

City of Milwaukee Racial Equity Assessment Report

July 2022



OFFICE OF
**EQUITY AND
INCLUSION**



City of Milwaukee

Racial Equity Assessment Report

As the city of Milwaukee works to advance racial equity within city government and throughout our community, it is important to understand and reflect on the current state of the city’s operations, policies, and practices within each department and across the organization as a whole. To do this, the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) developed a racial equity assessment process based on the experiences of other city governments and nationally recommended practices. The process is consistent with common council file 201192, which directs OEI to cooperate with the City Clerk Inspector General in conducting a racial equity audit of all city departments.

Contents

- Approach 3
 - Purpose and Scope3
 - Racial Equity Assessment and Action Planning Process3
 - Literature Review and Historical Context.....3
 - Assessment Activities4
- Assessment Results..... 5
 - Value of Racial Equity Work5
 - Commitment to Racial Equity5
 - Leadership & Management.....6
 - Workforce Diversity7
 - Employee Knowledge & Skills8
 - Budgeting & Contracting9
 - Community Access & Engagement..... 10
 - Data & Evaluation 11
- Key Findings 12
- Next Steps 13
- Appendices..... 14

Approach

Purpose and Scope

OEI's racial equity assessment focuses on city government operations and the culture, structure, and practices related to racial equity within city departments. The purpose is to develop a baseline for the city's racial equity work and to provide a foundation for departments to develop racial equity action plans. The assessment does not cover community-level disparities or inequities in Milwaukee, nor does it cover potential discrimination within city government. For additional information on community-level racial equity data and mapping resources, please see OEI's publicly available [Milwaukee Equity Atlas](#).

Racial Equity Assessment and Action Planning Process

The racial equity assessment is part of a broader citywide action planning process. The assessment is the first step in the process, followed by a review of the findings, development of a citywide racial equity vision and goals, creation of department racial equity action plans, and implementation of the plans with a clearly identified structure for reporting and evaluation.



Literature Review and Historical Context

OEI's racial equity assessment process is grounded in a review of racial equity literature and an understanding of government's role in creating and maintaining racial inequities over the course of Milwaukee's history. There is an emerging body of research on racial equity frameworks and recommended practices for advancing racial equity in local government. This research, including resources available through the Government Alliance for Race and Equity (GARE), and the experiences of other city governments have been instrumental in developing the city's racial equity assessment and planning process.

In addition to reviewing relevant literature and case studies from other local governments, understanding and acknowledging the historical role that government has played in creating and maintaining many of the racial inequities in Milwaukee today is critical. Before starting the racial equity assessment process, OEI developed a timeline of government actions that shaped the history of race in Milwaukee. The [timeline](#), which is publicly available on OEI's website, focuses on explicit race-specific government actions at the federal, state, and local levels that have impacted the city of Milwaukee over the last 200 years. It shows the very significant, widespread, negative impact of government policies and actions on Milwaukee's Black population since the city was established. This historical context is important to consider as a part of the assessment process.

Assessment Activities

OEI's racial equity assessment process included multiple assessment activities and perspectives from city departments, employees, and community stakeholders. This includes a racial equity assessment of city departments, a citywide racial equity employee survey, a review of the city's community engagement practices, a language access survey of city departments, and the Region of Choice Public Partners Study, which focused specifically on the experiences of city employees of color. Additional details on these activities is provided below.

