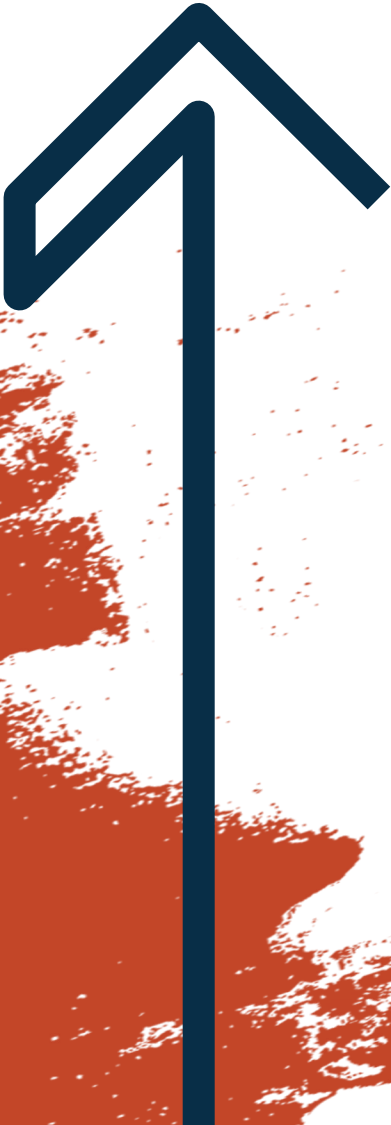


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# 2024 CEASE HARM

IMPACTING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

# COMPREHENSIVE AUDIT



## **Final Report**

April 1, 2024

### **Cease Harm Comprehensive Assessment Impacting the African American Community**

#### **Prepared for**

Buncombe County  
200 College Street  
Asheville, North Carolina 28801

City of Asheville  
P.O. Box 7148,  
Asheville, NC 28802

#### **Prepared by**

Carter Development Group  
P.O. Box 25294  
Tamarac, FL 33320-5294  
[www.carterdevgroup.com](http://www.carterdevgroup.com)  
[inclusion@carterdevgroup.com](mailto:inclusion@carterdevgroup.com)



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### Asheville-Buncombe County Project Management Team

The Cease Harm project management team was a core group of Buncombe County and City of Asheville employees responsible for providing logistic, administrative, and technical support to Carter Development Group, the research and consulting firm conducting the cease harm comprehensive audit.

#### Buncombe County

Dr. Noreal Armstrong  
Chief Equity & Human Rights  
Officer

DK Wesley  
Assistant County Manager

#### City of Asheville

Brenda Mills  
Equity & Inclusion Director, retired

Sala Menaya-Merritt  
Equity & Inclusion Director

Rachel Wood  
Assistant City Manager

---

### Carter Development Group

The Carter Development Group is a research, consulting, and inclusive leadership development firm specializing in strategic planning and change management for federal, state, county, and municipal governments, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and corporations. The following researchers and contributing authors conducted the Cease Harm assessment:

#### Project Lead

Dr. Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D.

#### Criminal Justice

Walter McDaniels, Ph.D.(c)  
Ricky Lebrun, M.S., M. Fin

#### Project Manager

Dr. La'Shana Wiggs, DBA

#### Economic Development

Dr. La'Shana Wiggs, DBA  
Adrienne Hibbert

#### Research Assistant

Dejannae Lang, Ph.D.(c)

#### Education

Jennifer Felton, M.S.  
Desmond Williams, M.A.

#### Internal Workforce

Dr. Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D.

#### Health & Wellness

Ashley Carter, M.S., RD, LDN  
Guillenne Smith, MSN-FNP

#### Equity, Inclusion, & Human Rights

Dr. Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D.

#### Housing

Beverly Cooper  
Ashley Jamieson, Esq., MPA, LLM  
Jonathan Moses

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## ABBREVIATIONS GUIDE

- ABFPC - Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council
- ABFPC - Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council
- ABI - Asheville Business Inclusion Office
- ABIPA - Asheville Buncombe Institute for Parity Achievement
- ACA - Regulations, the Affordable Care Act
- ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act
- AHSP - Affordable Housing Services Program
- AMI - area median income
- AP - Advanced Placement
- APD - Asheville Police Department
- ARHC - Asheville Regional Housing Consortium
- BAR - Board of Architectural Review
- BASA - Buncombe Aging Services Alliance
- BBE - Black Business Enterprise
- BBE - Black Business Enterprises
- BC - Buncombe County
- BCSO - Buncombe County Sheriff's Office
- BCU - Buncombe County University
- CAPE - Communication & Public Engagement
- CARE - Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency
- CAYLA - City of Asheville Youth Leadership Academy
- CDBG - Community Development Block Grant
- CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- CDFI - Community Development Financial Institution
- CDFI - Community Development Financial Institutions
- CDG - Carter Development Group
- CHA - Community Health Assessment
- CHIP - Community Health Improvement Plan
- CHW - Community Health Workers
- COA - City of Asheville
- CRC - Community Reparations Commission
- ECD - Office of Early Childhood Development
- ECOA - Equal Credit Opportunity Act
- EMS - emergency medical services
- FFATA - Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act
- FFLSA - Fair Labor Standards Act
- FLSA - Fair Labor Standards Act
- FPDS - Federal Procurement Data System
- GARE - Government Alliance on Racial Equity
- HBCUs - Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- HHS - Health and Human Services
- IFA - Impact Focus Area
- IFPHA - Institute for Preventive Healthcare & Advocacy
- IHP - Inclusive Hiring Partners
- JCPC - Buncombe County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council
- JCPC - Juvenile Crime Prevention Council
- LIEAP - Low-Income Energy Assistance Program
- MB Program - Minority Business Program
- MCCF - Mountain Community Capital Community Fund
- NAICS - North American Industry Classification System
- NBCC - National Black Chamber of Commerce
- NCDOA - North Carolina Department of Administration
- NHPA - National Historic Preservation Act
- NIGP - National Institute of Governmental Purchasing
- NMG - Neighborhood Matching Grant Program
- NOAH - Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing
- P.O.D.S - Positive Opportunities Develop Success
- PaYS - U.S. Military Partnership for Your Success Program
- PSC - Product Service Code
- PTSD - post-traumatic stress disorder
- PTSS - Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome
- R/ED - Racial and Ethnic Disparities
- R2S - Read to Succeed
- RFV - Request for Vendors
- SAHIE - Small Area Health Insurance Estimates
- SBE - small business enterprise
- SERV - Executive Resource Volunteers program
- SERV - Sheriff's Executive Resource Volunteers
- SIC - Standard Industrial Classification
- SMWBE - small women business enterprises
- SPF - Strategic Partnership Fund
- SPG - Strategic Partnership Grants
- STI - sexually transmitted infections
- UDO - Unified Development Ordinance
- USDA - United States Department of Agriculture
- USDA - United States Department of Agriculture

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**BLACK  
HISTORY**  
IN THE MAKING



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments' reparation resolutions aspire to cease the perpetuation of institutional processes resulting in racially disparate outcomes for African American residents. Recognizing the injustices endured by African Americans, these resolutions established the Community Reparations Commission to make short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations that will make significant progress toward repairing the damage caused by public and private systemic reasons. A comprehensive harm assessment of government services, policies, practices, procedures, and compliance with legal mandates was conducted to foster inclusive community building practices centered on trust, honor, and respect for African American residents.

This assessment unveiled racially disparate practices harming African American residents within various sectors, including criminal justice, economic development, education, health and wellness, and housing. A significant harm was the lack of data-driven practices in key government functions, which created a tangible vagueness in understanding the full impact of these practices and outcomes. Consequently, this highlighted the need to cultivate racially intelligent practitioners equipped with a mature equity lens to guide data collection and determine relevant metrics for the governments.

### **It's Not the Problem That Counts**

The results of the audit led to more than 100 recommendations across the impact focus areas and the development of five high-priority inclusive community building recommendations that include:

1. Designate Legacy Communities as Historic Districts
2. Increase Jurisdiction to Link Racial Equity Benchmarks to School District Funding
3. Develop Procurement Industry & Utilization Dashboard
4. Develop a Black Chamber of Commerce
5. Conduct Buncombe County Disparity Study

The impacts of racial harm extend beyond one area of life and instead infiltrate various settings and stages of life that comprise the social determinants of health. Health is holistic, including financial, social, environmental, and psychological. Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments and their residents can greatly benefit from the recommendations, which foster inclusivity and equity and center the African American community with opportunities for healthier outcomes across criminal justice, economic development, education, health and wellness, and housing. The study also reviewed the operational outcomes of the County and City's internal workforce/human resource operations and equity and inclusion offices.

### **Criminal Justice Overview**

The Buncombe County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) and the Asheville Police Department (APD) are proactive in fostering diversity in their workforce, particularly in non-sworn positions. Although disparities persist in specific roles, indicating areas for improvement, APD's recruitment efforts aim to attract diverse applicants. Still, there are notable disparities in the racial composition of critical agency positions, such as criminal investigators, compared to the demographic makeup of Asheville residents.

Both agencies offer extensive training programs for personnel. Yet, there needs to be more comprehensive data collection and evaluation mechanisms to assess the efficacy of diversity, equity, and inclusion training, posing risks of perpetuating biases. Disparities in traffic stops and searches,

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with the overrepresentation of Black individuals, raise concerns about potential biases in law enforcement practices. Additionally, the report highlights an increase in arrests involving African Americans, indicating potential disparities in law enforcement and judicial processes.

## **Economic Development Overview**

While programs like the Mountain Community Capital Fund and COVID Recovery Funding support underserved and underutilized entrepreneurs, challenges persist in accurately reporting program impact and ensuring equitable distribution of funds. Disparities in procurement opportunities are evident, with existing relationships and larger businesses often favored despite policies promoting minority business participation. Challenges in tracking, monitoring, and enforcing procurement policies highlight the need for improved data collection and policy adherence to foster inclusive economic growth.

In non-profit and grant support, various initiatives like the One Buncombe Grant Program show promise, but data collection and reporting gaps hinder comprehensive assessment and transparency. Similarly, workforce development programs such as the Inclusive Hiring Partners and NextAVL aim to address employment barriers, but challenges like low participant interest and limited demographic data collection persist.

## **Education Overview**

Buncombe County's Early Childhood Fund supports early childhood education initiatives. It focuses on increasing enrollment slots, improving quality, diversifying the workforce, supporting families, and enhancing the overall early childhood education system. Similarly, the Strategic Partnership Fund (SPF) in the City of Asheville provides critical financial support to nonprofit organizations aligned with City Council Strategic Priorities, addressing various societal needs, including education.

While these initiatives reflect a commitment to inclusivity and collaboration, the lack of clarity regarding learning outcomes poses challenges in comprehensively assessing the impact of the early childhood fund strategies. Moving forward, enhancing the reporting process to include detailed information on student progress and the specific outcomes of funding strategies will ensure accountability and maximize the impact of these investments.

## **Health & Wellness Overview**

Health disparities are addressed throughout the Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan, targeting issues like birth outcomes, mental health, substance misuse, and chronic diseases. Community health programs and partnerships are vital in addressing various health concerns, such as family planning, immunization, mental health support, and chronic disease management. Currently, staff involved in these programs are not required to undergo racial equity training, which is crucial for ensuring that services are delivered in a manner sensitive to and inclusive of the community's diverse needs. Furthermore, essential operational metrics are not being tracked, such as service costs, staffing ratios to ensure adequate service delivery, monitoring appointment times and gaps, and service geographical locations.

Food insecurity, driven by economic constraints and limited food access, poses a significant challenge for households, particularly in low-income communities where transportation barriers intensify the issue.

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## **Housing Overview**

The housing landscape in Buncombe County and the City of Asheville is marked by efforts to ensure access to safe, affordable, and inclusive housing for all residents. Buncombe County offers various programs such as emergency repair assistance, rental and eviction assistance, down payment assistance, and energy assistance to support affordable housing, collaborating with nonprofit organizations to prevent homelessness among poor residents. Similarly, the City of Asheville prioritizes affordable housing through partnerships with regional housing consortia, federal funding programs, and developers.

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, including a significant gap in Black homeownership, escalating housing costs surpassing income growth, and a shortage of affordable rental units. The lack of unity among housing factions across the County and City governments and other key stakeholders further hinders the creation of a cohesive affordable housing plan.

## **Nevertheless, The Opportunity**

This report presents a profound opportunity for the Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments to engage in transformative initiatives toward equity and justice. The findings are not to blame but serve as an opportunity for inclusive community building.

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## BACKGROUND

For over two hundred fifty years, African Americans faced systemic, physical, and cultural oppression in the United States, beginning with chattel slavery. This oppression has continued across various periods, including ninety years of Jim Crow segregation, twenty-six years of federally sanctioned redlining, and fifty years of mass criminalization – often referred to as the *New Jim Crow* – which has perpetuated the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, health disparities and injustices have plagued the African American community for the same duration.

From homeowners' associations to the halls of the United States Congress, various levels of governance have actively participated in perpetuating discriminatory practices against African Americans. The story of Bruce's Beach in Southern California serves as a poignant example of anti-Blackness, White supremacy, and a prejudiced mindset that devalues the Black identity. In 1912, Willa and Charles Bruce purchased a beachfront property with the intention of establishing a small resort. However, as the popularity of the Bruce Beach Front resort grew, the couple encountered resistance and animosity from their White counterparts. H.D. Aaron, a white resident of Manhattan Beach, CA, wrote a letter to City Clerk Lewellyn Price requesting information about a property near the resort. The City Clerk's response underscored the systemic racism at play:

“Confidentially, there is something about that block that is quite a detriment to the neighborhood, and that is that there is a colored family who live the year around on lot 8, which faces the ocean. Every so often they have a coon picnic and it is attended by about seventy-five to one-hundred-and-fifty coon pullman porters and their friends. You can imagine how much this would depreciate property values in that neighborhood. It is the only colored family that lives within the corporate limits of Manhattan. If it wasn't for that fact, I would consider this a bargain at about the assessed valuation.” (2021 Bruce's Beach Task Force: History Subcommittee Report)

The Bruce's Beach Taskforce History Subcommittee Report highlighted that on January 3, 1924, the Manhattan Beach City Council passed Ordinance 263, exercising eminent domain to acquire the property for a public park. Subsequently, the city government officially assumed control of the property in 1929. Fast forward to 2022, Los Angeles County made the unprecedented decision to return the property to the descendants of the Bruce family. This was done under an agreement wherein the property would be leased back to the county for 24 months, with an annual rent of \$413,000. Additionally, the county retained the option to purchase the land for up to \$20 million. This landmark action to return unlawfully seized land to a Black family underscores the case for reparations.

