful of a measure, as trainings differ in quality, skills provided, and applicability to the work place. Too often, GARE has seen trainings be a "check-the-box" activity. For city of Asheville employees who have attended racial equity trainings, 19% of respondents *strongly agreed **and 45% somewhat agreed*** that ***training had been useful,*** compared to 18% who somewhat agreed and 11% who *strongly disagreed that training had been useful*.

> *Since one of the priorities of the Racial Equity Core Team is developing and implementing additional training that builds skills amongst employees, doing so with the approach of "meeting employees where they are at" and clearly aligning training with lines of business will help to strengthen the usefulness of the training.*

In general, I have found trainings / workshops about racial equity to be useful.

Response	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	19.45%
SOMEWHAT AGREE	44.66%
SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	18.36%
STRONGLY DISAGREE	10.96%
DON'T KNOW	6.58%

With nearly three in ten employees having found previous trainings not to be useful, it will be important to view training not only as providing information and increasing understanding, but also as an opportunity to focus on operationalizing racial equity.
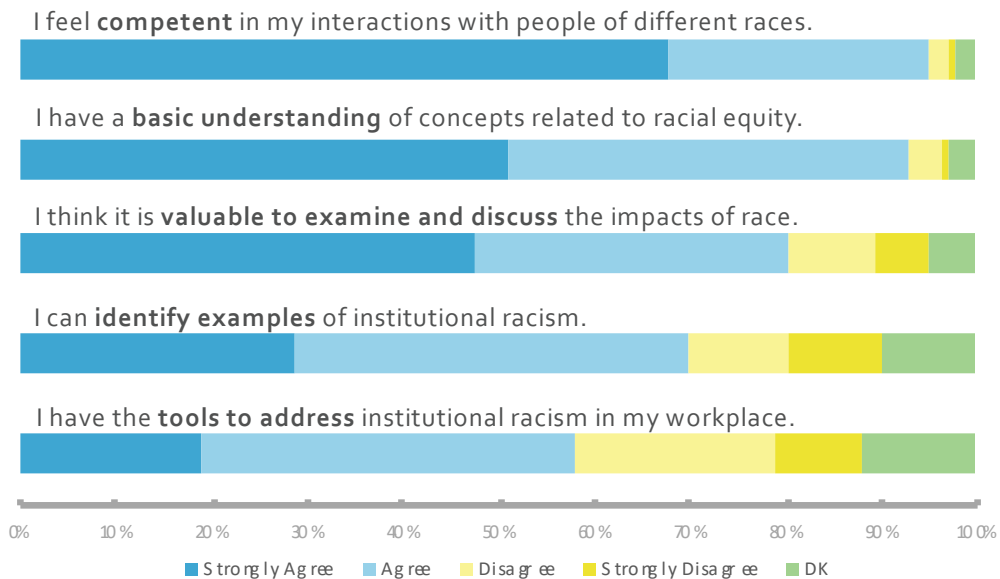
EMPLOYEE READINESS FOR TAKING ACTION

While GARE focuses on advancing racial equity by addressing institutional and structural racism, our institutions are made up of individuals, so it is critical that individual employees have knowledge and develop skills, comfort and competence that will allow them to take appropriate action to eliminate institutional and structural racism. Employees were asked a series of questions to assess how well situated they are to take action.

As displayed in the following chart, over 90% of employees either strongly or somewhat agree that they feel competent in their interactions with people of different races and have a basic understanding of concepts related to racial equity. There are slightly fewer employees who believe it is valuable to examine and discuss the impacts of race, with 81% strongly or somewhat agreeing with the statement. There are even fewer respondents who agreed that they could identify examples of institutional racism (70% strongly or somewhat agree), and even fewer still when it comes to having the tools to address institutional racism in the workplace.

Individual employees

I feel **competent** in my interactions with people of different races.

I have a **basic understanding** of concepts related to racial equity.

I think it is **valuable to examine and discuss** the impacts of race.

I can **identify examples** of institutional racism.

I have the **tools to address** institutional racism in my workplace.

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

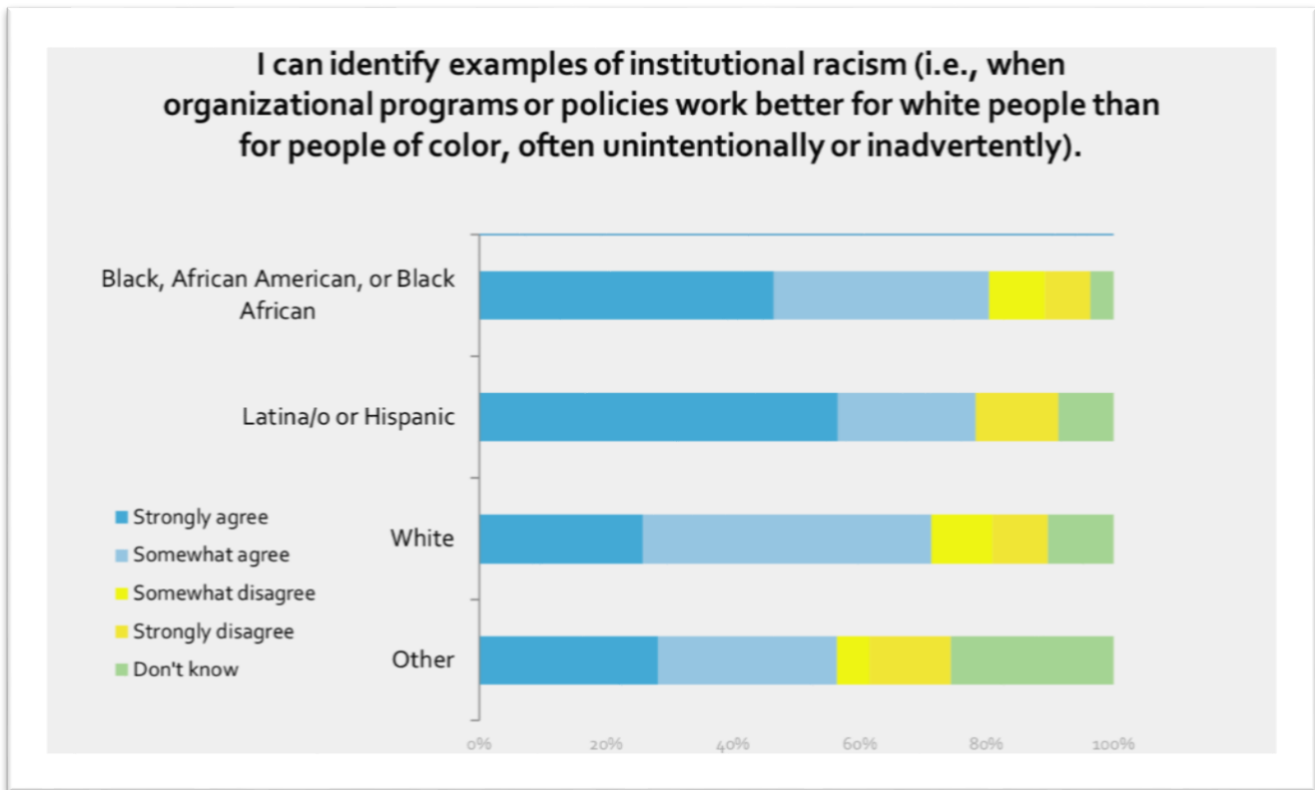Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree   DK

The overall percentage for People of Color respondents who strongly agreed that examining race is valuable was higher (59%) compared to White respondents (49%).

Mirroring this self-identified competency, respondents strongly agreed that they **felt comfortable talking about race** (50.82%) *(see chart below).* It is interesting to note that White, Black, and Asian respondents had the highest rates of overall agreement, in that order. This is an excellent indicator of the potential for meaningful future engagement and enhanced commitment across staff and departments.