Racial Equity Assessment	In December 2021 all city departments were asked to complete a racial equity assessment. The assessment is a set of questions designed to assist department staff in assessing racial equity within their department. It was developed using examples from other cities including the City of Portland, non-governmental organizations, and resources from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) with input from the city's REI Leadership Team. It includes six areas of focus: (1) commitment, (2) leadership and management, (3) workforce, (4) budgeting and contracting, (5) community access, involvement and partnership, and (6) data and evaluation. Completed assessments were submitted to OEI for review and shared with the city's Inspector General. A total of 26 assessments were completed, representing nearly all city departments and Department of Administration divisions.
Racial Equity Employee Survey	In February 2022 OEI partnered with Marquette University's Center for Urban Research, Teaching & Outreach (CURTO) to distribute a racial equity survey to all city of Milwaukee employees. The purpose of the survey is to assess the knowledge, skills, and experiences of city employees related to race and equity. The survey was developed by GARE and has been implemented by local governments throughout the country. A total of 1,064 survey responses from city employees were analyzed, representing a response rate of approximately 18%.
Community Engagement Practices	In late 2021 the city of Milwaukee engaged consultants with Consilience Group to facilitate a dialogue with city department staff and community groups to understand current community engagement practices throughout city government and the community's perspectives of those practices. This work was done in an effort to establish a shared understanding of authentic community engagement and guiding principles for the city's community engagement efforts. Participants in this process included members of the city's REI Leadership Team and a small group of stakeholders from community-based organizations.
Language Access Survey	In the fall of 2021 city departments were surveyed to collect information on the type of language translation/interpretation services and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting that departments utilize, the use of bilingual staff within city government, and the costs associated with providing interpreting and translation services. A total of 22 city departments/divisions participated in the survey.
Region of Choice Public Partners Study	The Region of Choice Public Partners is a collective group of the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Milwaukee Area Technical College, and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District whose work is aligned with the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) Region of Choice Initiative. In the fall of 2020, P3 Development Group administered an online survey and virtual focus groups among city of Milwaukee employees of color. The study provided insights into challenges and opportunities related to the recruitment, retention and advancement of employees of color in the public sector workforce. A total of 411 survey responses from city of Milwaukee employees were collected.

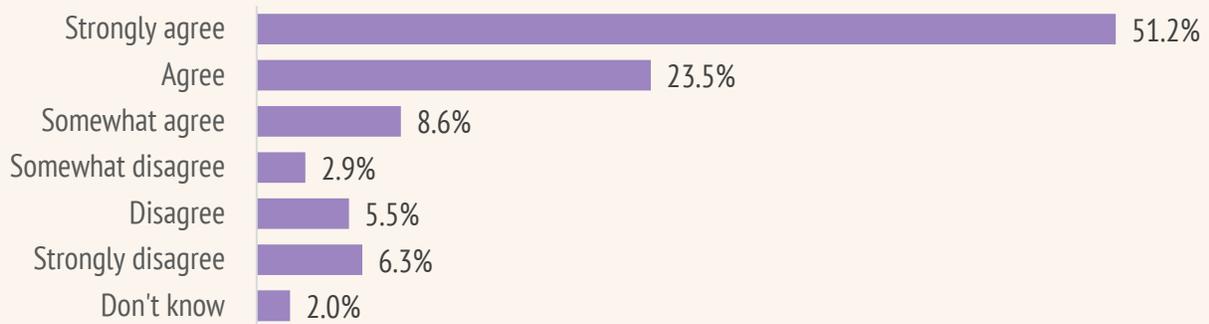
Assessment Results

Value of Racial Equity Work

The majority of city employees strongly agree that it is valuable to examine and discuss the impacts of race. Only 15% of employees surveyed either somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.

Employee survey

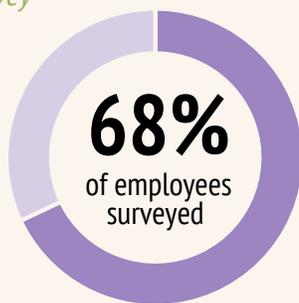
I think it is valuable to examine and discuss the impacts of race.



Commitment to Racial Equity

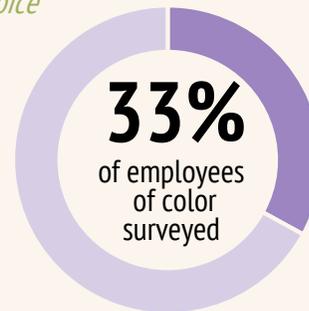
Two-thirds of city departments currently include or have started to include a commitment to racial equity in guiding statements such as mission, vision, and values or in department policies and practices, according to department assessments. And 68% of city employees surveyed agree that their department is committed to racial equity. However, survey results from the Region of Choice Public Partners Study show the potential for a disconnect between a commitment to racial equity and meaningful action. Just 33% of employees of color surveyed agree that leaders visibly support diversity and inclusion through their actions and not just words.