At the state level, California has emerged as a leader in discussions on reparations. The California Reparations Task Force was established through California Assembly Bill 3121 in September 2020, with the mandate to study and formulate reparation proposals specifically for African Americans. After extensive examination of injustices perpetrated against African Americans across various institutions, the task force concluded its [final report](#) in June 2023.

In 1994, the Florida State legislature approved House Bill 591, establishing the Rosewood Family Scholarship Fund for descendants of the [Rosewood massacre](#) of 1923. This tragic event unfolded when a white female resident from a neighboring town reported an attack by an unidentified African American man, sparking gun battles between groups of white men and Black residents. The ensuing violence led to the destruction of the small Black community of 120 people, resulting in fatalities and

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forced relocation. The Washington Post highlights House Bill 591 as the first instance of a legislative body in the United States providing reparations to African Americans.

The inaugural municipal resolution for reparations, known as [Resolution 126-R-19](#), was passed by the Evanston City Council in November 2019. This resolution established the City of Evanston Reparations Fund and the Reparations Committee. Initially set at \$400,000, the fund has since grown, and as of August 2023, the City of Evanston had allocated \$1,092,924 in reparations funds through the Local Reparations Restorative Housing Program.

In April 2021, the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives voted to advance [H.R. 40](#), known as the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act, to the House floor for comprehensive deliberation. As noted by the Human Rights Watch organization, H.R. 40 has been introduced in every congressional session since 1989, but 2021 marked the first time it advanced to a committee vote.

In May 2023, U.S. Congresswoman Cori Bush introduced [H.Res.414](#), titled "Recognizing that the United States has a moral and legal obligation to provide reparations for the enslavement of Africans and its lasting harm on the lives of millions of Black people in the United States."

Reparation initiatives concerning African Americans have a historical precedent in the United States. In April 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, which emancipated enslaved individuals in Washington D.C. and provided compensation of up to \$300 to slaveowners for each freed individual. This legislation reflected the perception of freed slaves as property loss.

Throughout history, the enduring legacy of regarding African Americans as property has posed a challenge to the notion of whiteness while seeking to humanize Blackness. The Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 exemplifies this, as it determined that slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person for purposes of legislative representation and taxation, thus eliminating their status as full citizens. In the Carolinas' historical context, slaveowners were compensated for the "legal" execution of slaves, with the enslavers perceived as suffering a proprietary loss and entitled to seek compensation from the state.

The Dred Scott decision of 1857, rendered by the US Supreme Court, further underscored the dehumanization of enslaved individuals by denying them citizenship rights and any expectation of protection from the federal government or the judiciary. Similarly, the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896 upheld racial segregation as constitutional under the "separate but equal" doctrine. This decision paved the way for the enactment of Jim Crow laws, which legalized segregation across all public facilities, schools, transportation, and other spheres of society.

Scholar Dr. Joy DeGruy delineates the ramifications of anti-Blackness on African Americans as Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) – a form of multigenerational trauma akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, African Americans and those from the Diaspora are not the only ones impacted. Social scientist Dr. Adrian N. Carter characterizes both White and Black Americans as ensnared in a Protracted Identity Conflict, wherein both the oppressor and the oppressed grapple with an internal and institutional crisis marked by structural, cultural, and direct violence.

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The concepts of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome and Protracted Identity Conflict contextualize the intricate interplay of opposing forces: internalized racism among Black Americans and internalized privilege among White Americans. This dynamic has engendered significant disparities and marginalization for African Americans across all American institutions, including areas such as wealth accumulation, homeownership, academic attainment, employment, and legal representation. The same underpinning of racism that shaped and propelled the United States also permeates the collective consciousness of local governmental structures with an immense ability to profoundly impact the lives of African Americans today.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The City of Asheville and Buncombe County, NC, acknowledge the historical harm caused by systemic racism to African Americans presently in the community, as well as nationally. In their effort to uphold social justice, in July/August 2020, the [City of Asheville](#) and [Buncombe County](#), NC, each adopted a reparations resolution for African Americans. The historic passage of a reparation resolution was the second of its kind among U.S. cities and the first among U.S. counties.

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville further codified its commitment to reparations in March 2022 by enacting the Community Reparations Commission (CRC), a community-led body empowered to make short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations that will make significant progress toward repairing the damage caused by public and private systemic racism. The CRC works toward understanding the systemic impact on African Americans within five impact focus areas.

### IMPACT FOCUS AREAS



**Criminal Justice**



**Economic  
Development**



**Education**



**Health & Wellness**



**Housing**

The cease harm assessment aimed to identify Buncombe County and the City of Asheville's governments' impact on the cessation of harm against African Americans. The comprehensive review assessed:

- Policies, operational practices, performance, and outcomes across each impact focus area.
- Compliance with federal and state laws, regulatory bodies, codes of conduct, court orders, and consent decrees across each impact focus area.
- Programmatic functions of comparative counties, cities, and organizations.
- Supplemental documentation, including performance measures and the rubrics of the researched policies and/or programs.

The final report will support the Community Reparations Commission's efforts and provide insight and inclusive strategies to the County and City to prevent, reduce, and ultimately cease harm to the Black and African American community.

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## PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH: THE ELLISON MODEL

Racial equity initiatives are intended to shift organizational cultures to respectfully identify, understand, and repair the inequities historically marginalized groups confront. The Carter Development Group (CDG) utilizes The Ellison Model, a philosophical approach and methodology for inclusive community building, to arrive at this outcome.

The Ellison Model helps reduce racial harm by fostering inclusive leadership, promoting multicultural appreciation, and providing tools for conflict resolution that prioritize trust, honor, and respect for all individuals, regardless of race. Inclusive community building practices repair the social, economic, personal, political, and psychological environments where people live and work. Consequently, a key component of inclusive community building is the personal accountability elected officials, senior leaders, and personnel must embrace and embody. This requires a solution-focused heart and inclusive community building equity lens that challenges bias, stereotypes, and historical perspectives contributing to discommunity-building practices.

The Ellison Model framework also produces racially intelligent individuals and organizations that prioritize inclusive community building in their sphere of influence. The inclusive leader can then emerge as the right person in the right place at the right time, as seen through their allyship and advocacy for inclusive community building. The Ellison Model, created by sociologist Deryl G. Hunt, Ph.D., affirms it's not the problem that counts. It's the solution.

## DEFINING HARM

### **Disparity**

The unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, treatment, or outcomes among different racial or ethnic groups within a society. These disparities often result in one group experiencing advantages or disadvantages compared to another group solely based on their race or ethnicity.

### **Disproportionality**

The overrepresentation or underrepresentation of specific racial or ethnic groups in a particular context, such as institutions, systems, or outcomes, compared to their representation in the general population or other reference groups. This phenomenon highlights disparities in the distribution of resources, opportunities, treatment, or outcomes based on race or ethnicity.

### **Exclusion**

The deliberate act or systemic practice of preventing individuals or groups from participating in social, economic, political, or cultural activities, opportunities, or institutions solely because of their race or ethnicity. This exclusion can take various forms, including segregation, discrimination, marginalization, and prejudice, and can occur at individual and institutional levels.

### **Inequity**

The unfair and unjust treatment, distribution of resources, opportunities, or outcomes that systematically disadvantage or advantage individuals or groups based on their race or ethnicity. It signifies disparities in access to opportunities, services, and resources that stem from systemic racism, discriminatory policies, and historical injustices.

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## **Marginalization**

The process by which certain groups are pushed to the fringes of society, limiting their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes.

## **Racial Harm**

The negative impacts, disadvantages, or injustices experienced by individuals or communities due to a wide range of discriminatory actions, policies, and practices that systematically disadvantage or marginalize individuals based on their racial or ethnic identity.

## **Underutilization**

Systemic discrimination, bias, or unequal treatment that limits access to resources and opportunities for certain racial or ethnic groups, resulting in their underrepresentation or limited participation in various aspects of society.

## **Inclusive Community Building Approaches**

Describes the collective work of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, access, accountability, respect, and social justice initiatives. As terminologies continue to grow within the field, inclusive community building approaches serve as an encompassing term that recognizes attempts by stakeholders who pursue any combination of strategies to cease harm caused by racial and culturally intersecting differences amongst people, communities, and organizations.



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## METHODOLOGY

The cease harm assessment of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments commenced in August 2023. It aimed to examine government services, policies, practices, procedures, and compliance with legal mandates between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2023. July 2020 was chosen as it marked the adoption of the reparation resolutions and the start of the County and City's fiscal year.

To facilitate this assessment, a data collection matrix was devised for each Impact Focus Area (IFA) to gather written responses and copies of policies, reports, and supporting artifacts verifying government services. More than 1000 artifacts underwent meticulous examination across the CRC IFAs, including criminal justice, economic development, education, health & wellness, and housing. Throughout 18 cohorts and 16 review meetings, government department leaders and key personnel provided insights, justifications, and contextual information regarding their policies, processes, practices, and outcomes. Additionally, the assessment encompassed artifacts from the equity departments and internal workforce practices of the County and City.

Thirty metrics, quantifiable practices and outcomes of government services, were evaluated across the five IFAs and the government's equity and internal workforce departments to ascertain the existence of harm. The analysis encompassed ongoing scrutiny of policies and procedures, project outcomes, expenditures, marketing materials, selected websites, and news articles throughout the assessment process. Furthermore, additional data was collected during the Community Reparations Summit held in October 2022.

## HARM ASSESSMENT COMPASS

The CDG Cease Harm research team utilized the **Racial Equity Harm Assessment Compass™**, also known as the OKRA Compass. Developed by Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D., the compass was employed to evaluate and ascertain whether policies, procedures, outcomes, and adherence to legal mandates had effectively diminished or eliminated harm within the governmental systems of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville. The OKRA Compass assesses the opportunity, knowledge, representation, and access within government operations and services provided to citizens.

**Opportunity** identifies the quantity and quality of programs, services, pathways, and resources that support and enhance the quality of life for citizens.

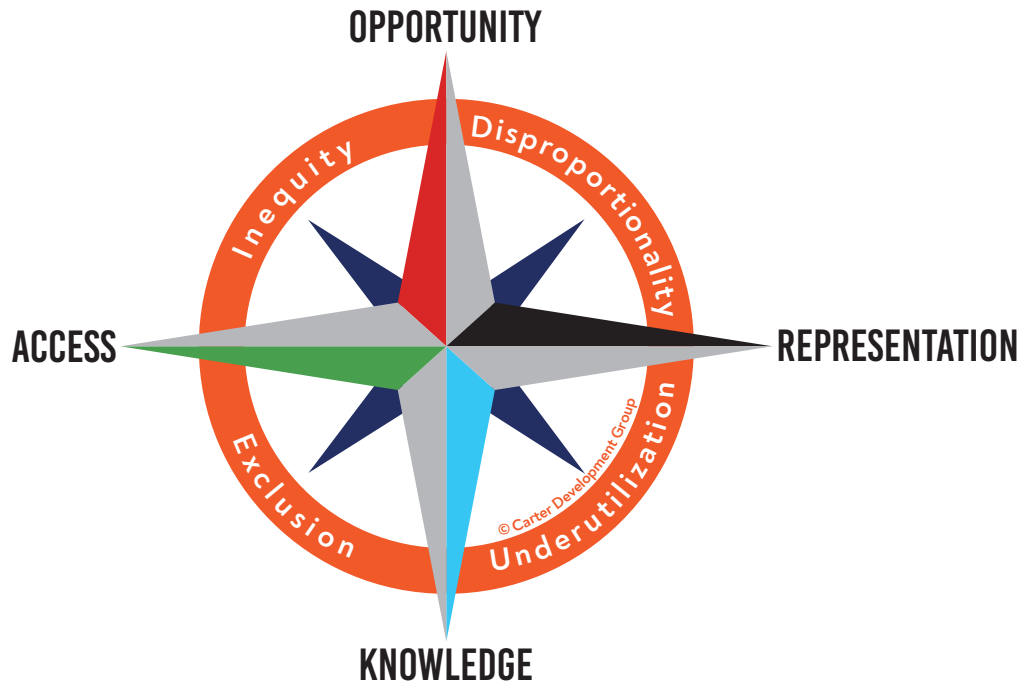
**Knowledge** assesses the quality of outreach campaigns to raise awareness about such programs, services, pathways, and resources.

**Representation** observes the racial or ethnic demographics of the program, service, and resource benefactors to determine the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of specific groups. R or R1 identifies the harm of underrepresentation, and R2 identifies the harm of overrepresentation.

**Access** inspects the mechanisms determining participation in programs, services, and resources, including policy and procedures.

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## Racial Equity Harm Assessment Compass (O.K.R.A.)



The OKRA Compass asks four essential questions to effectively determine the **type of harm**.