"I'M HAPPY TO SEE SOME EFFORT BEING MADE, BUT I'M SAD THAT IT DIDN'T HAPPEN UNTIL A BLACK MAN WAS VICTIM TO EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE, AND IT MADE NATIONAL NEWS. WE NEED MORE IN-DEPTH DIVERSITY TRAINING AT LEAST ONCE PER YEAR, AS WELL AS WRITTEN MATERIALS FOR BREAK ROOMS AND COMMON AREAS. WE NEED TO HIRE MORE DIVERSE PEOPLE."

When respondents were asked to identify **examples of institutional racism, there were significant differences between races**. Overall, 29% of respondents strongly agreed that they could identify institutional racism. African American respondents, however, strongly agreed at a significant higher rate than average (46%), as did Latina/o or Hispanic respondents (57%). The average People of Color response for *strongly agree* was 42%.

I can identify examples of institutional racism (i.e., when organizational programs or policies work better for white people than for people of color, often unintentionally or inadvertently).
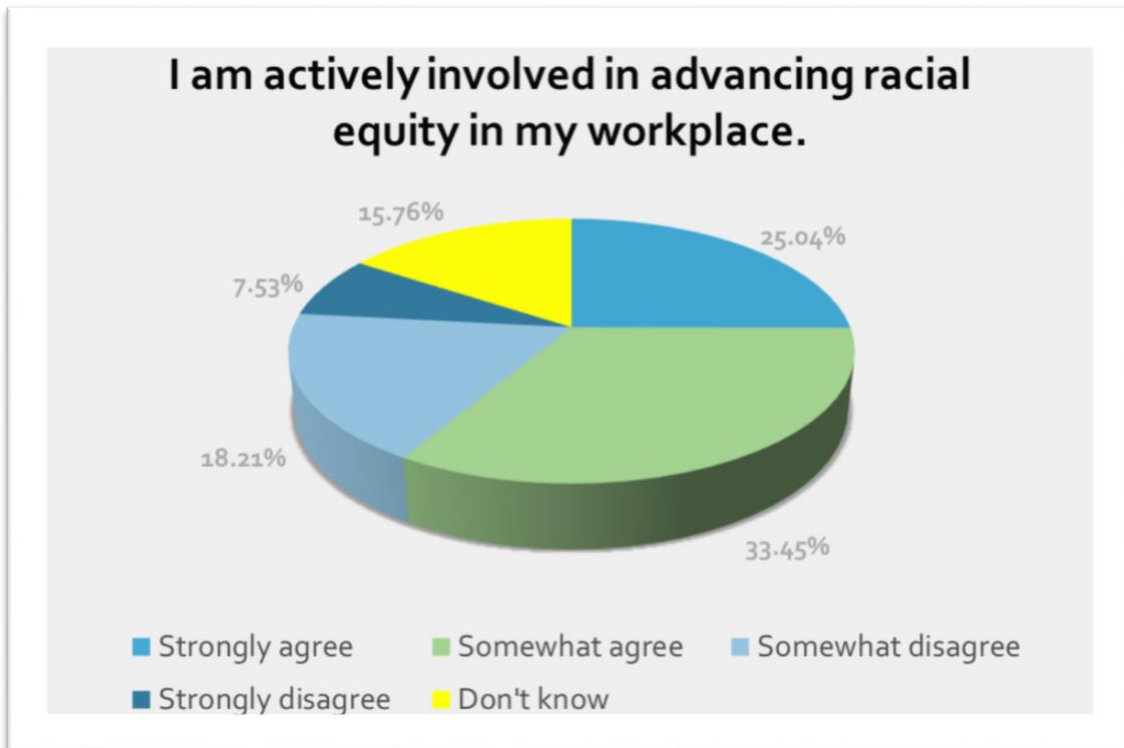
This suggests that it would be helpful to provide opportunities especially for White staff to form a deeper understanding of institutionalized racism and its applicability in the workplace, a key step in advancing racial equity at a City-wide level.

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES & PERCEPTIONS WITHIN THEIR DEPARTMENTS

EMPLOYEE RACIAL EQUITY ENGAGEMENT IN THEIR DEPARTMENTS

The survey also measured employee's current level of engagement in racial equity work and identified means by which the City could further support this engagement. When asked whether they were *actively involved in advancing racial equity in the workplace*, 58% agreed that they were involved, 26% disagreed, and 16% did not know.
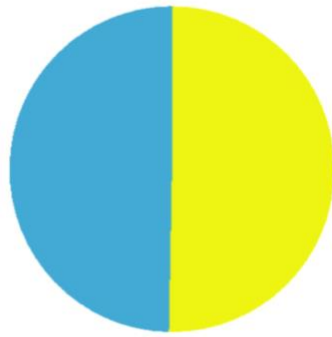
I am actively involved in advancing racial equity in my workplace.

- Strongly agree: 25.04%
- Somewhat agree: 33.45%
- Somewhat disagree: 18.21%
- Strongly disagree: 7.53%
- Don't know: 15.76%

With over half of all staff actively working towards advancing racial equity, there is momentum for carrying the work further, identifying new mechanisms to engage additional staff, and empowering those currently involved to deepen their skills and expand their strategies and actions. Managers were significantly more involved in advancing racial equity, with over 71% agreeing, compared to 49% of non-managers agreeing.
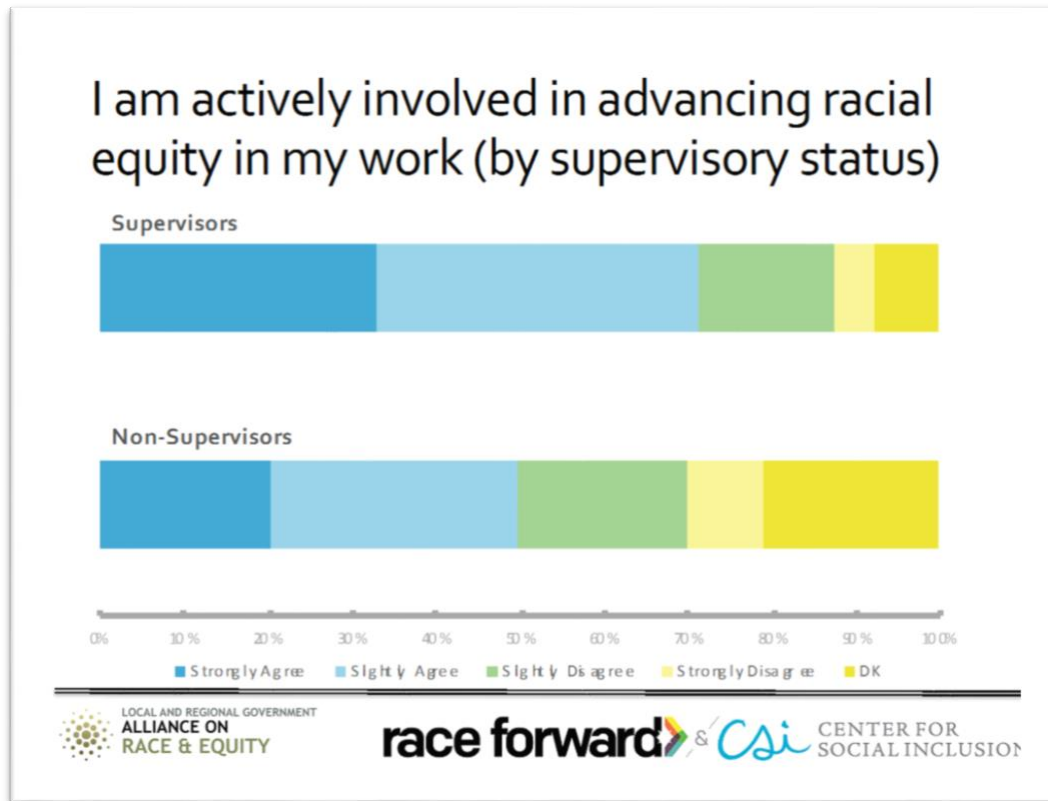
Respondents were also asked ***what factors would make them more active in advancing racial equity*** (respondents were asked to select all choices that applied). Overall, 50% of all respondents would like to become more engaged, with 39% of respondents reporting they would increase their activity if they had more information, and 31% if they received training. One out of six (16%) of respondents reported the need for support from their supervisors or managers, although 25% of all People of Color respondents indicated that more support from supervisors or managers would be helpful. This is a good indication that there is willingness to dedicate time and energy to advancing racial justice, with interest across a wide range of departments and supervisor level.

