



CEASE HARM COMPREHENSIVE AUDIT

IMPACTING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS JANUARY 2024

PRELIMINARY KEY HARM FINDINGS

- **Insufficient data-driven practices to determine the level of Black and African-American participation/representation in County and City opportunities.**
- **Insufficient data-driven evaluation of the equitable use of funds allocated to non-profits and partnership programs.**
- **County and City governments lack wide-scale racial equity training to create baseline knowledge of equitable practices.**
- **There is a limited affordable housing supply for purchase or rent throughout the County and City.**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is a persistent utilization of repeat vendors limiting opportunities for minority-owned businesses. However, the County and City are concerned about small business readiness to effectively respond to procurement needs.

Recommendations

- Develop a Utilization & Industry Dashboard that captures City and County procurement spent dollars over a selected period.
- Conduct a Disparity Study for Inclusive Procurement Practices in Buncombe County.
- Establish a Buncombe County Black Chamber of Commerce.

EDUCATION

The County and City could not clearly determine the effectiveness of early childhood grant dollars (BC) and strategic partnerships (COA) in improving the developmental milestones of students and closing the opportunity gap.

Recommendations

- Require a universal assessment tool for early childhood education grant funded programs.
- Streamlined reporting process that measures representation, access, program effectiveness, and awareness campaigns.

HOUSING

The City's Black homeownership gap is at 31.9%, #151 highest among all metro areas nationwide. There is limited affordable housing supply for purchase or renting within the City where 40% of vacant homes are seasonal. The City also has the highest rent in the state amongst major North Carolina cities at \$1,717 monthly.

Recommendations

- Expand housing inventory in collaboration with developers or orgs that focus only on building affordable, efficient housing.
- Develop a joint housing commission consisting of County, City, the Housing Authority, and other stakeholders.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Food Access. Nearly one-third of Black households in the County do not have consistent access to enough nutritious food. Food insecurity rate for Black households is 29% compared to 14% for white households.

Recommendations

- Increase the number of Indoor Winter Markets to increase food access during colder months.
- Develop a Healthy Corner Store Initiative to provide healthier options in foods insecure Black communities.
- Develop health and fitness challenges such as walking or biking campaigns to encourage residents in regular physical activity and adopt healthy habits.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The County and City Law enforcement personnel have received basic training and mandatory in-service training. APD requires an annual mandatory bias training. However, all trainings lack measurable requirements, which could result in biased behaviors in law enforcement practices.

Recommendations

- Implement skills assessments in the form of measurable scenario-based recorded training and pre-and-post testing to capture overall proficiency and competency.
- Utilize volunteer citizens to participate in scenario-based training to encourage both peer and citizen review and to ensure transparency.

INTERNAL WORKFORCE

The County receives nearly 8,000 applications annually, hires about 350 employees, and has 1,700 total positions. The City receives nearly 6,549 applications annually, hires about 372 employees, and has 1,290 total positions. Both the County and City lack consistency in their hiring and promotion processes.

Recommendations

- Update/develop a hiring manager and interview panel policy and procedures.
- Conduct an annual employee engagement survey.
- Develop a Women's focused leadership program to support the advancement of women of color for the City.

EQUITY, INCLUSION, & HUMAN RIGHTS

The County's Equity & Human Rights Office has an established Equity & Inclusion Workgroup with representation from 30 County departments. The office supports affinity groups and has a mandatory 8-hour racial equity training for department heads and supervisors.

The City's Equity and Inclusion Office manages the equity dashboard that provides data on the workforce, business inclusion, racial healing, and professional development training. The office oversees the Policy Equity Analysis Team, which conducts policy reviews. Racial equity courses are not mandatory for all staff to complete.

Recommendations

- Collaborate with Human Resources to conduct an annual comprehensive data collection of key employee metrics.
- Collaborate with Human Resources to conduct an annual employee engagement survey.
- The City should require racial equity training for all staff.

It's not the problem that counts. It's THE SOLUTION.