OKRA Compass™ Essential Questions	
Essential Questions	Result
What is the result of <b>Opportunity minus Representation</b> ?	Opportunity devoid of representation results in <b>disproportionality</b> .
What is the result of <b>Knowledge minus Representation</b> ?	Knowledge, ranging from low to in-depth awareness and understanding of the opportunities without representation, results in <b>underutilization</b> .
What is the result of <b>Knowledge minus Access</b> ?	Knowledge, when confronted with deliberate obstacles to accessibility, results in <b>exclusion</b> .
What is the result of <b>Opportunity minus Access</b> ?	Opportunity minus policies and practices that provide equitable access result in <b>inequity</b> .

The OKRA Compass was calibrated for each IFA to ascertain answers to these essential questions and identify factors creating disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, or inequity.

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## HARM ASSESSMENT SCALE

The CDG research team devised a three-point harm scale to gauge the **level of harm** induced by government policies, procedures, outcomes, and failure to comply with legal mandates, leading to disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, or inequity. This scale enabled the team to evaluate Opportunity, Knowledge, Representation, and Access for varying degrees of harm, categorized as high, moderate, or low outcomes.

- No apparent or slight harm was observed when high opportunity, knowledge, representation, or access were identified.
- Prevalent or compounded harm was observed when moderate opportunity, knowledge, representation, or access were identified.
- Significant harm was observed when low opportunity, knowledge, representation, or access were identified.

Harm Assessment Scale			
IFA	1	2	3
	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent or infrequent effects were consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization.	Frequent effects consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization. Compounding effects of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization caused by the lack of data.	Considerable and notable effects are consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization with outcomes resulting in a tremendously diminished quality of opportunities, knowledge, representation, or access.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

### No apparent to slight harm

No apparent to slight harm indicates that, based on available evidence or observations, there is minimal or negligible disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization observed in government policies, procedures, outcomes, and compliance with legal mandates that cause harm to Black and African American residents throughout Buncombe County and the City of Asheville.

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## **Prevalent Harm**

Prevalent harm indicates that, based on available evidence or observations, there are commonly occurring disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization in government policies, procedures, outcomes, and compliance with legal mandates that cause harm to Black and African American residents throughout Buncombe County and the City of Asheville.

## **Compounded Harm**

Compounded harm refers to the lack of available evidence or data exacerbating or amplifying covert, latent, conscious, or implicit bias that sustain a culture of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity within government policies, procedures, outcomes, and compliance with legal mandates. When there is a lack of accurate and comprehensive data, it is challenging to identify, understand, and mitigate risks or address underlying issues effectively. As a result, the absence of data can lead to a cycle of continued or amplified harm against Black and African American residents throughout Buncombe County and the City of Asheville, making it difficult to implement targeted interventions or policies to address the root causes of problems. Business educator Peter Drucker states, “You can’t manage what you can’t measure.”

The term “compounded harm” centers the people (citizens/residents) of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville while decentering the government entities. In other words, categorizing the harm as compounded highlights the lived experience of citizens forced to navigate these probable and real disadvantages. Meanwhile, categorizing the harm as indirect shifts the focus to a sense of reprieve due to the assumed unintentionality of County and City officials. The potential harm of data deficits should not be categorized as indirect. Which weighs more: the unintentionality of government officials or the lived experience of those enduring the harm?

## **Significant Harm**

Significant harm indicates that, based on available evidence or observations, there is considerable or substantial disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization observed in government policies, procedures, outcomes, and compliance with legal mandates that cause harm to Black and African American residents throughout Buncombe County and the City of Asheville. It indicates harm that has notable consequences or effects.

Together, the OKRA Compass and Harm Assessment Scale produce a comprehensive inspection of County and City operations in the cessation of harm. The findings serve as a baseline for future studies that can effectively measure the reduction and cessation of harm.



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## THEMATIC KEY HARM OBSERVATIONS

After thoroughly analyzing all artifacts and consolidating the qualitative insights from the cohort and review meetings, the CDG research team utilized the OKRA Compass™ and Harm Assessment Scale to score the impact focus area (IFA) metrics. As a result of this assessment, four overarching themes emerged, delineating the obstacles the Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments faced in their endeavors toward inclusive community building.

### Key Harm 1

**Insufficient data-driven practices to determine the level of African American participation in County and City opportunities.**

County and City departments inconsistently collect racial demographic data across their programs, services, pathways, and resources to comprehensively determine the quality of opportunity, knowledge-base, representation, and access to African Americans. The lack of racial demographics prevents a targeted understanding of service delivery and program effectiveness.

### Key Harm 2

**Insufficient evaluation practices of grant recipients.**

The County and City governments allocate grant funding to numerous community partnerships to provide relevant services in criminal justice, economic development, education, health and wellness, and housing. However, the County and City have no consistent mechanism (policy, practice, or technology) to engage adequately in ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness.

### Key Harm 3

**Limited affordable housing supply for purchase or rental across the County and City, compounded by a lack of cohesive strategy among County and City officials and key stakeholders.**

Housing key stakeholders are aware of the housing crisis impacting the County and City but appear disparate in developing unified goals and plans that collectively address the housing crisis.

### Key Harm 4

**County and City governments lack wide-scale racial equity training to create baseline knowledge of equitable practices.**

County and City government employees have varied racial equity education and training levels, presenting a challenge in connecting racial equity goals to their job functions. This absence of training may hinder efforts to implement effective strategies for ceasing harm and promoting equitable outcomes in governance and decision-making processes.

## HIGH-PRIORITY INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY BUILDING RECOMMENDATIONS

### #1 Designate Legacy Communities as Historic Districts in Response to Urban Renewal

The historic designation of legacy communities and neighborhoods is crucial in preserving a region's cultural and architectural heritage. Additionally, it brings about economic revitalization, as historic districts often become magnets for tourism, injecting vitality into local economies and boosting property values (Bequeaith et al., 2020). Beyond monetary gains, preservation efforts nurture a profound sense of community identity and pride in local history. It creates a shared narrative that binds residents together, fostering a collective appreciation for the unique heritage that defines their surroundings.

North Carolina General Statutes, N.C.G.S. § 160D-940, "authorizes local governments within their respective planning and development regulation jurisdictions and through listing, regulation, and acquisition to do the following: (1) To safeguard the heritage of the city or county by preserving any district or landmark therein that embodies important elements of its culture, history, architectural history, or prehistory. (2) To promote the use and conservation of such district or landmark for the education, pleasure, and enrichment of the residents of the city or county and the State as a whole."

The City of Asheville Code of Ordinances, Section 8, provides a pathway to historic preservation. It states the Historic Resources Commission of Asheville Buncombe County may recommend to the governing board areas to be designated by ordinance as "Historic Districts".

#### Benefits of Historic Preservation

- Historic district designation can provide legal protections and regulations to safeguard the community from gentrification and unwanted development. This can help prevent displacement of longtime residents and maintain the socio-economic fabric of the neighborhood.
- Historic districts often attract visitors interested in experiencing the cultural richness and authenticity of the area. This can stimulate tourism and economic development, increasing business opportunities, job creation, and local businesses and services investment.
- Designated historic districts may qualify for grants, tax incentives, and funding programs for historic preservation and revitalization. These resources can support rehabilitation efforts, infrastructure improvements, and other projects that benefit the community.
- Recognizing and preserving Black historic districts contributes to social equity and justice by acknowledging past injustices, promoting racial reconciliation, and empowering marginalized communities. It underscores the importance of diversity, inclusion, and representation in shaping urban landscapes and narratives.

#### State-Level Examples of Historic Designation Initiatives

California boasts a robust system for preserving its historical heritage through initiatives like the California Register of Historical Resources. Under the vigilant oversight of the California Office of Historic Preservation, this program plays a pivotal role in bestowing recognition and safeguarding historically significant properties (Bequeaith et al., 2020). Meanwhile, in New York, a similar dedication to preserving its rich history is evident through the New York State Register of Historic Places.

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Administered by the New York State Historic Preservation Office, this program is designed to meticulously identify, evaluate, and ultimately safeguard the state's invaluable historic resources (Kinahan, 2019). Both states are committed to ensuring their unique cultural legacies are acknowledged and protected for future generations' benefit and appreciation.

## **County-Level Examples of Historic Designation Initiatives**

Cook County, Illinois, has committed to preserving its rich history by implementing the Cook County Historic Preservation Ordinance. This initiative led to the establishment of the Cook County Historic Preservation Commission, a body dedicated to the review and designation of historic landmarks and districts (Ghahramani et al., 2020). This demonstrates a proactive approach to safeguarding the cultural heritage of the county. Similarly, the Historic Preservation Program in King County, Washington, exemplifies a concerted effort to identify and protect significant historical sites. By employing a combination of regulatory measures and incentives, King County aims to ensure the longevity of its cultural treasures (Ghahramani et al., 2020). These county-level initiatives showcase a recognition of the importance of preserving local history for future generations and serve as valuable models for other regions looking to adopt similar measures.

## **City-Level Examples of Historic Designation Initiatives**

Charleston, South Carolina, boasts a rich historical heritage, and the Charleston Board of Architectural Review (BAR) is a pivotal guardian of its architectural legacy. The BAR's primary mission revolves around safeguarding the city's historic character by meticulously overseeing the design and preservation of buildings and sites (Pennebaker, 2021). Its stringent guidelines and rigorous review process ensure that any alterations or new constructions align harmoniously with the city's unique aesthetic. Meanwhile, on the opposite coast, San Francisco, California, takes its approach to historic preservation through the dedicated efforts of the San Francisco Planning Department (Pennebaker, 2021). This program is distinguished by its emphasis on safeguarding and restoring historic resources, facilitated by a comprehensive framework of zoning regulations and incentivizing policies. By coupling regulatory measures with encouragement, San Francisco actively fosters a culture of conservation, allowing the city to evolve while still cherishing its invaluable architectural heritage.

## **Legal Framework and Support for Historic Designation**

The United States has a complex legal and regulatory structure that oversees historic preservation. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 is a federal law pillar providing the necessary legal foundation for preservation initiatives. Establishing the National Register of Historic Places, an essential tool for locating and preserving culturally significant sites, is one of its most important legacies. States play a crucial role in this endeavor through predation laws, each crafting specific measures to bolster conservation efforts (Pennebaker, 2021). These can range from offering tax incentives to implementing regulatory frameworks and allocating funding.

The designation and laws that provide Native Americans with land designation include the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. This federal law establishes the National Register of Historic Places, a crucial tool for locating and preserving culturally significant sites, including those of Native American heritage. Additionally, states play a role in crafting specific measures to support conservation efforts, which can include designations for Native American cultural sites. Locally, counties and cities may also enact ordinances and zoning regulations to further define and enforce historic preservation measures, which can extend to Native American heritage sites. It is important to note that while these laws and designations can offer protections, collaboration and consultation with Native American communities are essential to ensure that their perspectives and concerns are considered in the preservation process.



## #2 Increase Jurisdiction Linked to School District Funding

Work toward increasing Buncombe County government's jurisdiction over school districts to ensure specific racial equity metrics are met as part of school district funding provided through its property taxes. Doing so may require state-level legislative changes.

### Local Control vs. State Oversight

While local governments collect property taxes, they typically do not have direct control over education operations or the school district's management. Instead, authority over school districts rests with locally elected school boards responsible for making policy decisions, setting budgets, and overseeing district operations. However, state governments often provide oversight and set educational standards, curriculum requirements, and funding formulas that influence local school districts' operations. Local governments may work closely with school districts on land use planning, zoning regulations, and capital improvement projects.

### Benefits for Increased County Jurisdiction

Increasing County government jurisdiction over school districts that link to specific County-driven metrics to funding, including:

1. Requirements for faculty cultural sensitivity training.
2. Requirements for culturally relevant pedagogy in textbook selection.
3. Requirements for core subject faculty members to reflect the student demographics.

By having more control over funding, the Buncombe County government can implement policies and initiatives to reduce disparities in education outcomes and promote equity. This may include targeted interventions to support students from marginalized backgrounds, initiatives to address inequities in school funding, and efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness in education that curb disproportionate disciplinary responses to African American students.

### Racial Disparities

The reliance on property taxes for school funding has led to disparities in educational resources between wealthy and poorer communities. Since property values vary widely between districts, areas with higher property values can generate more revenue for schools, resulting in better-funded schools compared to those in lower-income areas.

The disparities in funding translate into differences in the quality of education provided to students. Schools in affluent areas may offer advanced placement courses, extracurricular programs, modern facilities, and experienced teachers, while schools in low-income areas may struggle to provide basic resources and support services. This can limit their upward mobility and economic advancement opportunities, reinforcing socioeconomic disparities across generations.

### History of Property Taxes & Education

The history of property taxes funding education in the United States dates to the early colonial period. During this time, local communities often supported their schools through various means, including direct taxation on property owners. However, the modern public education financing system through property taxes began in the 19th century.

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One significant milestone in the history of property taxes for education was establishing the common school movement in the mid-19th century, which aimed to provide free, publicly funded education to all children, regardless of socioeconomic status. To finance these schools, local governments increasingly relied on property taxes as a stable and reliable source of revenue.

The reliance on property taxes for education funding became more embedded in the early 20th century with the rise of the district school system. Under this system, local communities established school districts and property taxes were levied specifically to support these districts. This approach to education funding allowed for more localized control over school finances and operations. While property taxes were collected locally, state governments also played a role in funding education, often providing supplemental funding to school districts to ensure a basic level of education for all students. However, the primary responsibility for funding public schools remained with local governments.

## #3 Develop Procurement Industry & Utilization Dashboard

Create a dashboard that monitors historical procurement expenditures and grant allocations to provide insights into business utilization and industry spending patterns within Buncombe County and the City of Asheville. Data regarding spending by both County and City administrations, encompassing utilization and industry metrics, seeks to narrow the business readiness and utilization gap.