Employee Interests in More Engagement

Half of employees would like to become more actively engaged in advancing racial equity.

- Employees that would like to be come more actively engaged in advancing racial equity.
- Employees satisfied with their current level of engagement.

"I would become more active in advancing racial equity if..."

50%	Would like to become more active in advancing racial equity.
38%	I had more information so I knew what to do.
31%	I received training.
23%	I had more time.
16%	I had the support of my supervisor or manager.
50%	Are satisfied with current level of engagement.

While half of employees were satisfied with their current levels of engagement, there were significant differences by race, ranging from 69% (American Indian respondents) to a low of 33% (African American respondents).

> *This is an opportunity for the City to assess what activities or opportunities have successfully engaged staff, or to identify other factors that may prevent their interest or ability in joining racial equity work.*

When asked what it would take to become more involved in racial equity work, managers and non-managers fairly consistently noted more information and more time as important factors, with managers indicating at a slightly higher rate that additional training would be helpful. In open-ended responses to this question, a handful of respondents in managerial level positions wrote that they did not think that their departments had racial equity issues or would like to see additional evidence to show that racial equity was a city-wide issue. Others noted that they thought inequality or discrimination was isolated to certain departments and depended on work location rather than the institutional mistreatment of one particular race or ethnic group.

Some non-managers brought up their lack of authority to do this kind of work due to their position, and the potential of being fired or discriminated against if they increased their involvement. A handful of respondents were skeptical of policies and practices that focused on increasing diversity, as it would have the potential to negatively impact certain groups, only benefit one group, or place diversity considerations above skill and experience. Still others hoped to see more tangible commitment from City of Asheville leadership and worried that the initiative would end with surveys and discussions without concrete changes.

EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF DEPARTMENTAL COMMITMENTS

Employees were asked a series of questions to assess their perceptions of their department's commitment and actions to advance racial equity, recognizing that statements of commitment are important, but actions can speak louder than words.

"I THINK PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT "LENSES" OF WHAT EQUITY IS AND THAT IT'S IMPORTANT OUR ORGANIZATION HAS GUIDELINES OR TOOLS TO HELP US HAVE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING. IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO HAVE A SET OF GUIDELINES OR TOOLS AVAILABLE TO REFERENCE IN OUR DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES. I HAVE NOT HEARD OF THE EQUITY TOOL KIT MENTIONED IN THIS SURVEY. WE NEED MORE TOOLS AND TRAINING TO BE ABLE TO APPLY THE CONCEPT. NOT BEING PART OF THE "CORE TEAM" I WOULD LIKE TO BE KEPT BETTER INFORMED ABOUT THE TRAINING THEY ARE RECEIVING OR HAVE ACCESS TO OTHER TRAINING."

As displayed in the following chart, 75% of employees either strongly or somewhat agree that their department is committed to advancing racial equity. There are fewer respondents who feel that their departments have taken steps to reduce racial inequities, with 62% strongly or somewhat agreeing with the statement. This percentage drops further when respondents were asked whether their departments were providing resources to advance racial equity (55% strongly or somewhat agree), and further still when asked about providing racial equity training for all employees (42% strongly or somewhat agree). Building from the strength of general commitment provides an excellent opportunity for departments to take concrete actions, including providing racial equity training for both staff and management.

Significantly, across this set of questions, there was a relatively high percent of employees who responded "don't know." This result is important to acknowledge, as it emphasizes the importance of clear and consistent communication about the department's work to advance racial equity.

With 23% of respondents not aware of resources, it is clear that enhanced communication about what *is* available for staff could rapidly shift this perception. Communication and visible leadership are critical steps in strengthening racial equity work. With senior staff and managers setting positive examples, other employees are often more comfortable speaking about race within their departments. They may be more willing to increase their involvement in racial equity work, whether they attend a first-time training or begin applying a racial equity tool to their activities.

When senior staff and managers set positive examples, other employees are often more comfortable speaking about race within their departments. They may be more willing to increase their involvement in racial equity work, whether they attend a first-time training or begin applying a racial equity tool to their activities.

While three-quarters of respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement, **"My department is committed to advancing racial equity,"** only 57% of African American respondents agreed with the statement, compared to 79% of White respondents, and 66% of all People of Color respondents.
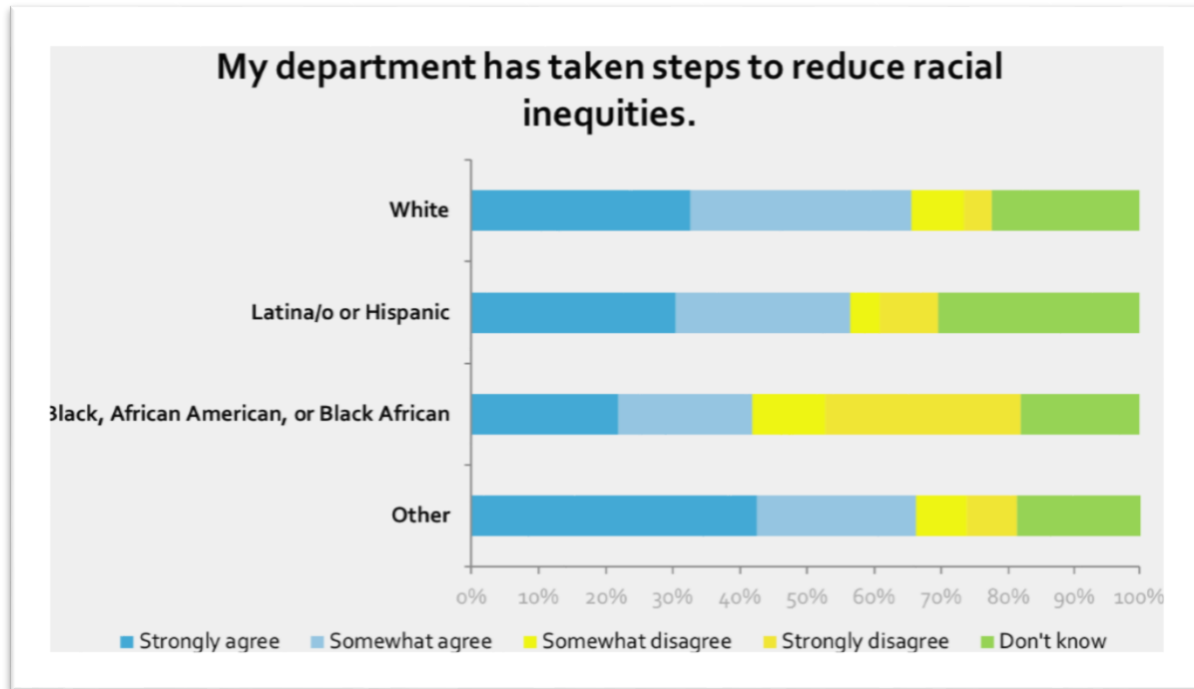
The level of awareness of concrete actions and opportunities was also significantly different across managers and non-managers. Non-manager respondents more frequently selected "don't know" to questions about whether their departments have taken steps to reduce inequities, provide the necessary resources for the work, or provide training for all staff. Another area of divergence was the question **"employees are encouraged to participate in trainings or events about racial equity**." Managers were significantly more like to strongly agree (37% vs. 28%) and non-managers were more like to disagree (15% vs. 9%).

PERCEPTIONS OF DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP

When asked more specifically about departmental leadership, respondents strongly agreed (44%) or agreed (23%) that **"Leadership in my department participates in and supports discussions about racial equity."** By demonstrating active engagement, leadership is modeling a commitment to normalize conversations about racial equity.

When respondents were asked specifically about leadership in their departments, managers agreed more heavily that leadership participates in and supports discussions about racial equity and were also more likely to agree that their leadership communicates about the importance of addressing racial inequities.

