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RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN



BUNCOMBE COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA



RACIAL **EQUITY** ACTION **PLAN 2025**

Developed by Equity & Inclusion Workgroup | Effective July 1, 2021

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

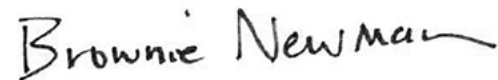
When my colleagues on the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners declared racism a public health and safety crisis in August of 2020, it signaled the confluence of a legislative commitment to dismantling systemic racism within Buncombe County governmental operations with meaningful community action. Not only does this plan set out to address the urgent priority areas identified in the Resolution to Support Community Reparations for Black People in Buncombe County, it also upholds our commitment to creating safe and equitable community that is outlined in our Non-Discrimination Ordinance.

When the COVID-19 global pandemic struck in March of 2020, disparities in Buncombe County widened, with Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities disproportionately affected. Not only were our BIPOC communities suffering more from the economic devastation, but they also were more likely to be impacted by the virus, with disproportionate death rates among our Native, Black, and Latinx populations.

The crisis of the pandemic intersected with the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless other BIPOC people, and the need for a Buncombe County Racial Equity Action Plan only grew. With hate crimes on the rise against members of our Asian community, the need for action is immediate.

The work outlined in this plan is long overdue. We recognize that the land Buncombe County sits on is originally the homeland of the Cherokee as well as the Yuchi, and it is our County's responsibility to ensure the atrocities of the past have no place in our future.

Sincerely,



Brownie Newman
Buncombe County Commission Chair

LETTER FROM THE COUNTY MANAGER

While the 2025 Buncombe County Strategic Plan places equity as both a foundational focus area and a value, none of the stated goals or objectives can be met without first developing a Racial Equity Action Plan to help us create the path there.

In Early 2020, Buncombe County staff formed an Equity & Inclusion Workgroup. Our staff applied to volunteer for three-year terms to help not only build that path, but also create the measures that help us stay the course to meet the goals outlined in this plan.

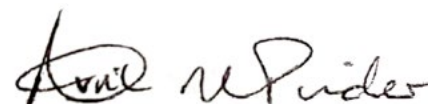
Our Equity & Inclusion Workgroup is focused on building a sustainable culture of equity, diversity and inclusion in our community. While inequities and lack of inclusion exist across all areas - race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and more, we are beginning with racial equity because of pronounced disparities in this area. Because we know that there are the largest disparities by race across all sectors, focusing on racial equity helps us to get our systems and structures in place in order to improve all types of equity.

This Racial Equity Action Plan is just the next step of deliberate and intentional work to build community resiliency. It is built upon the foundation of:

- **Isaac Coleman Economic Community Investment and Tipping Point Grants, which work to build equitable opportunity**
- **A 2018 Community Health Assessment with cross-sector collaboration to undo racism**
- **The Justice Resource Advisory Council and the Safety & Justice Challenge funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**
- **2025 Buncombe County Strategic Plan**
- **August 2020 Resolution by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners declaring Racism a Public Health and Safety Crisis**
- **August 2020 Resolution by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners committing to Community Reparations**
- **April 2021 Non-Discrimination Ordinance approved by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners**

The success of this plan is contingent on Buncombe County leadership, employees, and residents connecting to this work and holding Buncombe County Government accountable. Together, we will grow as champions, teachers, and connectors for equity.

This plan was not the work of Buncombe County staff alone. It was developed over the course of a year, then shaped by employee and community input. With Board adoption, our Equity & Inclusion Workgroup will assign timelines, establish performance measures, and hold ourselves accountable through a public dashboard to track our progress toward real racial equity.