### Data Availability on USAspending.gov

USAspending.gov is an example of an industry and utilization dashboard. The website is a publicly accessible website that serves as a centralized source of information on federal government spending. It was launched in 2007 because of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), which aimed to increase transparency and accountability in government spending. The website provides detailed data on federal contracts, grants, loans, and other financial assistance awarded by federal agencies. Users can search and explore spending data by agency, award types, prime award recipients, subrecipients, location, and other parameters. USAspending.gov offers various tools and features for analyzing spending trends, identifying patterns, and tracking how taxpayer dollars are used.

The Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) is the database where federal contracting officials submit transaction-level data for contracts and contract indefinite delivery vehicles (IDV). It contains information about award transaction obligation, award transaction description, action date, awarding agency, recipient code, recipient location, place of performance, industry (NAICS), product or service, and set aside, among other details. The collection of data in FPDS that USAspending.gov extracts is known as File D1.

### Benefits of the Industry & Utilization

Developing a Industry and Utilization (IU) dashboard that tracks procurement spending by County and City municipalities offers several benefits for vendors and government personnel:

- Vendors and businesses can use the dashboard to project procurement opportunities and track government spending in specific industries or sectors. This encourages readiness and competition and promotes vendor engagement in the procurement process.
- Tracking set-asides and minority-owned business participation ensures equity and inclusion in government contracting. The dashboard can highlight opportunities for minority-owned businesses and support efforts to increase diversity in government procurement.
- The dashboard enables performance measurement and evaluation of procurement activities. Government agencies can assess the effectiveness of procurement strategies, monitor compliance with spending goals, and identify areas for improvement.
- The dashboard facilitates benchmarking and comparing procurement spending across different departments, agencies, or municipalities. This allows for best practices to be identified and shared, leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness in procurement processes.
- The dashboard provides transparency into how taxpayer dollars are spent on procurement contracts. Citizens can access information about award amounts, recipients, service codes, and set-asides, promoting accountability and trust in government spending.
- Government agencies are held accountable for their spending decisions by publicly displaying procurement spending data. Officials can be held accountable for ensuring that contracts are awarded fairly and in compliance with regulations.

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Access to comprehensive procurement data supports data-driven decision-making processes. Government officials can analyze spending trends, identify cost-saving opportunities, and make informed decisions to optimize resource allocation.

## **Recommendations on Establishing the Industry & Utilization Dashboard**

By leveraging an Industry & Utilization (IU) dashboard like USASpending.gov, County and City municipalities can enhance transparency, accountability, efficiency, and equity in their procurement processes, ultimately improving the management of public funds and delivery of services to citizens. Here are recommendations for developing and managing the IU Dashboard:

- Implementing a procurement dashboard aligned with industry codes is a proactive step toward creating a more inclusive and transparent environment for business owners seeking to engage with local government procurement opportunities.
- Utilize standardized commodity purchasing codes, such as the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), Product Service Code (PSC), National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP), Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), or similar codes, to categorize different industries.
- Include trend analysis tools to help business owners identify patterns and anticipate future opportunities.
- Implement a user-friendly search and filter system based on industry-specific codes, allowing business owners to identify relevant procurement opportunities quickly.
- Enable entrepreneurs to customize their searches based on location, contract size, or other relevant criteria.
- Offer educational materials within the dashboard to guide business owners on understanding and navigating the procurement process.
- Include information on registering as a vendor, certification processes, and tips for submitting competitive bids.
- Use the system to help business owners stay informed about changes in government procurement needs.

## #4 Develop a Black Chamber of Commerce

As early as the 1860s, groups of Black business owners and professionals began establishing Chambers of Commerce to advocate for and promote Black-owned enterprises, which faced immense challenges and discrimination. As a business-led initiative, CDG recommends the development of a Black Chamber of Commerce. Government entities do not initiate/start chambers of commerce but support them through procurement and grant funding to develop business structures that in turn can service the government entity.

### **Establishment of Black Chambers**

Black Chambers of Commerce are 501(c)(6) nonprofit organizations modeled after traditional chambers of commerce but with a specific mission to support Black-owned enterprises since Black businesses have historically faced discrimination and additional obstacles to success. Tailored assistance through Black chambers has been needed to foster growth and opportunity. Establishing a chamber generally starts with a small group of committed Black business owners and professionals who recruit members and form a steering committee.

Founding members devote time to designing the mission, membership structure, budget, programming, and bylaws. Securing nonprofit status, establishing a dues model, electing a governing board, and hiring staff provide the structure to launch operations.

Outreach to build a solid membership base within the local Black business community is critical. Member dues provide financial stability. The chamber's board should include respected professionals and entrepreneurs who can guide strategy. A passionate Executive Director is ideal for managing day-to-day operations. Seed funding from grants, corporate sponsors, and events enables the chamber to implement impactful community programs. With dedicated people, effective organization, and adequate resources, a Black Chamber can quickly gain traction by providing networking, development resources, and advocacy that helps Black enterprises grow. Starting with a well-conceived structure allows the chamber to strategically expand its scope over time.

### **Benefits of a Black Chamber of Commerce**

- Provide tailored support services to assist Black-owned businesses at various stages of development, including start-ups, sustainability, and growth.
- Facilitate networking opportunities to foster collaboration among Black entrepreneurs, local businesses, and community stakeholders.
- Serve as a centralized resource hub, connecting Black business enterprises with essential tools, mentorship programs, and educational opportunities.
- Offer training programs, workshops, and mentorship initiatives to enhance Black entrepreneurs' business acumen and capacity.
- Advocate for the interests of Black business owners at the local, regional, and state levels, ensuring equitable representation in decision-making processes.
- Work collaboratively with local government entities to advocate for policies that foster an inclusive business environment and address systemic barriers.
- Establish mechanisms for collecting data on the challenges and opportunities faced by Black-owned businesses, informing targeted interventions.

Establishing a Black/African American Chamber of Commerce is a strategic and proactive measure to uplift the Black business community, promote economic equity, and contribute to the overall vibrancy and diversity of Buncombe County's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

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## History of Black Chambers

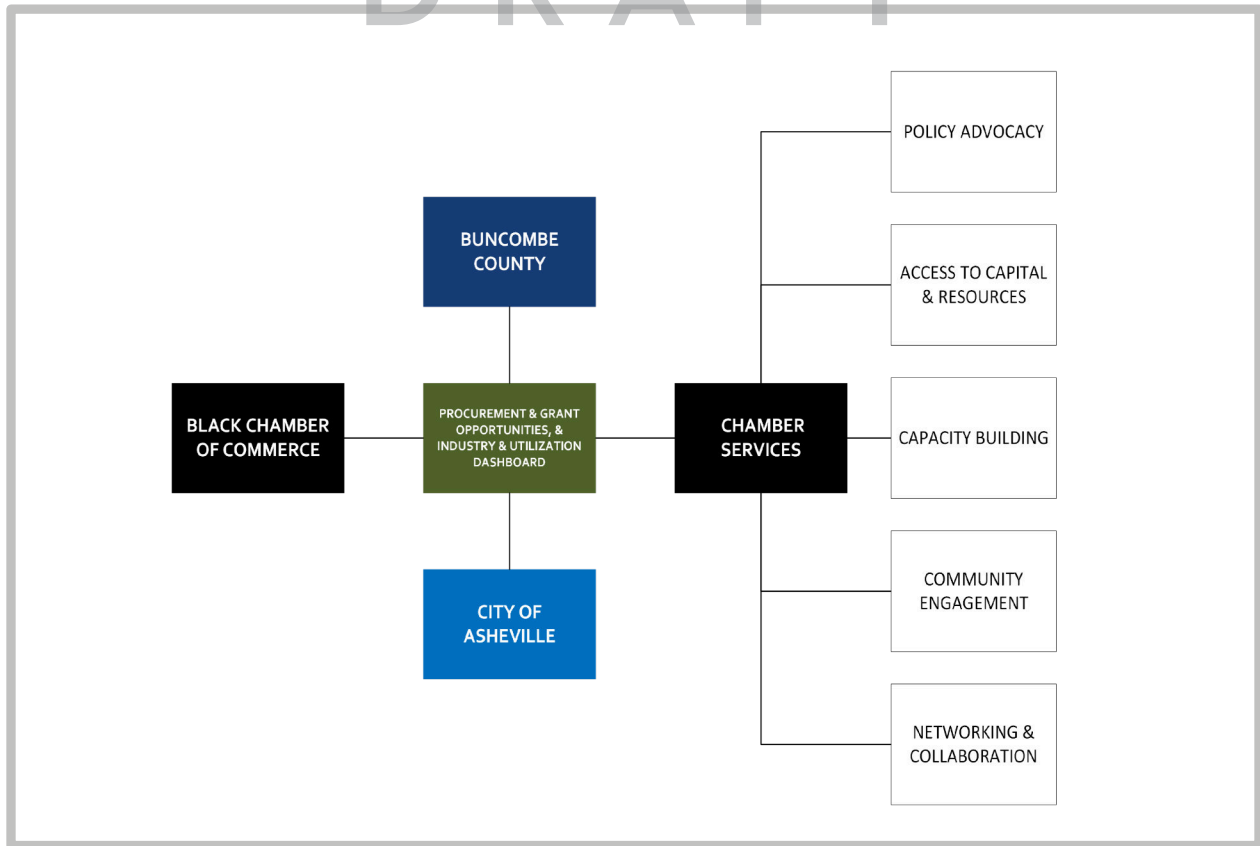
Black Chambers of Commerce has over 150 years of history promoting Black enterprise and economic opportunity:

- 1860s-1900s – The first Black Chambers emerged after the Civil War as Black Americans established businesses yet still encountered significant discrimination and race-based barriers. Early chambers provided Black entrepreneurs with critical networking and aid. Central Black business districts like Black Wall Street in Tulsa took root.
- 1920s – Expansion of Black Chambers stalled due to the Great Migration dislocating Black populations and growing racism in the 1920s that stifled advancement. Mainstream chambers also began excluding or segregating Black members.
- 1930s – New Deal programs helped resuscitate Black Chambers in Northern cities, leading to the growth of groups in places like Chicago and Philadelphia.
- 1940s-1960s – World War II and the focus on civil rights stalled the Black Chamber movement. The decline of historic Black business districts also impacted local organizations.
- 1970s – The founding of the National Black Chamber of Commerce in 1975 led to renewed expansion of Black Chambers. A rising Black professional class and minority business enterprise programs helped bolster growth.
- 1980s-90s – Increasing membership and chambers formed as minority business development gained traction in many cities.
- Today, there are over 200 active Black Chambers nationwide with expanding impact and programming. In recent years, the SBA and major corporations have increased programming and contracts aimed at Black enterprises, providing new opportunities for Black Chambers to facilitate success.

## Effective Chamber Model

The Greater Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce is an example of a particularly effective Black Chamber organization. Established in 1926, the GDBCC has a long record of successfully promoting Black enterprise in Texas. Reasons the [GDBCC](#) provides a model to emulate include:

- Robust programming – The GDBCC provides a potent mix of business training seminars, networking events, educational forums, and access to business resources. This drive to deliver value helps sustain membership.
- Advocacy – The GDBCC has effectively lobbied major Dallas corporations and governments to implement more substantial supplier diversity and minority contracting programs.
- Leadership – A dedicated executive team and strong Board of Directors comprising top Black business owners and professionals provide guidance.
- Procurement – The GDBCC has facilitated over \$2 billion in corporate and public contracts for Black-owned member businesses by expanding procurement programs.
- National leadership – The GDBCC leads Black Chamber advocacy efforts on a national level as well.
- Best practices – The organization is recognized as one of the top Black Chambers in the U.S. and highlighted for its impact and innovation.



## Recommendations

Based on the analysis of successful Black Chambers, the following practices are recommended to maximize efficacy:

- Offer localized programming that provides training, mentoring, networking, and access to capital tailored to the needs of Black enterprises in the community. Relevant and practical assistance will drive member engagement.
- Build and leverage relationships with corporate and government partners who can expand access to contracts, grants, and programs benefiting Black Chamber members. Having procurement and funding opportunities to channel to members provides value.
- Focus on growing a robust dues-paying membership base of Black-owned businesses committed to chamber participation. Avoid over-reliance on a few significant donors or sponsors. Member dues and engagement provide stability.
- Recruit an energetic and creative Executive Director to provide strong leadership for operations, programs, and partnerships. Supplement with young talent through internships and training programs.
- Embrace digital platforms and tools to increase reach, provide programming, engage members, and track impact. Relying solely on traditional channels limits exposure.

## Examples

- Broward County Black Chamber of Commerce, FL
- Greater North Carolina Black Chamber of Commerce
- Collin County Black Chamber of Commerce, TX
- US Black Chambers, Inc

## #5 Conduct Buncombe County Disparity Study

A disparity study is a comprehensive examination of contracting practices to assess whether there are disparities or inequities in awarding government contracts to minority-owned and women-owned businesses compared to their availability in the relevant marketplace. These studies typically analyze procurement data, business utilization, contracting patterns, and relevant market conditions to determine if there is evidence of discrimination or barriers to equal participation in government contracting opportunities.

### History of Disparity Studies

Governmental entities across the United States of America have authorized disparity studies in response to the *City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469 (1989) and subsequent cases to determine whether there is a compelling interest for the creation or continuation of remedial procurement programs, based upon race, gender, and ethnicity. The first disparity study was done by Miller3 Consulting, dubbed as being the creators of the disparity study industry. Miller3 Consulting conducted the recent 2023 City of Asheville disparity study.