Employee survey



agree that their department is committed to racial equity

Region of choice study



agree that leaders visibly support diversity and inclusion through their actions and not just words

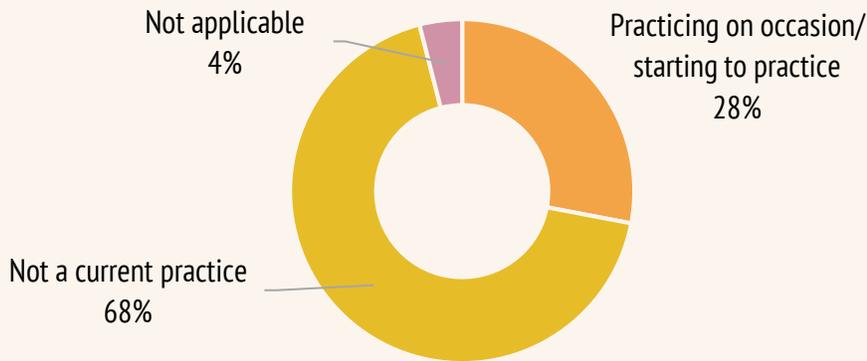
In terms of planned actions, several departments noted that work is currently in progress to develop and implement a racial equity action plan for their department. However, the majority of departments (72%) do not have a regularly updated racial equity action plan.

Leadership & Management

Using racial equity tools throughout city government can help to ensure that racial equity is consistently integrated into decision-making processes. Based on the assessments, several departments have started to consider or begin to use a tool in their decision-making processes, but the majority of city departments do not currently use racial equity tools. Overall, department responses indicate different levels of understanding about racial equity tools and how and when to use them.

Department assessments

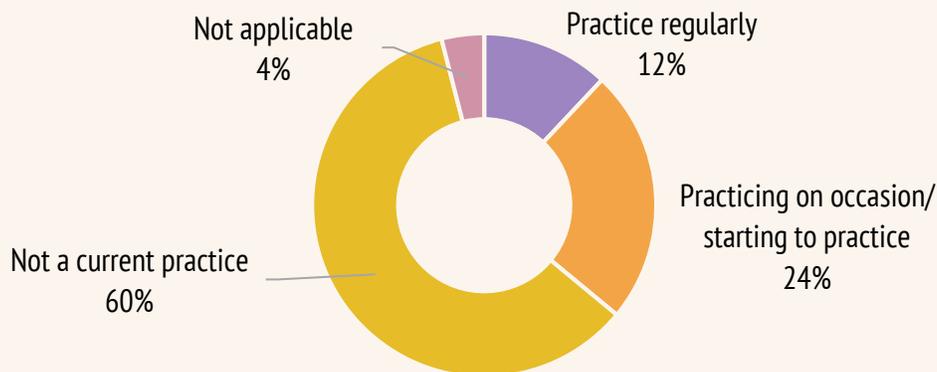
Leadership have and use a specific equity tool when making significant decisions, such as program planning, budgeting, and staffing decisions.



In addition to tools, some departments have created internal structures such as committees within their department to address racial equity issues. Examples of city departments with racial equity and inclusion committees include the Fire and Police Departments, Department of Public Works, and Milwaukee Water Works, among others.