Digging deeper, participants were asked whether *"Leadership in my department communicates the importance of addressing racial inequities and achieving racial equity."* There was similarly high confidence in this aspect of communication, with 66% respondents in agreement.
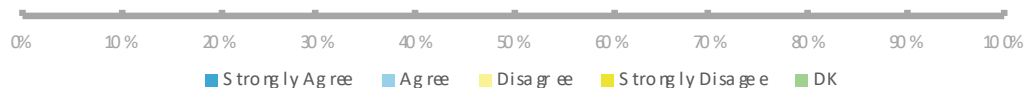
> *This has the potential to encourage more staff to join the conversation, particularly in departments where the connection to daily responsibilities and a racial equity lens may not be immediately apparent.*

Leadership within departments

Leadership in my department, including supervisors, managers and directors, **supports efforts** to advance racial equity.

Leadership in my department **communicates** the importance of advancing racial equity (leadership includes supervisors, managers and directors).

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Agree   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ DK

When we disaggregate the data by race, we found that White respondents had significantly better perceptions of leadership's communication, with 39% strongly agreeing, compared to 23% of African American respondents.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RACIAL EQUITY

## RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS, ACTION PLANS, & WORK GROUPS

While normalizing conversations about race is critical to addressing racial disparities, the City's work must also focus on operationalizing the values and priorities emerging from internal dialogue and trainings. Building departmental infrastructure includes formalizing racial equity working groups, as well as developing and implementing action plans and implementing racial equity tools. Structural changes at both the departmental and City level provide a strong foundation for sustaining and scaling racial equity initiatives.

"I AM IN A SMALL DEPARTMENT WITH A SMALL BUDGET. WE PARTNER WITH EVERY DEPARTMENT IN THE CITY TO COMPLETE PROJECTS BUT ARE RARELY THE LEAD. WE IDENTIFY PROJECTS BY LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITY WITHIN LARGER PROJECTS LED BY OTHER DEPARTMENTS. THIS IS THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO MEET OUR DEPARTMENT GOALS. THIS MAKES IT REALLY CHALLENGING TO USE AN EQUITY LENS TO SELECT PROJECTS. ALSO, WHEN IT COMES TO CONTRACTING, WE CAN GIVE PREFERENCE TO MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES, BUT I THINK THE GREATER ISSUE IS WITH REACHING THOSE BUSINESSES AND LETTING THEM KNOW OF THE OPPORTUNITY. IT IS OFTEN HARD TO GET A COMPETITIVE NUMBER OF BUSINESSES TO BID ON RFPS."

As noted in the section on individual employees, many staff did not feel as though they had the **tools necessary to address institutional racism**. Only 19% strongly agreed that they had these tools, while 30% either strongly disagreed or disagreed, and 12% did not know. Among People of Color, 58.75% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they did have the necessary tools.

A critical step towards operationalizing racial equity requires raising awareness across the City and ensuring that much larger numbers of staff are exposed to these Tools and Action Plans.

Further demonstrating this limited exposure to tools, only 13% of all respondents said that they had used a Racial Equity Tool on a policy, program, or budget decision, and 28% did not know. Of those who have used a tool, 93 respondents answered the question ***"I feel confident determining racial equity results and outcomes when using a Racial Equity Tool"***; 48% agreed and 18% strongly agreed. People of Color who had applied a tool and answered whether they felt confident in determining results strongly agreed at a slightly higher rate (28%).
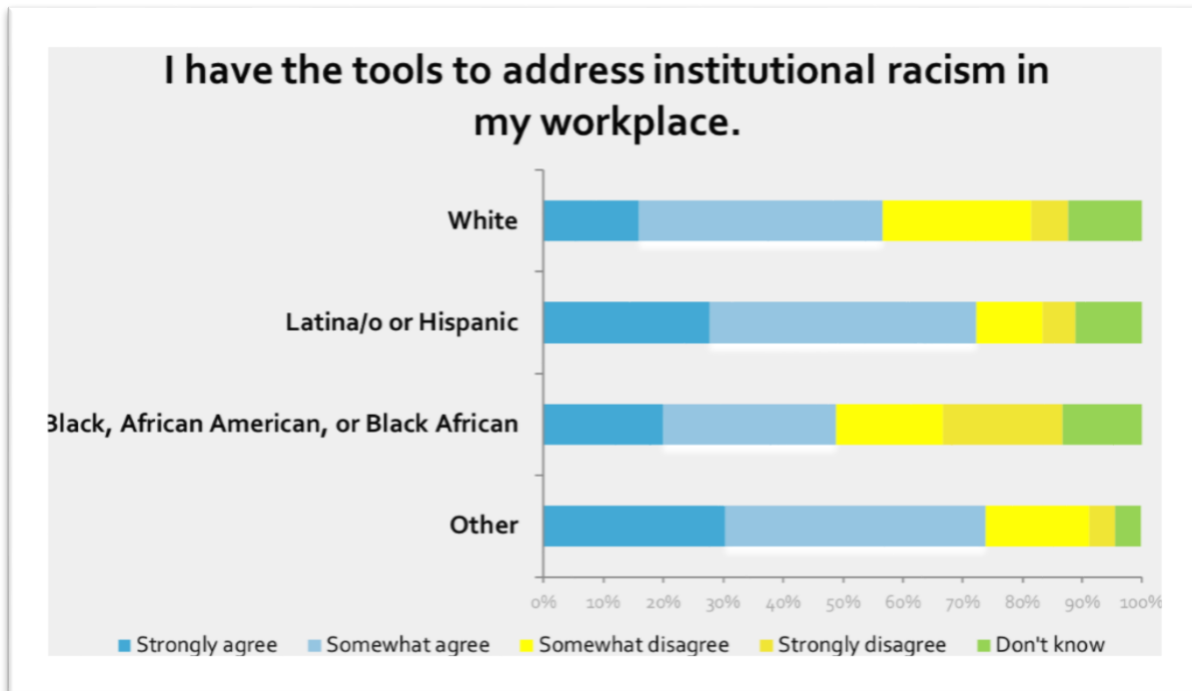
Managers and non-managers felt that they had the tools to address institutionalized racism at roughly the same rates, (61% vs. 54%). However, Managers had used a Racial Equity Tool on a policy, program, or budget decision at a much more significant rate (22% compared to 8% of non-managers).

As a part of the city's expanding focus on advancing racial equity, the city as a whole is developing infrastructure, including convening of Racial Equity Work Groups, use of a Racial Equity Tool, and development of Racial Equity Action Plans. Over the coming years, this same infrastructure is expected to expand within departments.

Because of Ashville's developmental stage working on racial equity, it is not surprising that a large number of employees lacked information about the infrastructure that is being established. When this survey is repeated in future years, it will provide a useful baseline from which progress can be assessed.

> *This indicates the potential of equity working groups to provide the resources, leadership, and support necessary to sustain racial equity, as the structure is highly visible and accessible at the departmental level.*