### Benefits of Disparity Studies

Organizations should conduct disparity studies to determine if race-conscious procurement policies should be enacted. Such studies also ensure fairness, equity, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations, such as equal opportunity requirements. By conducting a disparity study, organizations can:

- **Enhancing Supplier Diversity:** Disparity studies inform efforts to enhance supplier diversity by identifying areas where minority-owned businesses are underrepresented or face barriers to entry. Organizations can use the findings of these studies to develop targeted strategies for increasing the inclusion of minority-owned firms in their procurement supply chains.
- **Identifying Disparities:** Disparity studies help identify disparities in contracting opportunities for minority-owned businesses compared to their market availability. By examining procurement data and contracting practices, these studies can reveal any systemic barriers or discriminatory practices.
- **Promoting Equity:** By uncovering disparities, organizations can proactively address inequities and promote a level playing field for minority-owned businesses. This may involve implementing targeted outreach and support programs to increase the participation of minority-owned firms in procurement opportunities.
- **Building Trust and Transparency:** Conducting disparity studies demonstrates a commitment to transparency and accountability in procurement processes. By openly addressing disparities and taking steps to address them, organizations can build trust with stakeholders and demonstrate their commitment to fair and equitable business practices.

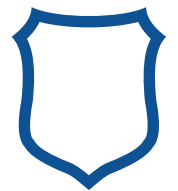




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# CRIMINAL JUSTICE



## CRIMINAL JUSTICE IFA REPORT

Extensive research on racial disparity within the criminal justice system indicates that African Americans nationwide encounter tremendous disproportionality in arrests, policing, and sentencing. African Americans are incarcerated at higher rates compared to white individuals despite similar rates of drug use and criminal activity. African American youth are also more likely to be arrested, detained, and harshly punished compared to their white counterparts for similar offenses. The reparations resolution put forth by Buncombe County and the City of Asheville recognizes that, historically, law enforcement and criminal justice processes throughout the country have unfairly singled out black individuals, leading to elevated incarceration rates and subsequent denial of equal job opportunities. The Buncombe County Sheriff's Office (BCSO), Asheville Police Department (APD), and the county government Justice Services Department view the reparations resolution as an opportunity to take the necessary steps toward identifying and mitigating harm within each agency.

Actively addressing the infused effects of systematic racism within the criminal justice field requires a broad effort. This involves reforming policies and professional development training and fostering a cultural shift towards inclusivity, accountability, equality, and transparency. Criminal justice reform within policing is a crucial component of this multifaceted approach.

### Governance

The U.S. Constitution grants individuals certain rights that law enforcement agencies, including the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office and Asheville Police Department, must uphold. These rights include protection against unreasonable searches and seizures under the Fourth Amendment and safeguards against discrimination under the Fourteenth Amendment. Federal laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights outline specific protections against discrimination and set standards for law enforcement personnel. The United States Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights oversees the enforcement of these federal laws to ensure compliance by both agencies, while the North Carolina General Assembly enacts state laws governing law enforcement, covering areas such as training standards, criminal procedure, and the powers and duties of sheriffs.

Furthermore, the Asheville Police Department and Buncombe County Sheriff's Office must adhere to city ordinances and regulations. These include Asheville city ordinances related to police alarms, ABC permits, and non-discrimination practices, as outlined in various articles and sections of the city code. Both agencies also have dedicated Offices of Professional Standards responsible for internal policy development and ensuring adherence to training and certification requirements set forth by the Basic Law Enforcement Training Academy. These comprehensive regulatory frameworks aim to ensure accountability, fairness, and adherence to legal and ethical standards within Asheville and Buncombe County law enforcement operations.

### Criminal Justice IFA Metrics

The CDG research team assessed the following metrics across 150 documents received from BCSO, APD, and the county Justice Services Department to determine the level of harm in the criminal justice impact focus area.

- **Agency Recruitment and Demographics** refer to the process by which law enforcement agencies recruit, hire, and maintain a diverse workforce and the demographic composition of agency personnel.
- **Agency Field Training Officer Procedures & Records** pertain to law enforcement agencies' guidelines, protocols, and documentation for training.
- **Agency Traffic Stops & Searches** refer to the practices of law enforcement agencies in conducting traffic stops, vehicle searches, and related enforcement actions.
- **Agency Arrests and Bookings** involve the process of apprehending individuals suspected of committing crimes, as well as processing and documenting their entry into the criminal justice system.
- **Agency Programs & Partnerships** refer to initiatives and collaborations law enforcement agencies undertake to address crime, improve community relations, and promote public safety.
- **Access to Alternative Sentencing Programs** refers to the availability and utilization of non-traditional sentencing options for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. These may include diversion programs, drug courts, mental health courts, restorative justice programs, or other rehabilitative interventions designed to address the underlying causes of criminal behavior and reduce recidivism.
- **Juvenile Justice Services** encompass a range of interventions and programs designed to address the needs of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. This may include diversion programs, probation services, rehabilitation programs, educational and vocational services, and community-based alternatives to incarceration.

## Criminal Justice Harm Assessment Scale

Criminal Justice Harm Assessment Scale			
Criminal Justice	1	2	3
	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent to occasional racial disparities in criminal justice policies and processes, encounters and arrests, and biased hiring practices. Some variations in access to rehabilitation and sentencing alternatives among groups.	Frequent racial disparities in arrests and uneven hiring practices. Notable differences in rehabilitation access and recidivism rates among certain groups.  Lack of comprehensive data can compound systemic racial disproportionality and the absence of pointed interventions and policies.	Pronounced racial disparities in multiple criminal justice aspects, consistent evidence of biased hiring, limited rehabilitation access, and high recidivism for certain groups. Documented instances of systemic bias. Pervasive systemic bias that leads to severe consequences.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Agency Demographics and Recruitment Practices

Agency demographics and recruitment practices indicate the levels of workforce diversity amongst law enforcement personnel compared to the demographic composition of the broader community they serve. This metric scrutinizes recruitment strategies, hiring processes, and the demographic outcomes of these efforts. It is a benchmark for gauging progress toward building a diverse and culturally competent public safety organization.

### Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

Buncombe County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) employs strategic recruitment practices to foster a diverse, representative law enforcement agency. Through targeted recruitment at job fairs, educational institutions such as Western Carolina University and Appalachian State University, and community colleges in the Western North Carolina region, the BCSO works to attract candidates from various backgrounds.

BCSO's racial makeup across agency positions is as follows:

- The BCSO workforce is 79.2% White, slightly below the county's 81.2% White population. This indicates a relatively proportional representation within the BCSO, compared to the county's demographics, is slightly lower.
- At the BCSO, 11.11% of the workforce is Black or African American, which is significantly higher than the county's 5.7%. This shows a higher representation of Black or African American employees in the BCSO compared to their population percentage in the county.
- The representation of Black or African American individuals in "Sworn" job classifications at the BCSO is 7.51%, slightly higher than the overall Black population in Buncombe County, which is 5.7%. This indicates a relative alignment or slight overrepresentation

in these law enforcement roles compared to their demographic proportion in the county.

- In "non-sworn" job classifications, Black or African American individuals represent 16.67%, significantly higher than the Black population percentage of 5.7% in Buncombe County. This suggests a considerable overrepresentation of Black individuals in civilian or administrative roles within the sheriff's office compared to their population in the wider community.
- The distribution of BCSO Black or African American staff across job classifications shows that 41% are in "sworn" roles, while 59% occupy "non-sworn" positions, indicating a higher concentration of Black employees in administrative or civilian roles compared to enforcement or detention duties.

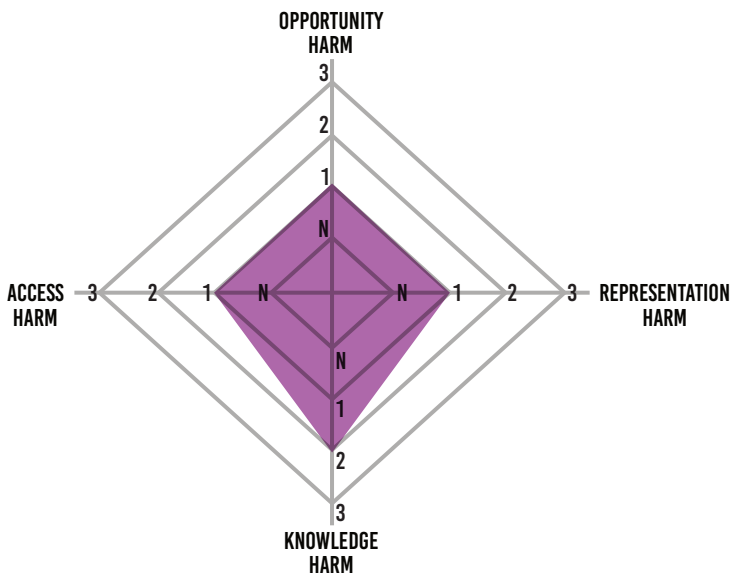
BCSO has a commendable representation of African American employees, averaging 11%, surpassing the 5.7% representation in the County's population. This indicates proactive measures toward creating a diverse workforce. Moreover, BCSO's engagement in public events and the U.S. Military Partnership for Your Success (PaYS) Program, a job placement program for veterans, highlight their commitment to inclusive hiring.

### Key Harm Indicators

- There is a significant underrepresentation of Black employees in detention officer roles at the Buncombe County correctional facility. This is particularly concerning given the disproportionately high percentage (approximately 30%) of Black inmates, highlighting a potential bias in hiring practices and a key area for improvement in diversity and equality within the workforce.
- The representation of Black individuals in deputy management positions demonstrates notable disparities when compared to the overall Black population in Buncombe County, which stands at 5.7%. Specifically, Black

deputies constitute only 3.45% of detention deputy management positions, 5% of law enforcement management positions, and 5.8% of total deputy management positions, highlighting a potential underrepresentation in key leadership roles within the sheriff's office.

**Agency Recruitment and Demographics (BCSO)**



**Asheville Police Department**

The Asheville Police Department (APD) currently contracts with EPIC Recruiting to recruit new officers. Referred to as "The Epic Process," the recruitment firm engages APD through strategy, production, website development, and advertising. The [APD recruitment website](#), developed by EPIC, highlights video testimonials and images of a diverse pool of officers, hoping to generate a mirrored pool of applicants. According to the APD dashboard their total workforce is currently 215 employees. This number consists of both sworn and non-sworn personnel.

APD's racial makeup across agency positions are as follows:

- 36 Criminal Investigators

- 88.8% White (32 Investigators)
- 8.3% Hispanic/Latino (3 Investigators)
- 2.7% African American (1 Investigator)
- 119 Patrol Officers
  - 78.8% white (94 Officers)
  - 9.2% Hispanic/Latino (11 Officers)
  - 5 % African American (6 Officers) identify as Black
  - 2.5% (4 Officers) identify as two or more races
  - 0.8% Native American (1 Officer)
  - 3.3% did not respond (4 Officers)
- 42 Administrative personnel
  - 88% White (37 Employees)
  - 7.1% African A (3 Employees)
  - 4.7%, Hispanic/Latino (2 Employees)
- 18 Police Engagement Personnel
  - 77.7% White (14 Employees)
  - 22.2% African American (4 Employees)

According to the APD Law Enforcement Diversity Dashboard, African Americans make up 8% of the personnel compared to the 10.9% of Asheville residents, a difference of 2.9%. Amongst the APD Uniformed Patrol Division, African Americans represent 5% of the division, a difference of 5.9%.

Of the 36 criminal investigators, only 2.8% (1) identify as African American, creating a disproportionate representation within this critical agency position. during the follow-up citizen engagement during the process of completing a criminal investigation. In response to a call-for-service, an APD patrol officer is typically the first point of contact. After an initial report, cases requiring an investigative follow-up are assigned to a criminal investigator. For the remainder of the investigation up until the prosecution phase of the criminal justice process, most of the law enforcement contact with the public, witnesses, victims, and suspects is facilitated by an assigned criminal

investigator. The absence of a comparable representation of race within the Criminal Investigation Division when compared to the African American community population enhances the risk of service disproportionality, which can potentially contribute to diminished trust and community relations, increased risk of bias and discrimination, missed opportunities for diverse innovation within the practice of criminal investigation, plus legal and ethical concerns.

### Key Harm Indicators

- Racial harm exists in the form of low representation, which is fueled by the presence of disproportionality between the number of African American Criminal Investigators employed by APD and the percentage of African American citizens represented in the community.
- Racial harm exists in the form of low representation which is fueled by the presence of disparity between the number of Black/African American Patrol Officers employed by APD and the percentage of Black/African American citizens represented within the community.
- Moderate Harm due to an inadequate attempt to attract a diverse pool of applicants.

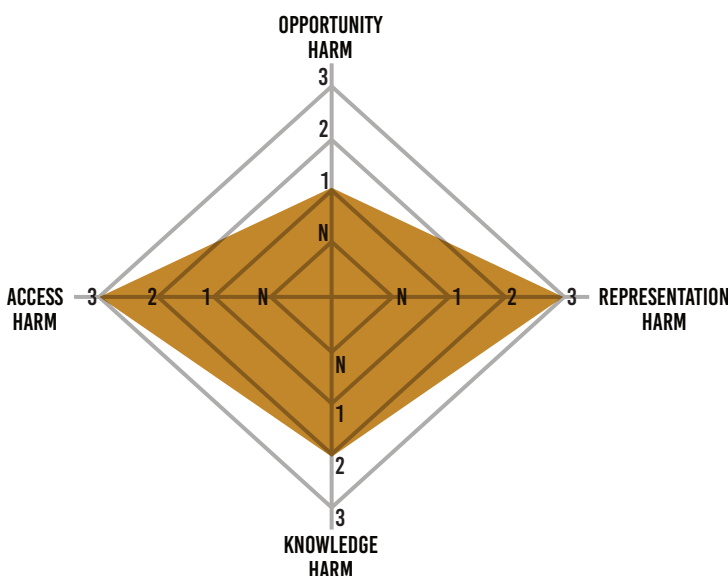
### Field Training Officer Training Procedures & Records

The Field Training Officer (FTO) Training Procedures & Records are reviewed to identify and mitigate potential racial bias in law enforcement training. It examines whether the FTO Training Manual includes content on diversity, equity, and inclusivity and scrutinizes the agency's training procedures to ensure they incorporate anti-bias education. Moreover, agency training records are audited to confirm that all officers, regardless of race, receive equal access to high-quality training and that the outcomes of such training do not reflect any racial disparities.