Department assessments

Internal structures (for example, an equity committee) exist within the department to address issues of institutional racism

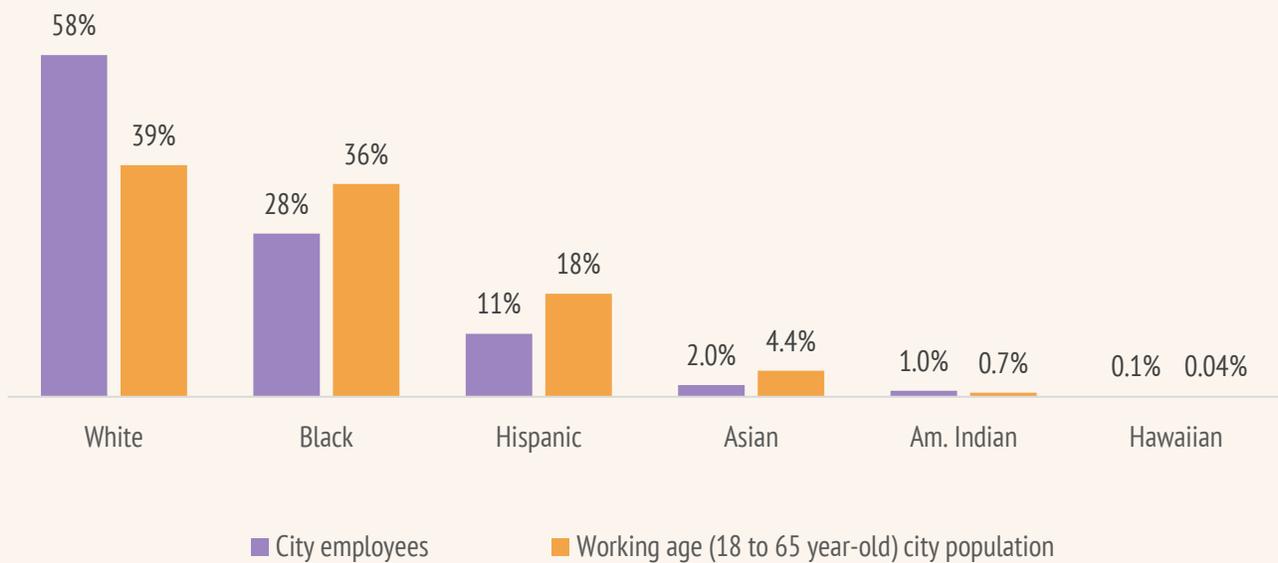


Workforce Diversity

In October 2021 OEI released a publicly available [City of Milwaukee Employee Workforce Demographics Dashboard](#). The dashboard provides a summary of data on city of Milwaukee employees by race/ethnicity, gender, generation, job category, and department as well as comparisons to the population of working age (18 to 65-year-old) Milwaukee residents.

As a whole, city employees represent a larger percentage of white workers and a smaller percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Asian workers, compared to the population of working age Milwaukee residents. For example, 28% of the city's workforce is Black, while 36% of the city's working age population is Black.

City employees vs. city population (working age residents)



Sources: Department of Employee Relations (Sept 2021); 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Within city government, general city departments represent a larger percentage of employees of color, compared to employees in the fire and police departments. And city employees who live in the city of Milwaukee represent a larger percentage of employees of color, compared to non-resident employees.

Workforce diversity is one of the most common racial equity priorities identified by departments in their racial equity assessments. Over half of departments indicate that strategies are in place to recruit employees of color and/or bilingual employees. A smaller proportion of departments noted that strategies are in place to retain and develop employees of color and/or bilingual employees once they are hired. The assessments highlight the key role of the Department of Employee Relations and the diversity recruiter position in recruitment and hiring processes, particularly for general city departments.

Employee Knowledge & Skills

In addition to workforce diversity, employee knowledge and skills related to racial equity is an important workforce need. Racial equity training opportunities for employees have been fairly limited to date. In 2021 a total of 126 city employees and elected officials participated in a racial equity leadership training through YWCA Southeastern Wisconsin. This training was primarily offered to employees in manager level positions and members of the city's REI Leadership Team. Departments also encourage staff to use tuition reimbursement for training and provide notice of opportunities when they occur, but note that additional training is needed. Another complicating factor identified in the assessments is the lack of performance appraisals, due to the elimination of performance-based pay, which makes it difficult to assess employee progress on racial equity knowledge, skills, or goals.

The results of the employee survey also indicate a need for additional direction, guidance, and training on racial equity. When employees were asked, "I would become more active in advancing racial equity in my department if", the most popular response was "I had more information, so I knew what to do" followed by "I received training".