Over half of the respondents (58%) did not know **whether their departments had a Racial Equity Work Group**. Of those respondents that did know about a Racial Equity Work Group in their department, 65% indicated that the groups were providing effective support to the department. This indicates the potential of equity working groups to provide the resources, leadership, and support necessary to sustain racial equity, as the structure is highly visible and accessible at the departmental level. Similarly, 75% of respondents did not know if their **department had a Racial Equity Action Plan.**
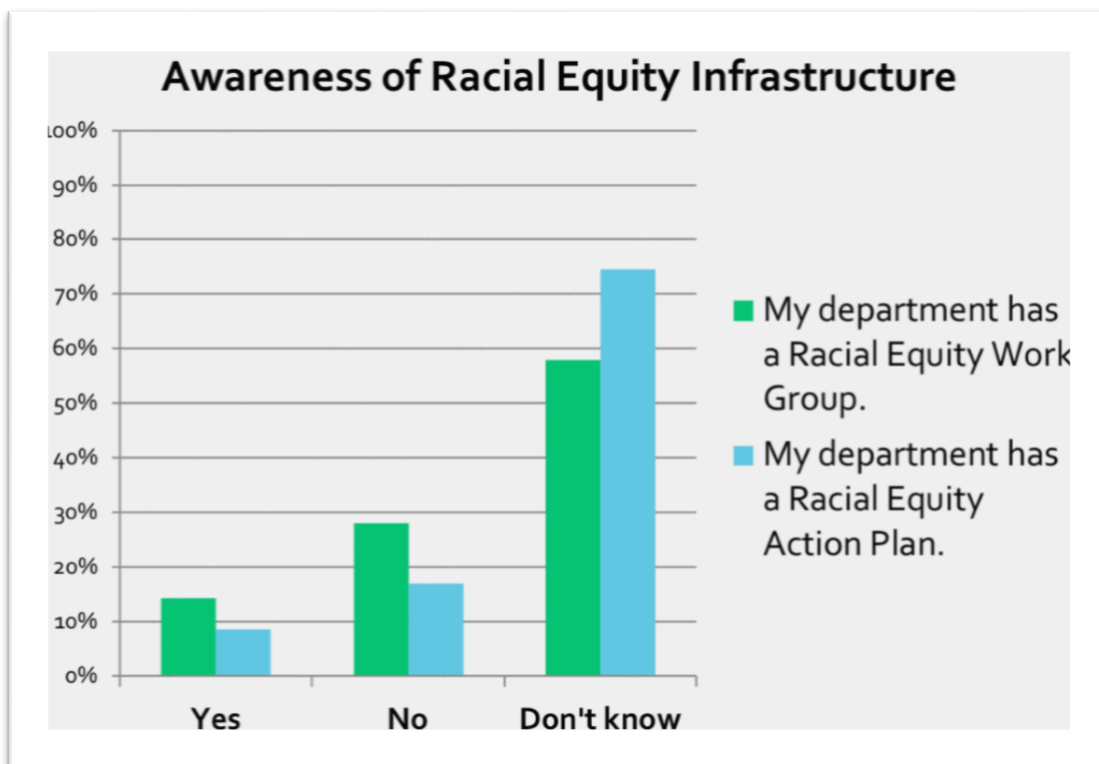
47% of managers did not know if their departments had Racial Equity Work Groups, compared to 67% of non-managers. There were similar rates of awareness for departmental Action Plans (66% vs. 80% did not know) and the active use of a Racial Equity Tool.
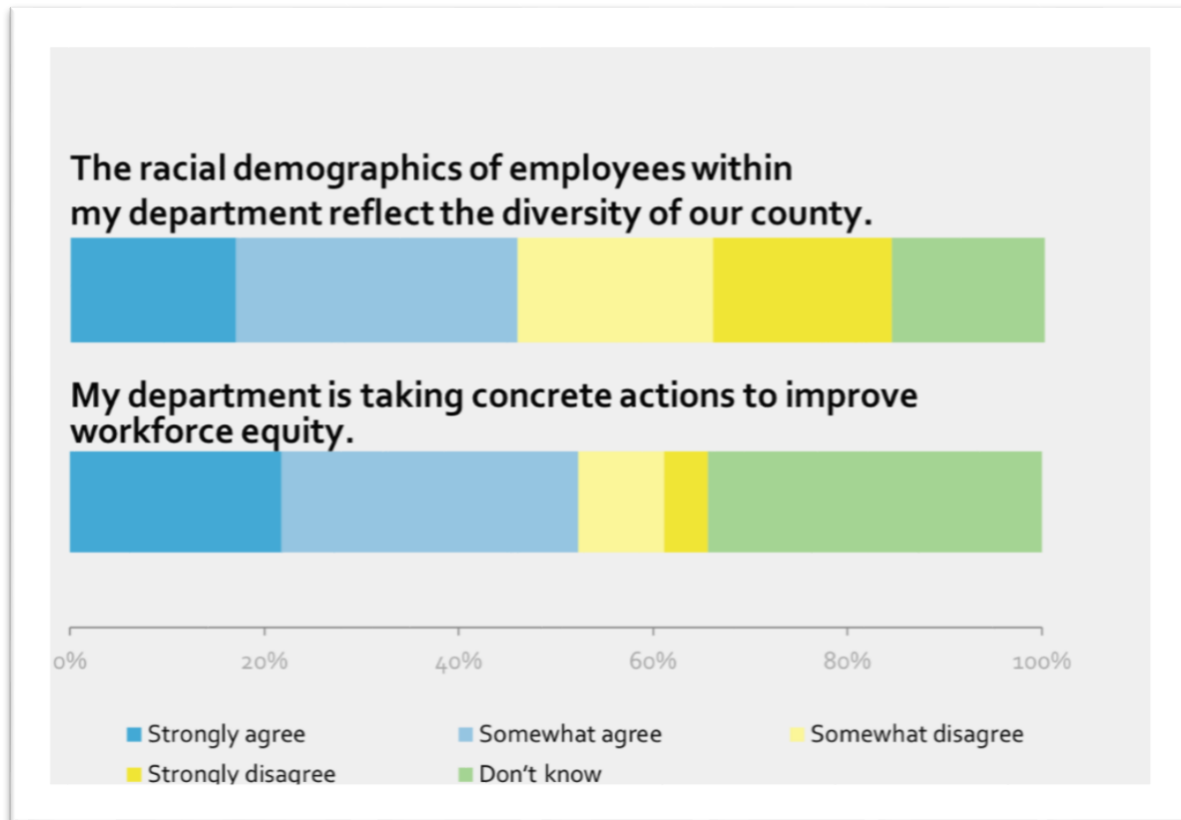
Just as many respondents indicated that they did not know whether they had the tools necessary for advancing racial equity, 76% of respondents did not know whether their **departments use a Racial Equity Tool in making decisions.** Only 8% were aware of this and said that the tool was used consistently. Although only 94 out of 661 respondents answered the question "a Racial Equity Toolkit has helped to improve my department's policies, initiatives, programs, or budget decisions," 63% of them agreed—a positive indicator that Racial Equity Tools are generating promising progress.

ADVANCING WORKFORCE EQUITY

Measuring the use of tools and increasing skill-building are important steps towards operationalizing workforce equity. Assessing employee demographics can also indicate the way that equity plays out in the City's engagement with community and highlight areas for improvements in policies and procedures.

"MY EFFORTS AT HIRING AND RECRUITING ARE OFTEN FOCUSED ON ENSURING THAT THE BEST QUALIFIED CANDIDATE WHO IS THE BEST FIT FOR THE POSITION… HOWEVER, THE APPLICANT POOLS ARE OFTEN RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY HOMOGENEOUS. THIS PRESENTS AN OBSTACLE TO PROMOTING RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY WITHIN OR WORKPLACE. SUPPORT FROM GROUPS WITH THE APPROPRIATE KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTIONS TO HELP US ADVERTISE FOR POSITIONS THROUGH TOOLS THAT MIGHT INCREASE THE DIVERSITY OF APPLICANT POOLS WOULD BE A GREAT ADDITION."

To shift the focus away from individual departments and perceptions of diversity, the survey assessed **employee perceptions of their workforce relative to the actual demographic makeup of the City**. There was no distinct different between White respondents and People of Color respondents and their perceptions of diverse representation within departments.

The racial demographics of employees within my department reflect the diversity of our county.

My department is taking concrete actions to improve workforce equity.

- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ Somewhat agree
- ■ Somewhat disagree
- ■ Strongly disagree
- ■ Don't know

Respondents were also asked whether their *departments were taking concrete steps to increase workforce equity.* 52% agreed that there were concrete steps being taken, while 34% did not know. This percentage was relatively consistent across all racial groups. To improve workforce equity, some respondents suggested that the City seek outside support in recruitment tools and strategies that could bring in more diverse applicant pools.

BRINGING A RACIAL EQUITY LENS TO CONTRACTING & PROCUREMENT

The survey shed light on the amount of awareness most staff has of the City's Contracting and Procurement strategies and their impacts. When asked: "*the results of my department's contracting and procurement equitably benefit the racial diversity of our city,*" 31% People of Color respondents and 35% of White respondents generally agreed. Overall, 55% of respondents did not know.