The training framework at the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office encompasses Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) and Mandatory In-Service Training (MIST), which are designed to ensure well-prepared law enforcement professionals. MIST is required by the state of North Carolina for officers to maintain their certification. This includes annual firearms recertification and defensive driving. The BLET, exceeding 700 hours of training, is comprehensive, covering a spectrum from laws to ethical practices, and is foundational for all new deputies. MIST requires annual completion to maintain certification, including critical skills such as firearms proficiency and defensive driving. These programs are complemented by a rigorous Field Training Officer (FTO) Program, where new deputies and detention officers receive practical, on-the-job training, enhancing their initial training with real-world application.

Under the BLET curriculum, APD and BSCO law enforcement personnel receive 10 hours of training within unit #3, which includes victim/public response, communication skills, and crime prevention techniques. Unit #10 within the BLET curriculum provides officers with 8 hours of cultural diversity training. BLET training uses a mid-term and final exam to measure proficiency and competency. However, this

Agency Demographics and Recruitment (APD)



assessment is not typically implemented by law enforcement agencies post-graduation.

Additionally, Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT), VISTELAR, and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training primarily addresses tactics to ensure officer safety during emergencies, not specifically race-related and/or cultural diversity topics.

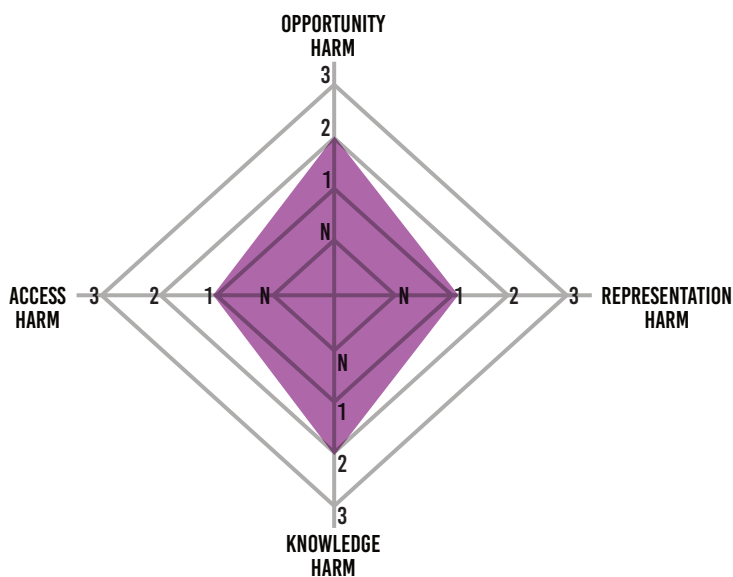
### Buncombe County

While the training regimen is extensive, the available data does not highlight specific tools or assessments used to gauge racial competency post-graduation from BLET or during MIST. The absence of such tools could lead to disparities impacting community relations and fair treatment across residents. Although BSCO fosters an environment of continuous learning with a broad spectrum of training opportunities available, there is room for additional assessment of knowledge that adheres to state standards while ensuring cultural competence when serving a diverse community.

### Key Harm Indicators

- BSCO lacks comprehensive data collection and evaluation mechanisms to assess the efficacy of DEI-related training. Without measurable, scenario-based training evaluations, there is a risk that officers may not fully recognize or address their biases during interactions with the community.
- The absence of robust evaluation tools prevents the identification of areas where biases might influence decision-making, allowing potential racial harm to persist and even compound over time. This gap in the training framework may hinder the development of fully equitable and unbiased law enforcement practices.

Agency Field Training Officer (FTO) Training Manual, Training Procedures, Training Records (BCSO)



### Asheville Police Department

In addition to BLET and MIST, the APD received Fair and Impartial Training (FIP), an implicit bias awareness training created by Dr. Lorie Fridell. The FIP does not appear to use measurable training tools in the form of pre/post testing and audio/video recorded intradepartmental scenario-based training that is used to determine competency. APD’s department policy 304.3 requires all affected personnel to receive annual bias-based training. APD developed a mandatory bias workshop in 2022.

Officers must complete these courses to remain employed. Training includes hands-on, traditional classroom, and some virtual sessions. No training measuring tools in the form of a rubric and/or grading scale that would support the degree of employee proficiency during FIP training were observed. Additional training received through FIP and APD policy #304.3 currently does not utilize any measuring tools to determine employee proficiency.

### Key Harm Indicators

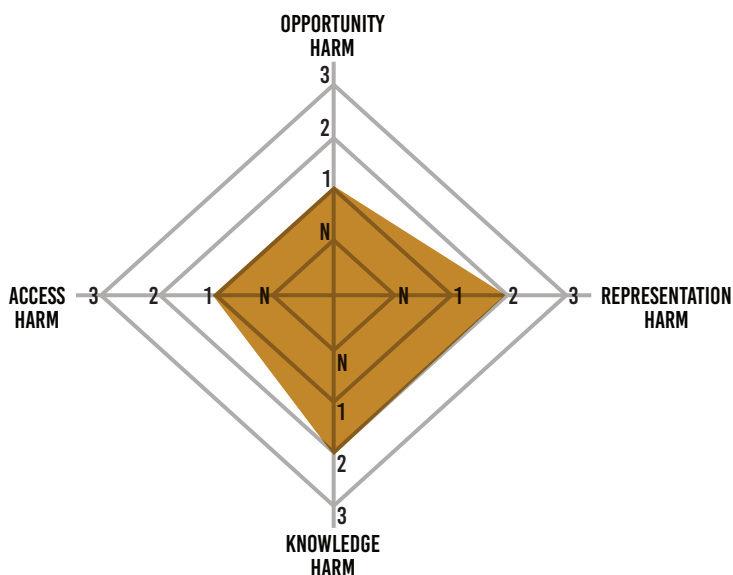
- Training competency is not adequately measured due to the lack of measurable scenario-based training. Officers may not comprehensively understand how



their biases present themselves when interacting with citizens, which could result in the use of force, arrest, detention, stop and frisk, traffic stops, unlawful searches and seizures, poor responses to mental health crises, and overall poor community relations.

the racial dimensions of law enforcement interactions, shedding light on the experiences of different racial groups, with a particular emphasis on the disparities between Black and White drivers, specifically from 2020-2023. The racial composition of Buncombe County in 2020 was predominantly White (81.2%). African Americans comprised 5.6% of the population. This context is essential for understanding how traffic enforcement actions align with or diverge from demographic expectations.

Agency Field Training Officer (FTO) Training Manual, Training Procedures, Training Records (APD)



In a detailed account of traffic stops and search data from the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office, records indicate that 6,574 traffic stops were made over a three-year period. Of these stops, 10.3% identified as Black, while 88.2% identified as White. Additionally, the data shows that 1,151 searches were conducted during these traffic stops. Out of these searches, individuals identified as Black were searched in 8.9% of cases, whereas individuals identified as White were searched in 90.5%.

The data reveals that Black individuals accounted for 10.3% of traffic stops. When this percentage is held against the demographic composition of Buncombe County, where Black residents make up 5.7% of the population, the data reflects an 80.7% higher involvement in traffic stops for Black individuals than their representation in the population would suggest.

## Traffic Stops & Searches

Agency traffic stops and search data were evaluated to determine the fairness and impartiality of traffic interventions. It involves analyzing the demographics of those stopped, the frequency and outcomes of searches during stops, and compliance with departmental policies.

### Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

The provided summary examines the patterns of traffic stops and searches by the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office over a nearly four-year period.

Drawing on data from the North Carolina Bureau of Investigations, this analysis examined

Furthermore, when examining the search data, Black individuals were the subjects of searches in 8.9% of all recorded instances. Based on the demographic figures, this percentage exceeds their population representation by 56.1%.

### Key Harm Indicators

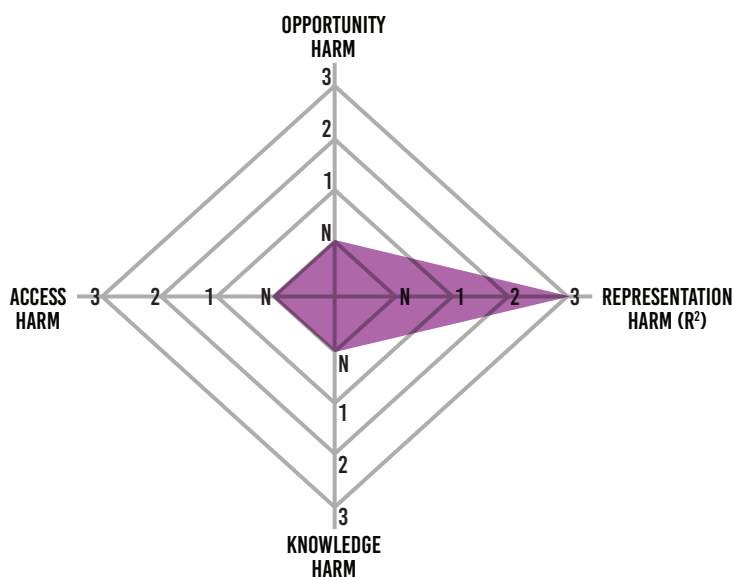
- African American residents experience an overrepresentation of stops and searches in comparison to their white counterparts.

**Agency Traffic Stops & Searches (BCSO)**

during traffic stops, Black individuals accounted for 60% of the searches.

**Key Harm Indicators**

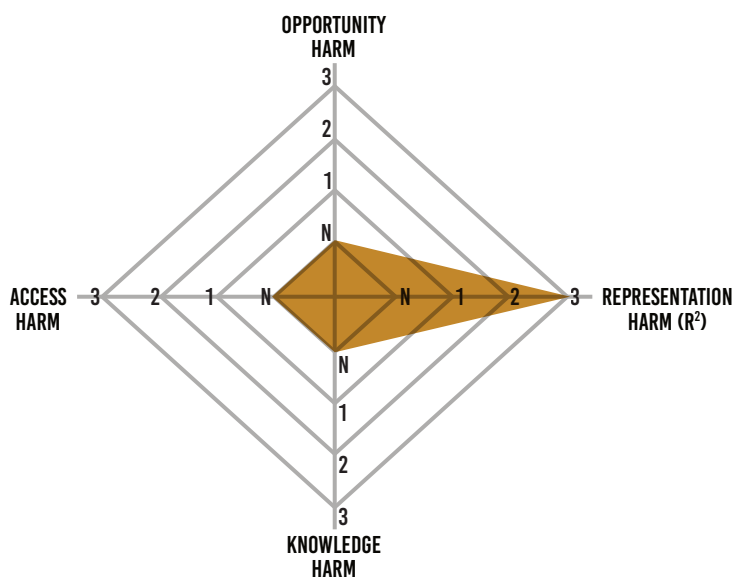
- Overrepresentation of Black individuals in traffic stops and searches:
- The disproportionate focus on Black individuals raises questions about the criteria for initiating stops and searches.
- Highlights the potential for harmful biases in law enforcement practices.
- Overrepresentation could exacerbate community tensions, erode trust in law enforcement, and perpetuate racial stereotypes and systemic inequities.



**Agency Traffic Stops & Searches (APD)**

**Asheville Police Department**

According to the latest estimates, Asheville's population exhibits a diverse racial composition, with White individuals constituting approximately 78.9% to 81.43%, Black or African American individuals representing about 8.7% to 10.86%, Hispanics or Latinos making up 7.02% to 7.7%, Asians accounting for 1.1% to 1.29%, Native Americans around 0.4% to 0.38%, and Other races comprising 0.35% to 3.2%.



From January 1, 2020, to November 30, 2023, the APD made 20,984 traffic stops, leading to 2,075 searches. The breakdown of searches by gender reveals that males were more frequently subjected to searches, with 1,452 instances, compared to females, who were searched 623 times. When disaggregated by race, White individuals accounted for 956 of the searches, while Black individuals were searched 1,456 times. Notably, the search rate for traffic stops was approximately 9.89%, highlighting a significant intervention by law enforcement in traffic-related encounters.

**Arrests & Bookings**

Agency arrests and bookings are measured to determine the efficacy and equity in arrests and detention procedures. It considers the volume and nature of arrests, ensuring they align with legal standards and community expectations. This metric also assesses demographic data related to bookings to monitor for any disparities that could indicate bias or unequal treatment of different population groups.

**Traffic Stops:** Despite comprising 8.7% to 10.86% of Asheville's population, Black individuals represented 23.07% of all traffic stops.

**Searches:** Of the 9.89% of searches conducted

## Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

Buncombe County Sheriff's Office provided arrest data for 2020 and 2021. In 2020, most arrests were of individuals identified as White, comprising 87.66% of all arrests recorded during that year. This percentage slightly decreased to 86.17% in 2021, indicating a marginal decline over the two-year span. Conversely, there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of arrests involving individuals identified as Black or African American. In 2020, African American individuals accounted for 11.02% of arrests, which rose to 13.18% in 2021.

While arrests of White and Black individuals dominated the data, arrests involving individuals of Asian descent remained relatively low throughout both years. In 2020, Asian individuals comprised only 0.25% of arrests, with a slight increase to 0.29% in 2021. Similarly, arrests of individuals identified as American Indian or Alaska Native also remained relatively low, decreasing from 1.06% in 2020 to 0.36% in 2021. Notably, there were no recorded arrests for individuals identified as Native Hawaiian in either year, indicating their minimal presence within the arrest data.