Avril Pinder
Buncombe County Manager



COMMUNITY

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

CREATE PATHWAYS TO ENSURE ENGAGEMENT IN RACIAL EQUITY STRATEGIES THAT IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

Assess current state of racial disparities

1. Compile and review existing data on equity and community outcomes
2. Review an array of community assessment tools, and consider industry best practices in selecting a methodology
3. Hold an asset planning/mapping process to assess work occurring in the community around equity, specific to the four County strategic focus areas
4. Ensure completion of a racial equity community assessment

Accountability

- Budget
- Equity Data Support Team
- Finance
- Performance Management
- Equity & Inclusion Workgroup

Support and expand community partnerships in equity programs and efforts for high impact and better outcomes

1. Partner with municipal governments, school systems, and other organizations to coordinate and align equity efforts around all community areas (such as educational opportunity gap, housing, employment, health, justice, etc.)
2. Convene input sessions/forums with leaders from (BIPOC) communities
3. Involve communities in creating BIPOC history programming
4. Utilize models for compensating community members for community participation, where possible

Increase diverse representation on Buncombe County Boards and Commissions

1. Develop an equitable application and selection process for advertisement and appointment to boards and commissions
2. Revise and expand communication methods and channels regarding boards and commissions to increase, and sustain maximum levels of diverse community participation
3. Improve access to board meetings (e.g. time of meetings, transportation to meetings, child care, translated announcements/materials) and publish meeting minutes and recordings
4. Align board and commission processes with an equity-based approach
5. Develop racial equity training for boards and commissions including orientation to equity action plan and annual survey of demographic makeup
6. Conduct annual survey of boards and commissions
7. Create process for engaging residents in county government to form a pool for potential applicants for boards and commissions

Accountability

- Communications & Public Engagement
- County Manager's Office
- Economic Development
- Justice Services
- Planning
- Public Libraries
- Strategic Partnerships
- Equity & Inclusion Workgroup

Accountability

- Clerk's Office
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Countywide Racial Equity Training Team
- Human Resources
- Performance Management
- Equity & Inclusion Workgroup



COMMUNITY

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

PROVIDE RACIAL EQUITY EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMUNITY

Create authentic, honest, transparent *communication* around racial equity

1. Create dialogue to advance racial justice through a multi-media campaign to foster public engagement
2. Utilize asset-based language/framing in our data communications
3. Transform county archives – Special Collections at Pack Memorial Library – to be more inclusive & welcoming with a focus on local Black history
4. Improve language access for all non-English and English as a Second Language community members
5. Increase the BIPOC community's awareness of and opportunity to engage in the democratic process
6. Update tools to better connect with today's community demographics
7. Ensure internal and local capacity development and investment in equity-based communications to include inclusive imagery in our assets
8. Enhance access and transparency for all public meetings, including boards and commissions

Accountability

- Clerk's Office
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Election Services
- Public Libraries

Create authentic, honest, transparent community *engagement* around racial equity

1. Create an equity landing page on county website to promote data transparency and accountability and solicit community feedback
2. Increase and maintain information on community initiatives engaged in racial equity work
3. Host trainings for community and stakeholders
4. Develop an outreach plan to get community input on county initiatives
5. Move from iterative, project-based outreach to ongoing engagement

Accountability

- Communications & Public Engagement
- Countywide Racial Equity Training Team
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Performance Management
- Public Libraries
- Strategic Partnerships





COMMUNITY

QUALITY OF LIFE

IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE OUTCOMES THROUGH RACIAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

Improve housing outcomes for the most impacted communities

1. Target funding to address specific affordable housing needs for BIPOC populations, ensuring geographic regions and specific populations receive the appropriate housing intervention
2. Revise the County's affordable housing strategy in light of changing housing needs to address BIPOC population needs across all age groups
3. Recommend strategies to address any gaps in service in meeting the needs of the chronically homeless and those experiencing mental health conditions in BIPOC populations
4. Review developmental ordinances to determine if BIPOC populations are disproportionately and harmfully impacted by their application
5. Collaborate with local, state and federal entities, as well as community partners, to create affordable housing for BIPOC populations and eliminate barriers to fair housing
6. Provide BIPOC populations with access to home repair and energy efficiency services
7. Sustain and expand rates of BIPOC homeownership

Accountability

- Health & Human Services
- Planning
- Performance Management
- Sustainability
- Tax Collections