Employee survey

I would become more active in advancing racial equity in my department if
(select all that apply):



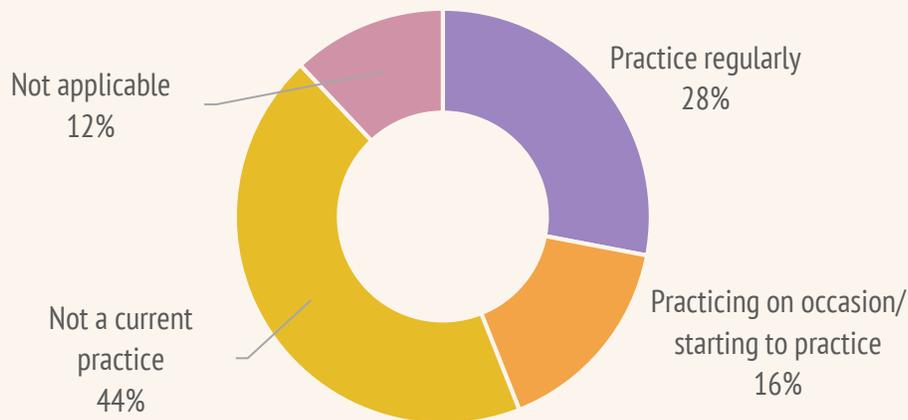
Budgeting & Contracting

Budgeting

Significant demands on resources and staff time impact department efforts to advance racial equity, according to department assessments. 28% of departments regularly allocate resources to addressing documented racial/ethnic inequities, and 16% of departments indicate that this is starting to happen or happens on occasion. Additionally, the Budget office has expressed interest in incorporating racial equity into the annual budget process, which has the potential to impact resource allocation for racial equity citywide.

Department assessments

Department resources have been allocated to respond to documented racial/ethnic inequities



Contracting

Bid incentives such as the Socially-Responsible Contractors (SRC) Program and the Local Business Enterprise (LBE) and Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Programs are designed to address some known disparities, but the incentives do not specifically address race and are not frequently utilized. Work also has been done in recent years to remove participation barriers and increase contracting opportunities to minority owned businesses.

To further this effort, the city has engaged Griffin & Strong, P.C to conduct a disparity study to determine whether there is a disparity between the percentage of minority and women owned firms that are available to provide goods and services to the city and the city's utilization of those firms. The study began in January 2021 and is anticipated to conclude in the summer of 2022. Griffin & Strong will prepare a final report of its research findings and recommendations to the city of Milwaukee regarding the inclusion of minority and women owned firms in its procurement process.

Community Access & Engagement

One significant aspect of community access to city government is language access. Many departments report ongoing and concerted efforts to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate materials to the community. Yet a review of language translation services across city departments shows that services are not standardized across departments and the cost of providing services is considerable. For example, the city spent over \$640,000 in 2021 for interpreting and translation services for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and ASL interpretation. This is likely an underestimate because some departments did not report all interpreting/translation service expenses.

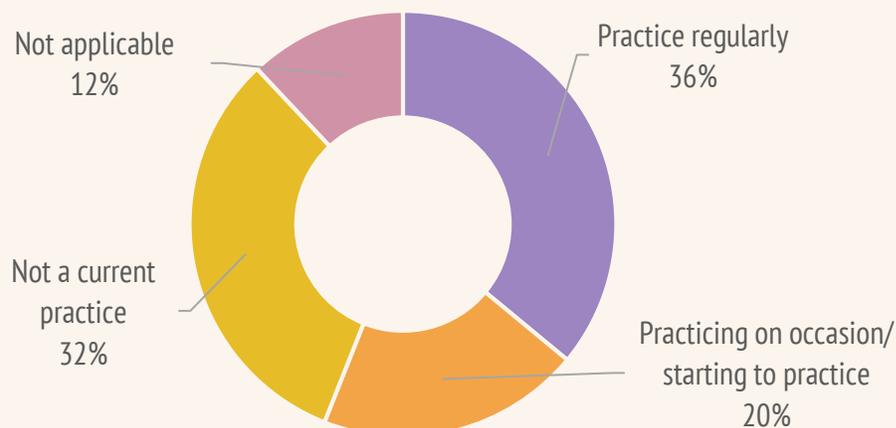
In addition to access, authentic community engagement in city government decision-making processes plays an important role in advancing racial equity. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a spectrum of public participation that ranges from informing the public on one end of the spectrum, to empowering the public to make the final decision on the other end of the spectrum, as shown below.