These averages remained consistent across racial groups when respondents were asked if their *"department is taking concrete actions to increase equity in its contracting and procurement practices."* When disaggregated by supervisor status, managers agreed at a much higher rate than their counterparts.
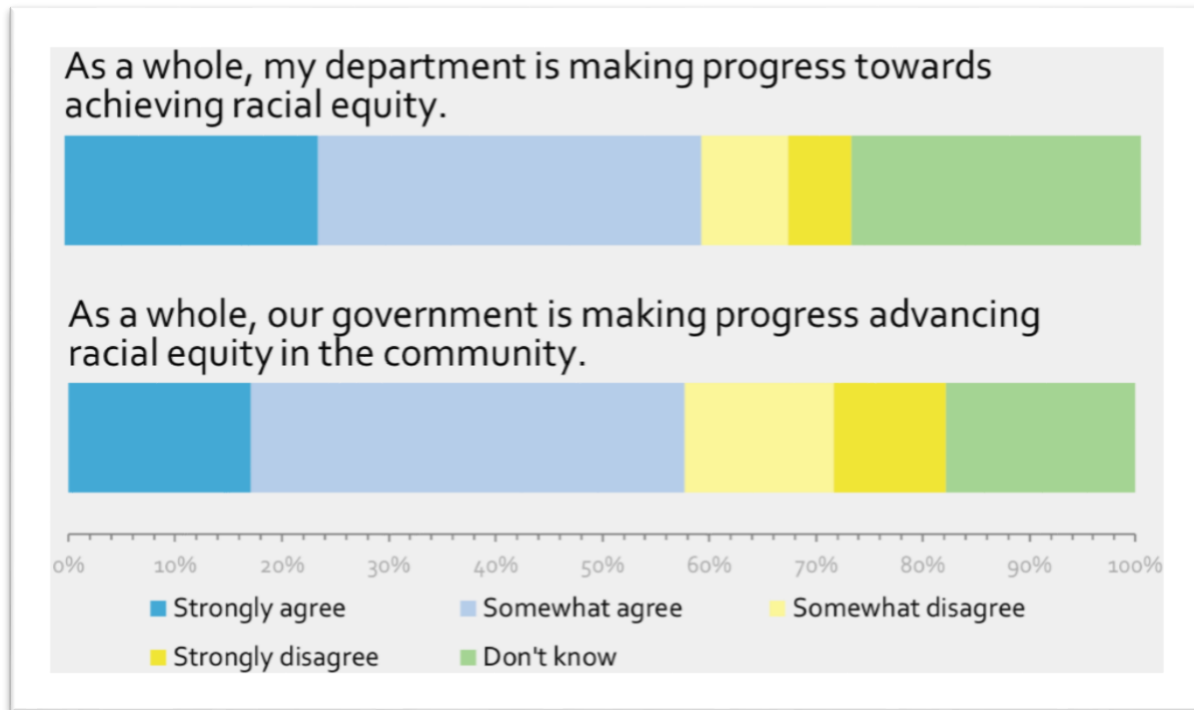
SERVING & ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Respondents were asked a series of questions related to their departments' work with and for communities. From general actions to increase racial equity for communities, to partnering, seeking input, and improving services, respondents were fairly consistent in their levels of agreement and awareness of their departments' initiatives. There was slightly more variation when disaggregated across race and managerial level. When asked if their "*department is making progress on improving access to services for people of color,*" Black respondents disagreed *and* strongly disagreed at a significantly higher rate than White respondents (25% versus 7% for White respondents).

Managers more strongly agreed that departments are making progress on improving access to services (32% vs. 19% non-managers) and they also more strongly agreed if their *departments were seeking input and assistance from communities of color.* African American respondents expressed lower agreement that their departments were seeking input from communities (36%), compared to White respondents (51%) and all People of Color respondents (47%). When asked if "*My department is taking concrete actions to increase racial equity for our communities,*" White respondents generally agreed (52%) compared to 38% of African American respondents and 45% of People of Color respondents.

There was limited awareness of whether "*my department is making progress at providing interpretation and translation services for people with limited English proficiency.*" Across all respondents, 40% did not know.

In a broader view, the assessment asked whether respondents agreed with "*as a whole, our government is making progress advancing racial equity in the community.*" 17% of respondents strongly agreed and 41% of respondents somewhat agreed, which is a solid foundation to build on and a good indication that staff are aware not only of their departmental initiatives but also of progress at-large in the city. There was a statistically significant difference between African American and White respondents: 63% of White respondents agreed versus 30% of African American respondents agreed. African American respondents also had the highest rate of disagreement of any racial group (55%).

59% of all respondents agreed that, as a whole, *their department is making progress towards achieving racial equity* (People of Color agreed at a rate of 51%).

As a whole, my department is making progress towards achieving racial equity.

As a whole, our government is making progress advancing racial equity in the community.

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly agree   ■ Somewhat agree   ■ Somewhat disagree
■ Strongly disagree   ■ Don't know

With that majority of agreement, there is also 27% that does not know, again facilitating an opportunity to look at new communications strategies to lift up actions and progress. Of all racial groups, African American respondents had the least confidence in this statement, with only 44% agreeing. This underscores the importance of staff having a shared understanding of definitions or concepts such as racial equity.

V. UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN STAFF PERSPECTIVES

GARE's experience in administering numerous other organizational surveys has demonstrated that the more we can have open conversations about differences in experience, the better able we will be to develop appropriate strategies to advance racial equity. And in doing so, we subsequently decrease organizational racial anxiety, making racially-skewed processes, practices, and cultural norms visible.

"I THINK THAT BRINGING UP LGBT ISSUES AS PART OF THIS IS IMPORTANT, BECAUSE IT'S RELATED TO BIGOTRY AS A WHOLE, SO I WAS GLAD TO SEE THE QUESTION. I WAS DISAPPOINTED TO SEE THAT ANTISEMITISM IS NOT ADDRESSED AND THEREFORE NOT PART OF THE DISCUSSION. THERE IS ANTI-MUSLIM AND ANTI-JEWISH SENTIMENTS AND RHETORIC THAT OCCUR HERE AND WITHOUT A DOUBT SERIOUS IMPLICIT BIAS AGAINST PERSONS THAT DO NOT FIT INTO THE WHITE MALE CHRISTIAN MOLD."

Demographics, position, and life experiences matter. Thus, the survey data was analyzed by demographic characteristics and supervisory status: this provides a deeper understanding of the organizational environment, considering the diversity of lived experiences and intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. The following observations shed light on both quantitative analysis pulled from the survey that shows variations across different identities, but also trends from open-ended comments that dig deeper into respondent experiences.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Open-ended responses shed light on other forms of marginalization and inequities. A handful of participants noted the treatment of LGTBQ staff as well as staff with disabilities, and their departments' work to address both internal and external discrimination related to these groups.

"MY FAMILY IS MULTIRACIAL, AND I WORRY EVERYDAY IF I CAN REMAIN IN THIS COMMUNITY AND HOW THE LACK OF DIVERSITY AFFECTS MY CHILD NOT BEING BLACK OR WHITE, BUT I HAVE CONTINUED TO EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION IN THIS ORGANIZATION, BECAUSE OF MY RELIGION EVEN THOUGH THE COLOR OF MY SKIN WHITE. OBVIOUSLY, THE EQUITY DEPARTMENT IS ONLY INTERESTED IN THE COLOR OF PEOPLE'S SKIN AND NOTHING ELSE. HOW MANY MUSLIM WOMEN OR MEN ARE IN MANAGEMENT POSITIONS IN THIS CITY?"

When disaggregated by gender, there was statistically significant differences across Male and Female respondents for certain questions. For example, when asked *"I think it is valuable to examine and discuss the impacts of race,"* 63% of Female respondents strongly agreed, compared to Male respondents (43%). Similarly, when asked about

their ability to identify institutionalized racism, Male respondents had a significantly higher rate of "strongly disagree" (11% of Male respondents compared to 6% of Female respondents and 0% of Transgender and Gender fluid respondents).