Enhance equitable economic drivers

1. Expand Black business ownership in the community
2. Support workforce development initiatives that address earnings and wealth gap
3. Support developmental programs that increase graduation rates
4. Expand enrollment opportunities and participation in early childhood education
5. Strengthen education partnerships to reduce college and career readiness gaps

Improve justice outcomes for the most impacted communities

1. Partner with community, schools and justice system to end the school-to-prison pipeline and prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system
2. Work with justice stakeholders and community partners to develop and implement a plan to reduce community violence and increase community safety
3. Enhance community safety by providing trauma-informed criminal justice responses for the Black community
4. Develop crisis response plan and initiative that reduces arrest rates for low-level offenses
5. Provide opportunities for culturally competent and diverse programming/service options for BIPOC communities served by the Family Justice Center and the Coordinated Community Response to Domestic and Sexual Violence; for both survivors and individuals using harm (offenders)
6. Coordinate with justice and community partners to reduce adult and juvenile recidivism and enhance reentry planning and programming

Accountability

- Economic Development
- Health & Human Services
- Strategic Partnerships

Accountability

- Emergency Services
- Health & Human Services
- Justice Services
- Performance Management
- Sheriff's Office



Improve wellness and recreation outcomes for the most impacted communities

1. Develop and invest in programs and marketing to encourage BIPOC communities to recreate outside
2. Consider cultural differences in how people use open and public space when developing or improving recreational amenities
3. Strive to partner with local outdoor industry partners on the expansion and diversification of the outdoor recreation industry

Accountability

- Agriculture & Land Resources
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Planning
- Recreation Services
- Tax Assessment

Improve health and human service outcomes for most impacted communities

1. Support new Black parents, families, and caregivers through community-based programs, peer support, and home visiting
2. Cultivate caregiver knowledge, develop outreach resources and referral, and provide information on healthy child development to parents and caregivers
3. Build culturally focused programming that builds resilience of youth and reduce negative risky behaviors
4. Increase trust and promote healing of BIPOC communities through public health initiatives
5. Expand access to behavioral health services in Buncombe County and reduce the stigma of behavioral health-related conditions in BIPOC communities
6. Implement strategies to reduce racial disparity in infant mortality and birth outcomes
7. Provide culturally aligned and racially equitable practices, responses, and interventions for all communities served by Child Protective Services
8. Improve support, training and resources geared towards maintaining and strengthening family units
9. Increase median household income for STEP graduates
10. Ensure residents can receive needed services and actively age in place, including guardianship for adult services
11. Assess participant data for overall Health & Human Service programs to ensure access and representation for BIPOC populations

Improve transportation outcomes for the most impacted communities

1. Evaluate access to education, jobs, social services, health care, and healthy food by location and, when modifying or expanding public transportation services, use that information to increase access for currently and historically disadvantaged populations
2. Promote development along existing public transportation routes, through land use regulations and development incentives
3. Evaluate public transit accessibility to government facilities offering social service and other public services
4. Work with smaller employers to expand rideshare distribution to BIPOC workers through outreach and incentive programs

Accountability

- Health & Human Services
- Emergency Services
- Planning

Accountability

- Planning
- Recreation Services
- Economic Development
- Health & Human Services
- Agriculture and Land Resources
- Communications and Public Engagement



Recruit, engage, and retain a workforce for Buncombe County in ways that ensure equitable opportunities

1. Implement equitable hiring and recruitment practices
2. Create equity lens tools and other resources for all staff
3. Create Equal Employment Opportunity statement and plan for Buncombe County Human Resources, and ensure it is communicated to staff and the public
4. Ensure race/ethnicity and gender makeup matches demographic data (of Census and/or population served) at every level and department of the organization
5. Apply Government Alliance on Race and Equity racial equity tools to all Human Resource practices, including compensation, advancement opportunities, disciplinary actions and employee engagement
6. Create internal hiring and advancement opportunities via training opportunities