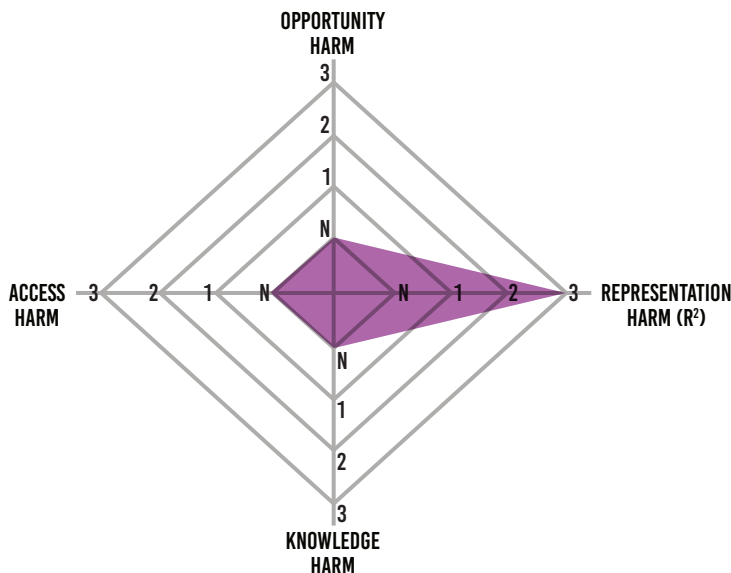
## Key Harm Indicators

Increase in Proportion of Arrests Involving African Americans:

- Discernible increase in proportion of arrests involving African Americans from 2020 to 2021.
- African Americans are significantly over-represented in arrests compared to their population proportion in Buncombe County.
- African Americans, constituting 5.7% of the population, accounted for approximately 11.02% of arrests, indicating an overrepresentation of approximately 93.34%.
- Despite constituting a minority of the population, percentage of Black or African American individuals arrested rose to approximately 13.18% in 2021. This increase resulted in an overrepresentation percentage of

approximately 131.21%, marking a significant rise from the previous year.

Agency Arrests and Bookings (BCSO)



## Adult Jail Population

Data collected from the Buncombe County Detention Facility specified the adult incarceration rates per 1,000 people from the years 2020 to 2022. The average rate amongst racial demographics were:

- White individuals was 2.69 per 1,000 people.
- Black or African Americans was 16.10 per 1,000 people.
- American Indian or Alaskan Native was 4.37 out of every 1,000 people.
- Asian or Pacific Islander was 0.84 per 1,000 people.

Each group's average incarceration rate was also assessed against their respective population percentages to gauge their representation in the detention facility relative to their presence in the wider community. The ratios derived from this analysis were 0.36 for American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.70 for Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.82 for Black, and 0.03 for White individuals.

The trend over the years indicates a shift in these rates, with certain demographic groups experiencing increases or decreases in their representation within the detention system. For instance, the data reflects a decrease in the incarceration rates of White individuals from earlier years, a trend that is paralleled by a general decrease in crime rates across the county. On the other hand, the incarceration rate for Black individuals, while fluctuating, has consistently shown a higher ratio compared to other groups. This trend aligns with broader historical patterns observed nationally, where systemic factors often disproportionately affect certain Black and African Americans.

### Key Harm Indicators

Racial Disparity in Jail Population and Booking Rates:

- Black individuals, comprising only 5.7% of Buncombe County's population, have an average incarceration rate of 16.10 per 1,000 people.
- In contrast, White individuals, representing 81.2% of the population, have an incarceration rate of just 2.69 per 1,000.
- Ratio of incarceration rate to population percentage for Black residents is 2.82, indicating over-representation by 282%.
- Ratio for White residents is 0.03, suggesting under-representation by 97%.

Implications of Disparity:

- The over-representation of Black individuals in incarceration rates is nearly threefold.
- Raises concerns about the fairness and impartiality of law enforcement and judicial processes, suggesting that Black individuals are significantly more likely to be detained and booked.

### Agency Community Programs & Partnerships

Community programs and partnerships include collaborative initiatives with community organizations and stakeholders. This metric examines the scope, engagement levels, and impact of programs designed for community service, crime prevention, and education. This metric also looks at the diversity of partnerships and their alignment with community needs, measuring success through community feedback, participation rates, and tangible outcomes in public safety and trust.

#### Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

The Buncombe County Sheriff's Office has committed to a range of community engagement programs and partnerships to serve the public and enhance safety. This report gathers information from the official Buncombe County websites and a Sheriff's Office document detailing the Sheriff's Executive Resource Volunteers (SERV) program.

The Sheriff's Office's community engagement is multifaceted, beginning with the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Program, which brings mental health professionals into collaboration with law enforcement to better respond to individuals in crisis. Complementing this is the co-responder program, where law enforcement officers and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel work together to provide immediate support to those experiencing behavioral health issues. The SERV program invites community involvement by recruiting volunteers to support various functions within the Sheriff's Office, from administrative tasks to community service.

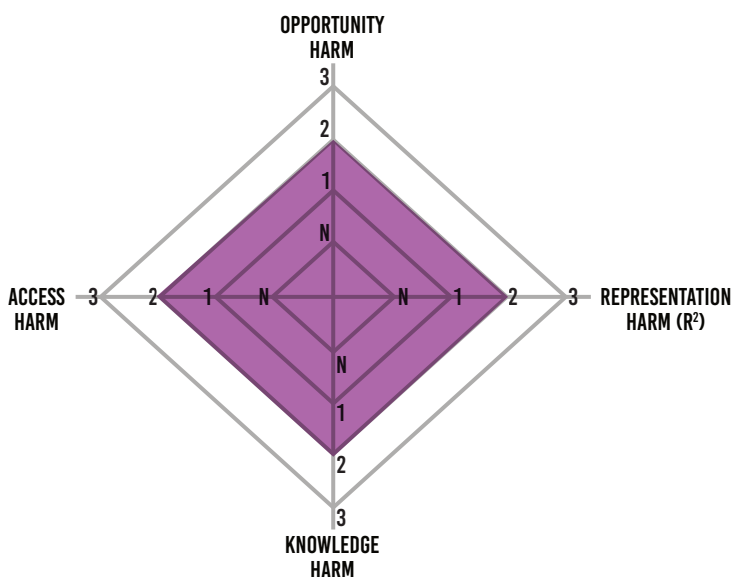
The SERV program's policy for volunteer recruitment echoes the BCSO dedication to equal opportunity, ensuring that individuals from all walks of life can contribute to and enrich the department's community services. The CIT program illustrates the Office's recognition of the importance of specialized knowledge in addressing the complex needs of community

members, particularly those with mental health challenges. By adhering to nondiscriminatory recruitment practices, the SERV program seeks to reflect the community's diversity within its volunteer base, enabling a broader representation of community voices within the department. The co-responder program and the inclusive volunteer recruitment strategy enhance access to support services, ensuring that assistance is available to those in need, thereby reducing barriers to critical services.

Challenges without Robust Data:

- Difficulty in identifying systemic inequities without comprehensive data.
- Inability to measure the progress of initiatives combating disparities.
- There is a lack of evidence to substantiate the effectiveness of partnerships and programs in fostering an equitable justice system.

## Agency Programs & Partnerships (BCSO)



### Key Harm Indicators

Absence of Data Collection and Analysis Processes:

- Buncombe County Sheriff's Office lacks explicit processes for collecting and analyzing relevant data on community engagement programs.
- Lack of data raises concerns about the effectiveness and inefficiencies of programs and partnerships.
- Historical perpetuation of racial and socioeconomic disparities in environments with insufficient data collection and analysis.

### Asheville Police Department

The Citizens Police Academy (CPA) is a comprehensive educational program designed to provide participants with insights into the philosophies, policies, and guiding principles of law enforcement and the ethical standards governing police services within the community. Through engaging sessions and interactive discussions, participants gain a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement officers, fostering transparency and mutual understanding between the police and the public.

The CPA curriculum covers topics essential to law enforcement, including criminal investigations, constitutional and criminal law, use of force protocols, departmental structure, and defensive tactics. Through basic classroom instruction, dynamic presentations, and hands-on demonstrations, participants receive valuable insights into the complexities of police work and the challenges faced by law enforcement professionals.

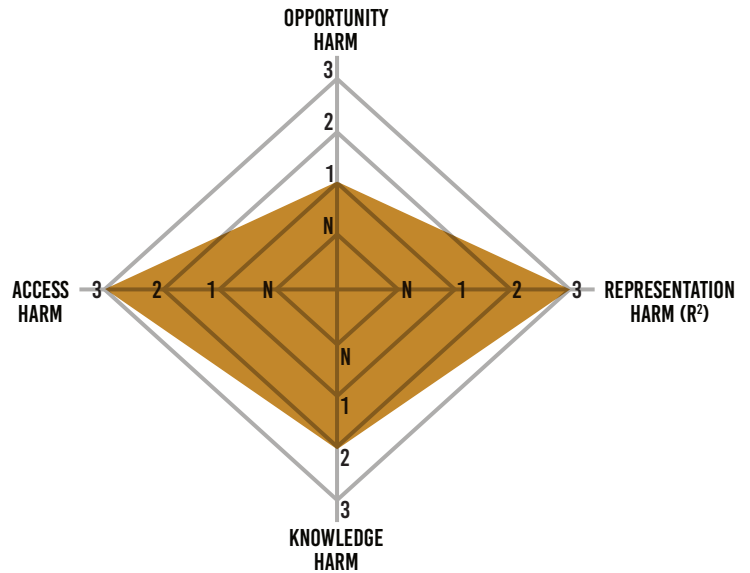
One of the distinctive features of the Citizens Police Academy is its emphasis on participant engagement and input. Throughout the course, attendees are encouraged to share their comments, ideas, and potential solutions to address community concerns and enhance police-community relations. This collaborative approach fosters open dialogue and empowers citizens to play an active role in shaping law enforcement practices and policies.

In addition to classroom instruction, the CPA

offers practical learning experiences, including ride-alongs with police officers and participation in simulated weapons training. These immersive activities provide participants with firsthand exposure to the day-to-day realities of police work, promoting a deeper appreciation for the complexities and challenges inherent in law enforcement operations.

To ensure a meaningful and productive learning experience, participation in the Citizens Police Academy requires individuals to apply and be accepted into the program. Courses are typically held once a week, on Thursdays, for a duration of ten weeks. The structured format and convenient scheduling aim to accommodate participants' needs while maximizing opportunities for learning and engagement within the community.

## Agency Programs & Partnerships (APD)



### Key Harm Indicators

- No data is currently collected to capture the demographic of applicants or outreach efforts.

### Access to Alternative Sentencing Programs

The data for access to alternative sentencing programs and juvenile services assesses how



effectively a justice system provides and utilizes non-incarceration options for offenders, focusing on youth. It gauges the range of alternative programs available, the demographic inclusivity of these programs, the frequency of their use over traditional sentencing, and their impact on rehabilitation and recidivism.

The Buncombe County Justice Services department plays a key role in supporting the Buncombe County criminal justice system, emphasizing cost-effective strategies, prioritizing public safety, providing resources to law enforcement and the courts, and supporting our community in navigating the justice system. This includes access to alternative sentencing programs and the juvenile justice system.

The Buncombe County Justice Services Department initiated a deep-dive analysis into the performance of their alternative sentencing programs, collating findings from the operations of the Adult Drug Treatment Court, Veterans Treatment Court, and Jail Review Team. The data details the performance metrics of these programs over fiscal years 2019 and 2020.

The Adult Drug Treatment Court showcased a success rate among its participants. In the fiscal year 2019, Black participants achieved a 100% success rate, although this rate declined to 66.67% in FY20. White participants also maintained a high success rate at 93.33% in FY19 and slightly less at 81.81% in FY20. However, the termination rate among Black participants was 33.33% in FY20, which was higher than the 18.18% termination rate for White participants. The completion of the program also varied by race, with Black participants in FY19 taking an additional 220 days on average to complete the program, a gap that narrowed significantly in FY20 to just a 9-day difference.

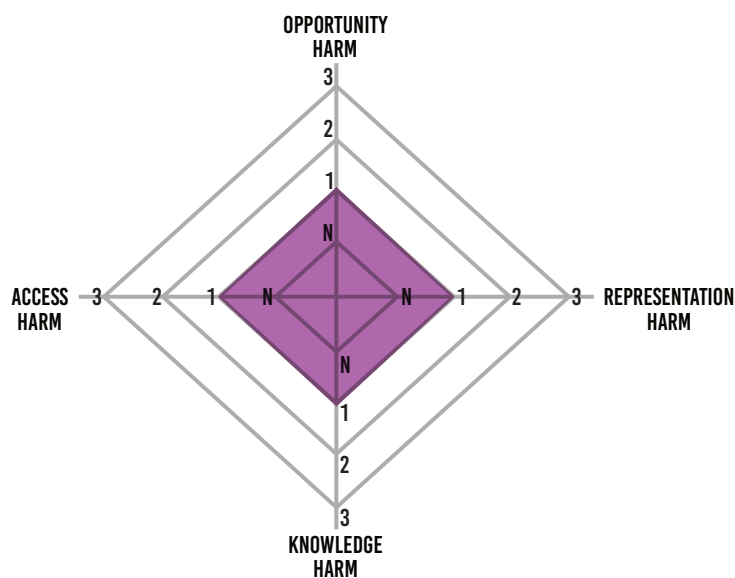
In the Veterans Treatment Court's fiscal year 2020 report, the data revealed a success rate of 33.33% for Black participants, with a contrasting

66.67% unsuccessful exit rate. White participants' success rate was higher at 62.50%, with 37.50% exiting unsuccessfully. Notably, there was a considerable difference in time to exit for those who completed the program successfully, with Black individuals taking 305 days longer than White individuals.

The review of post-admission criminal charges indicated that 57.14% of Black individuals and 100% of Hispanic individuals incurred new criminal charges following their admission into the programs, a rate that was higher than the 46.34% for White individuals.

The analysis of these programs is not just a mere collection of numbers; it reflects the real-life impact of these initiatives on the participants' journey through the justice system. The detailed quantification of success and termination rates and the duration to program completion are critical in understanding the efficiency and efficacy of these restorative justice programs. It

■ Access to Alternative Sentencing Programs (BC)



allows for a transparent evaluation of how these programs operate and serve the community, aiming to ensure that rehabilitation and public safety are at the forefront of the justice system's priorities.