"I AM LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND THE EXTENT OF MY EXPERIENCES AS A WHITE PERSON AND THE UNREALIZED PRIVILEGE IT BRINGS, AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE FIELD IS NOT LEVEL FOR POC OR LGBTQ. AS A WOMAN I'M FULLY AWARE OF INEQUITIES FOR WOMEN IN GENERAL AND LEARNING HOW MUCH GREATER THE INEQUITY IS FOR MARGINALIZED GROUPS. I JUST DON'T WANT TO SEE THE PENDULUM TO SWING TOO FAR IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION AND EXCLUDE SOMEONE FROM AN OPPORTUNITY THAT THEY ARE THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR BECAUSE THEY ARE WHITE, AND THE TREND IS TO PROMOTE POC."

I think it is valuable to examine and discuss the impacts of race.
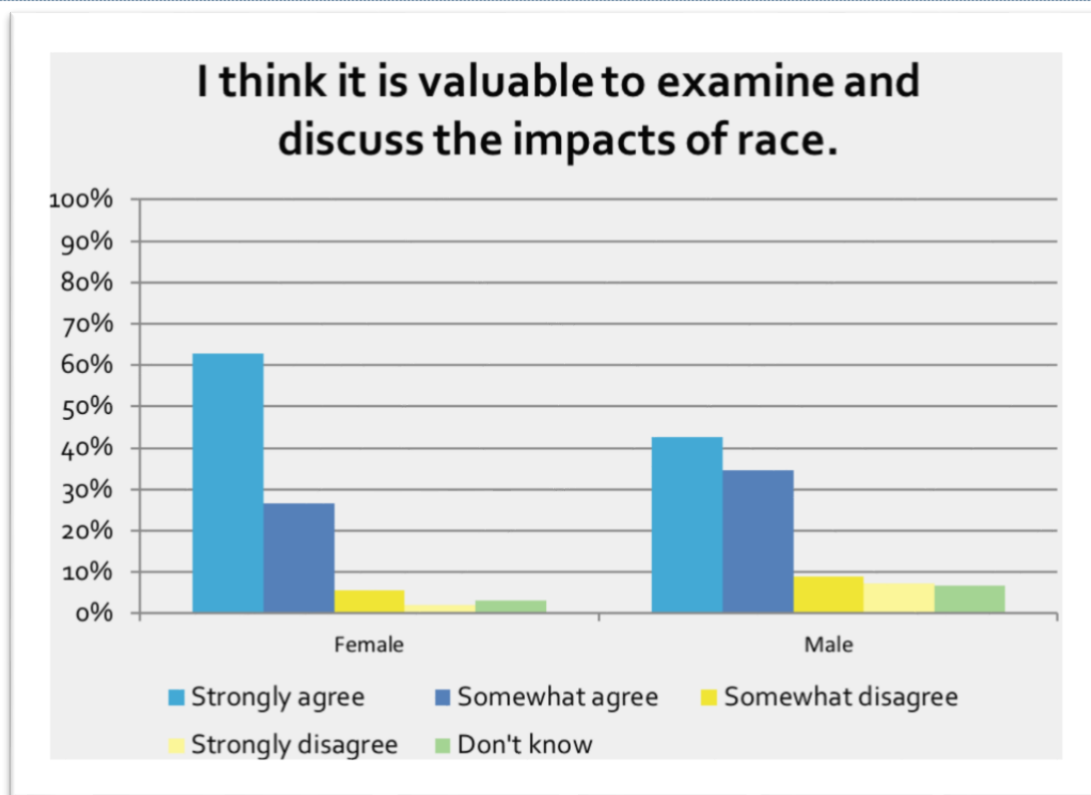
When asked what factors would contribute to respondents increasing their involvement in racial equity work, 57% of Male respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their current levels of engagement, compared to 37% of Female respondents.

VARIATIONS ACROSS RACIAL GROUPS

When respondents were asked whether "*My department is committed to advancing racial equity,*" we can see some differences across respondents. 57% of Black respondents agreed with the statement, compared to 79% of White respondents, and 66% of all People of Color respondents.

Similarly, for the question *"As a whole, our government is making progress advancing racial equity in the community,"* 63% of White respondents agreed versus 30% of African American respondents agreed.

"IN THE DEPARTMENT I'VE SPENT THE PAST [SIC] YEARS IN, I HAVE HAD NOTHING BUT CHALLENGES WITH ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES AND ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY. I DON'T FEEL THE MAJORITY REALIZES THAT THERE IS AN ISSUE AND THAT IMPLICIT BIAS IS ALIVE AND WELL. I AS WELL AS OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR HAVE BEEN STEREOTYPED, DISCIPLINED UNFAIRLY, COMPARED TO WHITE COWORKERS, AND I'VE BEEN PASSED UP FOR PROMOTIONS IN MY DEPARTMENT THAT I KNOW I DESERVED."

The assessment also shows that White respondents had significantly better perceptions of leadership's communication, with 39% strongly agreeing that "*Leadership in my department communicates the importance of addressing racial inequities and achieving racial equity*," compared to African American respondents (23%). Asian respondents had the overall lowest agreement of all racial groups when asked about leadership communication. This data, noted above in the analysis, sheds light on broader trends that impact the way that different groups of employees perceive the City's communications and activities, and also provide a mechanism to understand how best to address these disparities.

FAIRNESS & DIVERSITY

The concept of fairness and diversity was mentioned in a number of comments: there were widespread concerns for fairness in hiring and promotional practices based on the skills and experience of all employees, with some respondents identifying potential areas for strategic focus moving forward. Some White respondents did not think equity was a problem in their departments, with others expressing that a focus on race and racism would further divide staff on these issues.

"I BELIEVE THAT IF ANYTHING THE CITY OPERATES ON A REVERSE BIASED STANCE. I AM A FIRM BELIEVER IN TREATING EVERYONE EQUAL, NOT GIVING PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT TO ONE OVER ANOTHER JUST BECAUSE OF COLOR, RACE, GENDER OR SEXUAL PREFERENCES. ALL PEOPLE WERE CREATED EQUAL AND ALL HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES IN AMERICA, IT JUST REQUIRES SELF-MOTIVATION."

Many used their own personal experiences of equal treatment and treating others of different races with respect as an indication that racism is not a prevalent issue (i.e. color blindness). Additionally, the phrase "reverse racism" was highlighted several times, with the fear that surveys focusing on race would automatically put White people on the defensive or serve to hide behavior that was inadvertently hurting other employees or potential candidates.

POLARIZED PERCEPTIONS OF CITY PROGRESS

There are polarized perceptions of leadership's priorities and commitments, as well as departmental actions being taken to advance racial equity. In particular there were high levels of strong disagreement to certain statements, especially for African American respondents in comparison to White respondents and other People of Color respondents. There is also a significant discrepancy in awareness of activities, opportunities, and concrete steps taken by departments and the City as a whole between managers and non-managers.

VI. OPPORTUNITIES

RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS & ACTION PLANS PROVEN TO WORK

The data shows that when respondents work in departments that are implementing tools or action plans, many have positive perceptions of their efficacy in achieving racial equity. Based on this assessment, those employees who have been involved in building or participating in this infrastructure have high levels of confidence in their effectiveness in advancing racial equity. The challenge will be to raise awareness across the City and ensure that much larger numbers of staff are exposed to these Tools and Action Plan and gain confidence in their use.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL EMPLOYEES

Understanding where different groups of staff fall in their racial equity journeys is an important step in shaping the next phase of trainings and strategic planning. With the survey showing an overall commitment to advancing racial equity work, over 30% of staff felt that both additional information as well as additional training would benefit their ability to participate in racial equity work. Certain racial groups, in particular African American respondents, indicated that more vocal and visible support from supervisors would encourage their participation in advancing racial equity in their departments.

Addressing these concerns with communications, safe and structured discussion spaces, and building protections for staff to feel safe and empowered to participate in racial equity work will enhance Asheville's ability to meet its objectives.