Accountability

- Human Resources
- Economic Development
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Equity & Inclusion Workgroup

FOUNDATIONAL

EQUITY LEARNING AND SUPPORT

CULTIVATE A THRIVING WORKFORCE WITHIN BUNCOMBE COUNTY THAT ENSURES RACIAL EQUITY

Implement and provide ongoing racial equity learning and support for staff

1. Perform an institutional needs assessment using Government Alliance on Race and Equity's Racial Equity Assessment Tool
2. Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development sessions for all staff
3. Establish and support the work of employee affinity groups that are aligned to the county's mission and values
4. Develop and communicate racial equity values for Buncombe County staff

Accountability

- Communications & Public Engagement
- Countywide Racial Equity Training Team
- Human Resources
- Equity & Inclusion Workgroup

Create internal racial equity training for Buncombe County Commissioners

1. Develop training around culture, norms, and equity, diversity, and inclusion specific to Buncombe County Commissioners
2. Provide commissioners with tools for interviewing and selecting boards and committees based on best practice

Accountability

- Clerk to the Board
- Countywide Racial Equity Training Team
- Human Resources



FOUNDATIONAL

EQUITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

INSTITUTE ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND PROCESSES TO ENSURE EQUITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Establish organizational equity and accountability processes to increase capacity to make data informed decisions

1. Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making in the development of management recommendations
2. Establish a methodology for equity-focused data review
3. Create a transparent data system that reports and analyzes all equity, diversity, and inclusion progress/regression

Develop equitable policies and procedures for Buncombe County

1. Work with Commissioners & County leadership to implement and revise policies that have been vetted with an equity lens
2. Actively participate in legislative agenda to advance racial equity outcomes for Buncombe County
3. Ensure policies and procedures are transparent and easily accessible to all staff
4. Review County Personnel Ordinance through an equity lens to ensure that there is an appropriate level of non-discrimination and harassment protections for employees and sufficient consequences for non-compliance
5. Review County ordinances with an equity lens and present recommended changes to County Commissioners
6. Implement structures for adherence to Buncombe County's non-discrimination ordinance
7. Ensure the Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan's long-term goals uphold the County's commitment to dismantling racist and discriminatory land use and transportation systems

Accountability

- Clerk's Office
- Human Resources
- Legal
- Performance Management
- Policy Management Team

Accountability

- Countywide Racial Equity Training Team
- Equity Data Support Team
- Information Technology
- Performance Management
- Equity & Inclusion Workgroup



FOUNDATIONAL

EQUITY-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

ESTABLISH BUNCOMBE COUNTY AS AN EQUITY INCLUSION MODEL

Support and encourage supplier diversity

1. Create a procurement program and tools that ensure underrepresented groups are solicited and represented, with emphasis on local suppliers
2. Review and audit contract terms and language using equity lens
3. Explore expanded sub-contracting opportunities
4. Provide racial equity training for vendors
5. Teach minority business owners about the vendor application process
6. Maintain a database of available businesses owned by BIPOC individuals and use in procurement, training, and networking outreach opportunities

Accountability

- Communications & Public Engagement
- Countywide Racial Equity Training Team
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Information Technology

Increase equity-based County budgeting decisions

1. Assess all fee structures to identify opportunities to create a more equitable structure
2. Demonstrate inclusion of historically underrepresented communities in program and budget planning
3. Implement the use of an equity impact analysis tool for county department budget requests and identify where budget changes impact communities of color, low income residents, and limited-English speaking populations; and, if the impacts are negative, identify ways to address and mitigate those impacts
4. Ensure budgetary decisions align with the County's strategic plan and incorporate the actions of this equity action plan