City community engagement efforts fall widely along the spectrum of participation, both within and between departments. Most city practices for community engagement fall between “inform” and “consult”. Furthermore, 36% of departments indicate that representatives from communities of color are participants in the development of programs, policies, or services that impact them, with 20% of departments indicating that this is starting to happen or happens on occasion. Community groups emphasized a need for consistency, accountability, and follow through from the city regarding its community engagement activities.

Department assessments

Representatives from communities of color are participants in the development of programs, policies, or services that impact them.

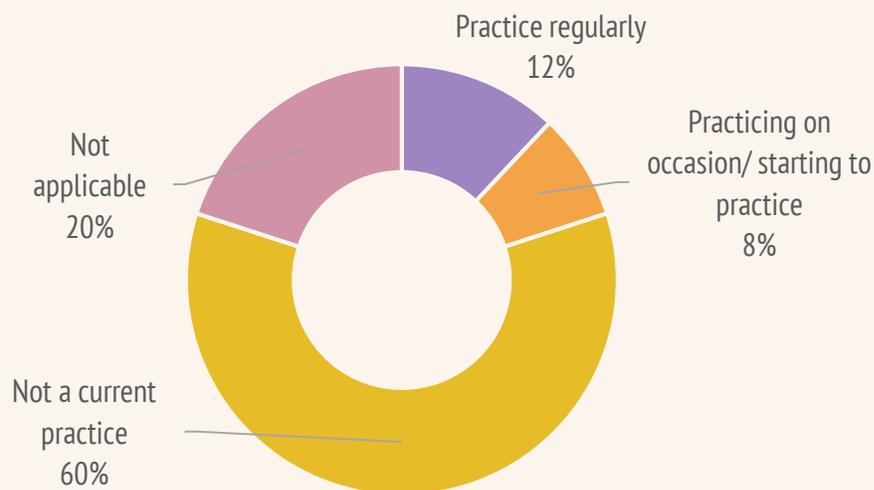


Data & Evaluation

Data plays a key role in government’s ability to advance racial equity. As the 2021 Biden/Harris Executive Order 13985 on advancing racial equity notes, “Many Federal datasets are not disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, income, veteran status, or other key demographic variables. This lack of data has cascading effects and impedes efforts to measure and advance equity. A first step to promoting equity in Government action is to gather the necessary data to inform that effort.” This same principle also applies to city government. Yet the collection and analysis of disaggregated demographic data varies considerably across city departments.

Department assessments

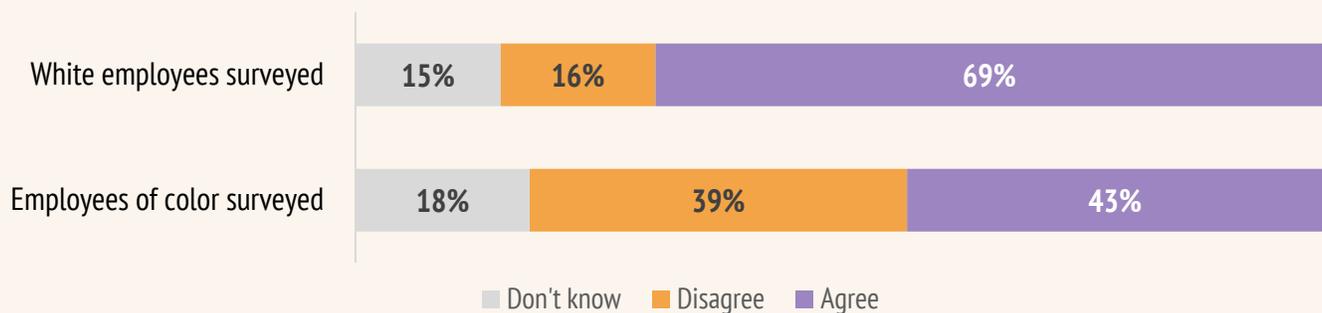
Racial equity is integrated into department performance measures