Some non-managers brought up their lack of authority to do this kind of work due to their position, and the potential of being fired or discriminated against if they increased their involvement. Addressing these concerns in communications, safe and structured discussion spaces, and building in protections for staff to feel safe and empowered to participate in racial equity work will enhance Asheville's ability to meet its objectives.

DEPARTMENTAL VARIATION

Open-ended comments noted issues within certain departments based on individual experiences of work culture, hiring practices, and interaction between staff and managers. Departmental variation beyond individual comments can be further parsed out from departmental reports that provide a full-breakdown of respondent data and trends.

"THE WORK ENVIRONMENT AT THE [DEPARTMENT] IS RACIST, HOMOPHOBIC, AND DISCRIMINATORY TOWARDS WOMEN, THE DISABLED, ETC... I THINK THAT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT MANY OF THE WORKERS DON'T REALIZE THAT THEIR LANGUAGE AND ACTIONS ARE INAPPROPRIATE. THERE SEEMS TO BE AN INCREDIBLE CULTURE OF IGNORANCE, THAT IN PART IS ENCOURAGED BY LOWER LEVEL SUPERVISORS."

There was significant variation across the departments, with some staff noting positive examples of open communication and safe space for address racial equity, to work culture where respondents felt that other employees did not have the language or awareness necessary to discuss race. Understanding this baseline for all departments will help build a stronger infrastructure in the coming months and target particular strategies and opportunities where they are most needed.

"IN MY NEARLY 15 YEARS WITH THE [DEPARTMENT] I HAVE NEVER WITNESSED ANY FORM DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS EMPLOYEES OR CITIZENS. I FEEL THAT THE [DEPT] STRIVES TO TREAT EVERYONE EQUALLY REGARDLESS OF RACE, RELIGION, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER, OR SOCIAL CLASS. IF THERE ARE ANY AREAS OF THE COA THAT ARE NOT DOING THE SAME I BELIEVE THIS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED."

POSITIVE OVERALL PERCEPTION OF CITY PROGRESS

The City of Asheville has high rates of positive feedback from its staff across many of the survey areas. This is a strong place to begin capacity building training. Additionally, with over half of all staff actively working towards advancing racial equity, there is momentum for carrying the work further, identifying new mechanisms to engage additional staff, and empowering those currently involved to deepen their skills and increase their resources.

VII. NEXT STEPS

The City of Asheville has joined a host of other cities and counties across the country who recognize that racial inequities exist across all indicators for success, and that government has a responsibility to play a role in closing the gaps and lifting up outcomes for all groups. This initiative is meant to help us analyze how previous and current policies, practices, and procedures may be maintaining racial inequities. The City of Asheville is well-positioned to serve as a visionary thought leader in this field and to make important strides both internally and externally. By making an explicit commitment to racial equity and taking concrete action, Asheville is highlighting the important role that government plays in creating a more equitable future.

> *The City of Asheville is well-positioned to serve as a visionary thought leader in this field and to make important strides both internally and externally. By making an explicit commitment to racial equity and tang concrete actions, Asheville is highlighting the important role that government plays in creating a more equitable future.*

This survey is an important building block for implementation of Asheville's Racial Equity Action Plan, including train-the-trainer activities, and monitoring a baseline for the City's progress over time in normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing. Below are questions and considerations based upon our analysis, observations, and engagement with Asheville thus far.

CONTINUE TO INCREASE CITY EMPLOYEE UNDERSTANDING OF RACIAL EQUITY

There is a range of how people understand and define concepts, as well as their comfort and competency in having discussions about race. Moving forward, there is also a need to create collective understanding of individual vs. institutional racism and identify larger trends beyond personal experiences of equitable treatment or individual behavior. As demonstrated by the data above, there was significant variation across racial groups as well as supervisor level related to staff understanding of racial equity concepts as well as their confidence in identifying examples of institutional and structural racism.

One trend across open-ended responses was a concern for common language and definitions—some participants noted that other employees may not share the same understandings of equity versus equality, and were concerned that a focus on race would take attention away from other pressing issues including discrimination against certain religions or sexual orientations.

> *It is critical to identify a means to support staff in ongoing racial equity learning in all departments, particularly where racial equity practices may seem less applicable or relevant.*

Bringing these definitions to the forefront of conversations will support departments develop a deeper analysis and ensure that all staff are on the same page moving forward.

Reinforcing core concepts and baseline understanding of key racial equity terminology will be a key priority. It is critical to identify a means to support staff in ongoing racial equity learning in all departments, particularly where racial equity practices may seem less applicable or relevant. In addition, it's important to sustain deeper learning for staff who are more advanced in their racial equity understanding or practice. Due to differences in understanding, will, and awareness of racial equity issues across departments, each department will be provided data for their employees, which will be useful more for targeted and specific action plans.

OPERATIONALIZE RACIAL EQUITY PRACTICES FOR CITY STAFF: MOVING FROM THEORY TO ACTION

The analysis of the survey suggests that, principally, racial equity is important to individuals and is understood as core to the mission and work of Asheville. With over 50% of respondents reporting involvement in advancing racial equity work and visible interest in additional support and resources for continuing their engagement, there was also a majority of respondents who held positive perceptions of the city and departmental work around racial equity. Moving forward, the City should consider developing benchmarks with staff to identify factors that influence perceptions of progress versus actual progress in advancing equity. These indicators will help shape the vision that staff and communities have of racial equity, and how trainings, action plans, and pilots can help achieve it.

"IT'S IMPORTANT THAT DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY INITIATIVES NOT BE DEVELOPED IN A SILO. SEPARATE PROGRAMS, TOOLS, ETC. ARE FOUNDATIONAL PIECES, BUT WE WILL ONLY BE SUCCESSFUL FOR THE LONG HAUL IF THESE ACTIVITIES BECOME PART OF THE FABRIC OF THE ORGANIZATION - THAT WILL ONLY HAPPEN IF THEY ARE INCORPORATED AND INTEGRATED WITH, NOT SEPARATED FROM, OTHER INITIATIVES."

Another important component of operationalizing racial equity is building on the positive experiences and perceptions of staff who have been implementing racial equity tools. Based on this assessment, those employees who have been involved in building racial equity infrastructure (Tools or Action Plans) have high levels of confidence in their effectiveness in advancing racial equity and have seen their impacts on decision-making and outcomes. Moving forward, Asheville can learn from these experiences and ensure that the scope of these endeavors reach across departments and staff levels and maximize awareness of how racial equity trainings, tools, and action plans can lift up outcomes for all programs.

COMMUNICATION & ACTIVE LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS WILL FOSTER STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS & OWNERSHIP

Overall, City staff share a strong desire to *get to better outcomes for everyone* and demonstrate a genuine interest in the learning and application necessary to advance racial equity. Since the survey showed some discrepancies in both understanding of concepts as well as awareness of City initiatives and progress, it will be important to increase information sharing and provide guidance to ensure that departments and individuals are adequately equipped with resources.

Absence of knowledge both limits the City's ability to measure the efficacy of its programs and hinders employee trust and pride in positive steps that are actually underway. Strengthening top-down communication about existing initiatives could address the high percentage of staff who were unaware of concrete steps being taken and demonstrate tangible leadership for racial equity.

In addition, Asheville could take concrete steps to alleviate concerns across managerial level by understanding where staff see opportunities to engage or may hesitate to get involved. Some non-managers brought up their lack of authority to do this kind of work due to their position, and the potential of being fired or discriminated against if they increased their involvement. Conversely, some managers of smaller departments felt

that they had slightly less agency to apply a racial equity lens to budgets or decisions when they are often partnering with larger departments for efficiency. A city-wide mandate to integrate racial equity analysis into all budgets and programs would help lift the burden on individual managers hoping to push this work forward.

VIII.   SUMMARY

The City of Asheville has a strategic opportunity to truly embed racial equity into policy, practice, and procedure. This survey data offers important information about current strengths and opportunities for the City to explore moving forward. A commitment to racial equity requires intent, rigor, and practice, and if done effectively, will position Asheville to be even more successful in achieving its mission.