Accountability

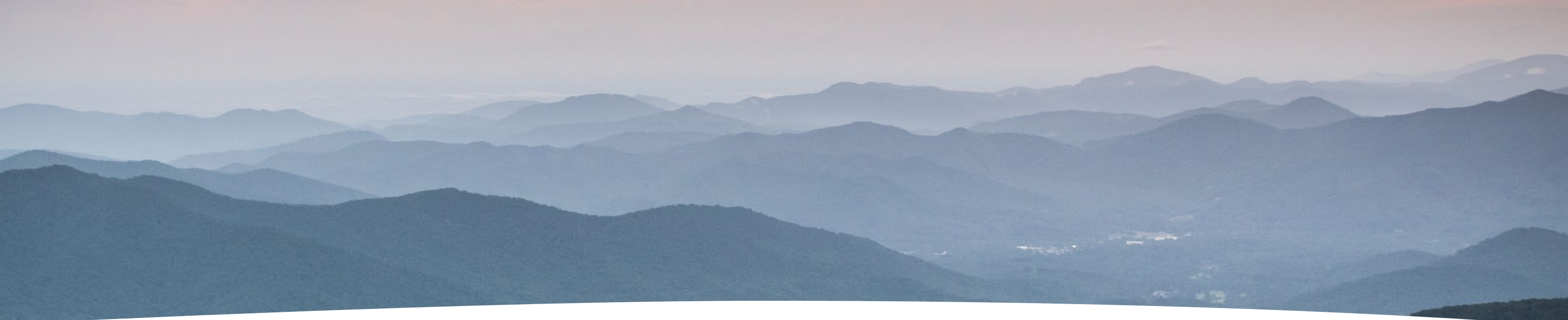
- Budget
- Finance
- Performance Management

Assess and identify opportunities to ensure minimized barriers to technology and communication

1. Identify and pilot public/private partnerships that increase the delivery of broadband services to underserved communities, especially low-income qualifying residents
2. Assess the County's digital equity baseline & develop a digital equity vision along with goals, strategies, approaches, and initiatives that comprise an action plan for Buncombe County
3. Audit County webpages to ensure culturally sensitive language and information and accessibility; document and recommend revisions or deletions

Accountability

- Communications & Public Engagement
- Economic Development
- Information Technology



EQUITY CONCEPTS & TERMS

BIPOC

BIPOC is an acronym for 'Black, Indigenous, People of Color,' and it is meant to unite all people of color in the work for liberation while intentionally acknowledging that not all people of color face the same levels of injustice.

EQUITY

Equity is defined as the state of being just, impartial and fair. Racial equity is achieved when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.

IMPLICIT OR UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

This refers to the unconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain social group. Shaped by experience and based on learned associations between particular qualities and social categories, including race and/or gender. Individuals' perceptions and behaviors can be influenced by the implicit stereotypes they hold, even if they are unaware/unintentionally hold such stereotypes.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity or numerical representation, inclusion often involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Institutional racism occurs within and between institutions (schools, mass media, etc.). Includes discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they act in ways that advantage and disadvantage people, based on race.

MICROAGGRESSION

Microaggression is a term that describes daily behavior (verbal or nonverbal) that communicates hostile or negative insults towards a group, either intentionally or unintentionally, particularly culturally marginalized groups. The three sub-types of Microaggressions include: Microassaults, Microinsults, and Microinvalidations. Microassaults are conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets. Microinsults include both verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. Microinvalidations in communications subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

This kind of racism lies underneath, all around and across society. It encompasses (1) history, providing the foundation for white supremacy; (2) culture, providing the normalization and replication of racism, and (3) interconnected institutions and policies providing the legitimacy and reinforcements to maintain and perpetuate racism.

SYSTEMIC RACISM

Systemic racism includes the policies and practices entrenched in established institutions, which result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups. No individual intent is necessary.

SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

This refers to discriminatory institutions, structures, norms, to name a few, that are embedded in the fabric of our society. Upheld by the various societal institutions such as culture, government, education, etc., are all complicit in the oppression of marginalized social groups while elevating dominant social groups.

WHITE FRAGILITY

Coined in 2011 by Robin DiAngelo, author of "White Fragility; Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism," white fragility is defined as "discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice."

Source: *Equality vs. Equity and Other Racial Justice Definitions*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Buncombe County Board of Commissioners:

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