Notably, most departments have not integrated racial equity into performance measures and have not yet developed methods to measure the effectiveness of their racial equity work. Without clear mechanisms for assessing the city’s racial equity work, it is difficult to determine whether we are making progress. This is reflected in responses from the city’s racial equity employee survey. Although 69% of white employees surveyed agree that city government is making progress advancing racial equity, a smaller percentage of employees of color surveyed agree with that statement.

Employee survey

City government is making progress advancing racial equity



Key Findings

The following findings reflect common citywide themes and trends observed across OEI's various racial equity assessment activities:

- **There is a need for additional direction, guidance, and training on racial equity.** Racial equity training opportunities for most employees have been limited and employees report that they would become more active in advancing racial equity if they had more information so that they knew what to do.
- **Department experience with racial equity tools and how to apply them is limited.** The majority of departments do not use racial equity tools to guide decision-making, and assessment responses indicate different levels of understanding about racial equity tools and how and when to use them.
- **Significant demands on staff time and resources impact department efforts to advance racial equity.** Departments noted budget constraints, lack of necessary infrastructure, staffing shortages, and competing demands for time as examples of challenges to performing activities such as racial equity analysis, data collection, and community engagement.
- **Readiness to develop equity action plans varies considerably across departments.** Some departments have made progress advancing their racial equity work, while others would likely benefit from additional training and support before attempting to create a department equity action plan.
- **Commitments to advancing racial equity must be accompanied by meaningful action.** Several departments have started to incorporate a commitment to racial equity into guiding statements such as mission, vision, and goals. It is essential that these commitments go hand in hand with concrete actions to advance racial equity.

Next Steps

- **Update citywide racial equity goals and priorities**

In the summer of 2020 the city developed a City of Milwaukee 2020-2021 Racial Equity Action Plan which outlined several citywide racial equity goals. Since the plan was developed nearly two years ago, the city created the Office of Equity and Inclusion, the position of Chief Equity Officer, and the citywide Racial Equity and Inclusion (REI) Leadership Team. Given these developments and the insights gained in the racial equity assessment process, OEI plans to lead a process to review and update the city's racial equity goals and priorities. This will ensure that the city's racial equity efforts are aligned across initiatives and departments, particularly as departments develop racial equity action plans.

- **Expand racial equity training and support for city employees**

As the city advances its racial equity work, training will continue to be an important part of normalizing and operationalizing racial equity in city government. This includes training for city employees on key racial equity concepts as well as how to apply a racial equity framework and racial equity tools to decision-making processes. The use of a racial equity tool incorporates practices such as community engagement, the identification and measurement of equitable outcomes, and data analysis, all of which are important skillsets for city employees in decision-making roles. In May 2022 the common council approved a carryover request allocating \$150,000 for racial equity and inclusion training which will help to fund expanded training opportunities.

- **Continue to build on existing city racial equity efforts**

In recent years the city has worked to develop its racial equity infrastructure and initiatives at both the citywide and department levels. Moving forward OEI and the REI Leadership Team will continue to guide and coordinate broader citywide racial equity initiatives as well as support efforts within individual departments. For example, OEI is currently leading an effort to standardize language translation services across city departments. In addition, OEI will continue to serve as a resource and consultant to city departments and offices, and support their work to review policies, programs and initiatives using a racial equity framework.

Appendices

For additional details and data from the racial equity assessment and racial equity employee survey, please see the following appendices.

- Appendix 1: Racial Equity Assessment Form
- Appendix 2: Department Racial Equity Assessment Responses
- Appendix 3: Racial Equity Employee Survey Results



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