## Racial & Ethnic Disparities

The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) focuses on addressing racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system, recognizing the disproportionate impact of these disparities on minority youth. One significant aspect of this disparity is the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Black and Hispanic youth, at various stages of the juvenile justice system, including arrest, detention, and incarceration. Studies have consistently shown that minority youth are more likely to be arrested and charged with offenses compared to their white counterparts, often for similar behaviors. The Racial and Ethnic Disparity (R/ED) report is annually developed by each state to capture youth contact with the criminal and legal justice systems in five key areas: arrests, diversion, detention, secure confinement, and adult transfer.

### North Carolina

The 2023 Racial and Ethnic Disparities (R/ED) state data from North Carolina reveals concerning disparities in the treatment of Black youth within the juvenile justice system. Despite comprising 24% of the total youth population in the state, Black youths receive a disproportionately high number of complaints, accounting for 59% of all complaints compared to their white counterparts. Black youths are also 5% more likely to receive complaints than white youths. This trend persists in confinement, where Black youths consistently represent over 60% of confined youth, with percentages increasing over the years (64% in 2021, 66% in 2022, and 68% in 2023).

Furthermore, the data highlights significant racial disparities in transfers to adult court, with Black youth comprising 74% of transfers in 2023, marking a notable 21% increase compared to white youth transfers, which saw a 23% decrease. Across offense classifications, Black youths are disproportionately represented, with 67% involved in violent offenses, 64% in serious offenses, and 56% in minor offenses,

significantly higher than their white and Hispanic/Latino counterparts. These disparities extend to school-based offenses as well, with Black students receiving 50% of complaints.

### Buncombe County

Based on the 2020 U.S. Census data for Buncombe County, of the total youth population of 32,367, ages 6-17, the largest demographic group is White, comprising 75% (24,256). Black or African American youth comprise 9% (2,972) of the total, while Hispanic or Latino youth account for 13.5% (4,365). Asian youth constitute 2% (656) of the population, and Native American youth represent 0.4% (118).

The Relative Rate Index (RRI) measures the rate of racial disparity between white youth and youth of color at a particular stage in the system. In Buncombe County, 620 complaints were made against the youth. The RRI of complaints against all groups compared to white youth was 3.21. However, Black youth incurred a disproportionately higher RRI of 5.32. Of the total complaints against Black youths in Buncombe County (195), 64% of the complaints were diverted. Amongst white youths, of 299 complaints, 57% of the complaints were diverted.

In 2023, detention placement for youth in Buncombe County totaled 53, with Black youths comprising 42% (22) and White youths comprising 40% (21) of the total. Only one Black youth was confined, and there were no transfers to adult court for Black youths. The number of Hispanic/Latino youths transferred to adult court decreased by two compared to the previous year. Across 695 offenses, minor offenses accounted for 62%, serious offenses for 23%, status offenses for 11%, and violent offenses for 4%. White youth trend the highest amongst serious (57%), minor (47%), and status offenses (45%). Meanwhile, Black youth trend at 48% for violent offenses.

In terms of school-based offenses, Black youth



account for 35%, White youth for 43%, and Hispanic/Latino youth for 16% of the total offenses in Buncombe County. Overall, school-based offenses have decreased by 15% from 2022 to 2023.

## Juvenile Crime Prevention Council

The Buncombe County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC) partners with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's [Division of Juvenile Justice](#) to galvanize community leaders, locally and statewide, to reduce and prevent county juvenile crime. Members are appointed by the county [Board of Commissioners](#). The NC DPS Division of Juvenile Justice allocates approximately \$23 million annually to these councils—funding is used to subsidize local programs and services. JCPC engages more than 68 organizations who provide a continuum of care services purpose of the Continuum is to document the services available for youth in the community under the DJJDP framework for JCPC fundable programs.

The Continuum can and should be updated throughout the year as services become available, expanded, or discontinued.

The JCPC conducts an annual Risk & Needs Summary Report that discusses the efficacy of community resources, gaps and barriers in the community continuum care, proposed priority for services funding, and the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI)—a new measurement tool administered by the Juvenile Court Counselors after youth are referred.

The findings from the JCPC's work reveal a proactive stance in juvenile crime prevention, with most youth assessed displaying low risk and requiring less intensive intervention compared to state averages. The youth demonstrated a spectrum of needs, predominantly at low to moderate levels, coupled with significant strengths, suggesting a strong foundation for positive outcomes with the right support

systems in place. Legal encounters for these youth were less severe in nature, with felony referrals lower than state averages. However, challenges within family dynamics were notable, with runaway incidents and substance abuse in family histories indicating a need for targeted family interventions.

School engagement emerged as a double-edged sword, with higher instances of conflict yet significant participation in school activities, highlighting the potential of school-based programs to positively influence at-risk youth. Slightly lower self-reported rates of substance use among the county's youth compared to state figures still call for dedicated interventions. Mental health issues were reported by a substantial segment of the youth population, underlining the necessity for comprehensive mental health services. The JCPC recognizes gaps in service, particularly in clinical assessments, substance use services, and vocational training, and is presumably working towards bridging these needs to better serve the youth of Buncombe County.

## Key Harm Indicators

### Racial Disparities in Adult Drug Treatment Court

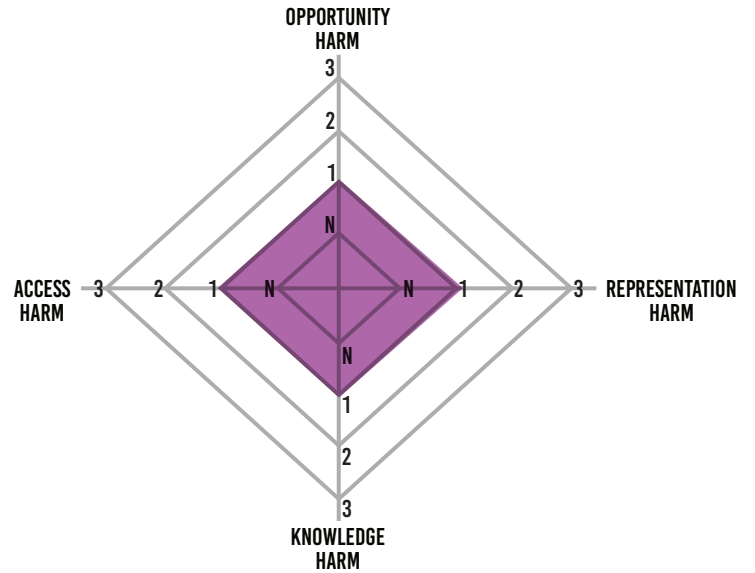
- Success rate for Black participants dropped from 100% (FY19) to 66.67% (FY20), compared to slightly higher rates for White participants (93.33% and 81.81%).
- Black participants in Veterans Treatment Court required an average of 305 additional days to complete the program compared to White participants.
- Post-admission criminal charges were more common among non-White individuals, with 57.14% of Black participants and every Hispanic individual facing new charges, compared to 46.34% of White individuals.
- Non-White clients experienced more severe sanctions, leading to a termination rate of 33.33% for Black participants, significantly higher than

the 18.18% for White participants.

Juvenile Justice Services (BC)

### Absence of Detailed Quantitative Data in Juvenile Crime Prevention Council's Programs

- Lack of detailed quantitative data on racial disparities within JCPC's programs makes it challenging to measure effectiveness accurately and ensure equitable interventions.
- Absence of data perpetuates historical harms by failing to identify areas needing improvement or confirm efficacy of Council's initiatives.



## Criminal Justice Recommendations

### Mutual County & City Recommendations

#### Data Collection

1. Implement a comprehensive data collection system that captures details of all law enforcement interactions with the public, including demographic information, to better understand and address racial disparities.
2. Utilize data analytics to regularly assess and identify patterns of racial bias in traffic stops, searches, arrests, and use of force incidents.
3. Publicly report the findings to promote transparency and accountability.

#### Training

4. Implement Skills Assessments in the Form of Measurable Scenario-Based Recorded Training and Pre-and-Post Testing. A 2023 Washington State University Study cites several examples that illustrate the positive impact of scenario-based measurable training when addressing the use of implicit bias during the act of policing.

#### Recruitment

5. Develop a school-to-squad bridge program with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to increase the overall agency's cultural competence in understanding the historical context, globalized incident-related nuances, and sensitivity status of their Black/African American community. In 2021, the Cayce Police Department, located in Cayce, South Carolina, established a school-to-squad bridge program with an HBCU institution known as Benedict College. A brief synopsis of the bridge development can be viewed [here](#).
6. Take advantage of EPIC Recruiting services: candidate engagement, media relations, community outreach, and social media management. This will improve communication, reduce misunderstandings, and increase empathy during interactions between law enforcement and community members.

### Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

#### Recruitment

7. Revise recruitment strategies to proactively include a more diverse applicant pool, specifically targeting the recruitment of Black detention officers.
8. Engage in community outreach programs in predominantly Black neighborhoods to build relationships and interest in law enforcement careers.
9. Implement a mentorship program for potential recruits from underrepresented communities to guide them through the application and training.

#### Community Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms

10. Implement community feedback mechanisms such as surveys, town hall meetings, and forums, particularly in minority communities to improve your data collection process and demonstrate a better connection to the use of the data.

## Asheville Police Department

### Training

11. Utilize volunteer citizens to participate in scenario-based training to encourage peer and citizen review and ensure transparent evaluation of simulation versus classroom-based implicit bias training. Additional information can be found at the United States DOJ/Office of Justice Programs.

### Policy

12. Implement a comprehensive School Resource Officer disability policy that promotes inclusivity and Meets all Federal Guidelines

### Recruitment

13. Increase the number of criminal investigators and uniformed patrol division officers to reflect the City's African American population percentage. Here is a list of County and Municipal law enforcement agencies that have successfully accomplished the suggested recommendation of matching their employee demographics to the diversity of the community it serves:
  - Richmond County Sheriff's Department
  - Albany Police Department
  - Austin Police Department and the University of Texas Police Department

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IFA REPORT

Cities and municipalities often grapple with the systemic disparities of urban economic development that disproportionately affect Black residents and businesses. From employment opportunities to entrepreneurial ventures, the impact of these inequities resonates across various sectors. Black employees often encounter barriers to upward mobility and fair compensation. On average, Black employees experience a persistent wage gap compared to their white counterparts, with a 2022 report from the Economic Policy Institute indicating a 26.5% disparity. Furthermore, Black businesses face systemic challenges in accessing capital and business resources. Data from the Small Business Administration reveals that, as of 2021, Black-owned businesses receive only a fraction of the loans granted to white-owned enterprises. Concurrently, racial inequities manifest in housing, education, and healthcare, significantly impacting the overall well-being of Black residents.

The 2020 reparations resolution set forth by Buncombe County and the City of Asheville and recognizes these historic economic disparities confronting African Americans – the inability to generate wealth, discriminatory wages, and systematic exclusion from economic development and community investments. Buncombe County and the City of Asheville aim to play a supportive role in boosting economic mobility and opportunities as drivers toward creating economic wealth for the Black community.

### Governance

Several federal, state, and local laws address and promote racial equity in economic development. Some of the key laws and regulations that were in scope during the review of policies and procedures of the City of Asheville and Buncombe County were the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) prohibits creditors from discriminating against applicants based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or receipt of public assistance [2]. The North Carolina Department of Administration (NCDOA) oversees the Purchase and Contract division. The laws and governance related to procurement and contracting in North Carolina are typically outlined in the North Carolina General Statutes, specifically within Chapter 143, Article 3. This chapter addresses the Department of Administration, and Article 3 focuses on purchasing. The NCDOA governs state procurement practices, ensuring that the state agencies and some local government entities acquire the goods and services they need at fair costs, which are effective uses of taxpayer dollars. The City of Asheville and Buncombe County ordinances, policies, and procedural documentation include the non-discrimination ordinance and procurement grant funding policies and procedures. Reviewing these policies, ordinances, and federal and state regulations ensured no policies deviated from stated policies related to racial disparities in policy and practices or the revelation that these policies, practices, or ordinances caused undue economic harm to the African American community.

### Economic Development IFA Metrics

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville provided the Economic Development CDG research team with over 500 artifacts to analyze. Those artifacts were contracts, documents, folder links, policies, and website links containing various qualitative and quantitative data types. The following metrics were assessed to determine the level of harm in the Economic Development impact focus area.

- **Access to Capital** refers to the ability of individuals, businesses, or communities, regardless of

race or ethnicity, to secure financial resources needed for investment, growth, or development, such as access to loans, grants, venture capital, or other forms of funding to start or expand businesses.

- **Government Procurement and Contracting** refers to the process by which government agencies purchase goods, services, or construction projects from private businesses or organizations.
- **Non-Profit and Grant Support** refers to financial assistance provided by non-profit organizations or government agencies to support the work of community-based organizations, social service providers, or other non-profit entities. from accessing these resources.
- **Workforce Development** refers to efforts to enhance individuals' skills, employability, and economic opportunities within a community. This includes job training programs, education initiatives, apprenticeships, and other workforce development activities designed to prepare individuals for employment and career advancement.

## Economic Development Harm Assessment Scale

Economic Development Harm Assessment Scale			
Economic Development	1	2	3
	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent to slight racial disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and programs that aim to facilitate equal access and promote growth and market diversification. Some manageable challenges may include limited publicity, scope, or complexity in application processes.	Frequent barriers exist limiting opportunities, access to capital, mismatch between skills and employer demand of minority residents hindering personal and professional growth, development, and minority firm market presence.  Lack of comprehensive data that may compound the systemic racial disproportionality in economic development policies and practices.	Significant constraints by lack of representation and limited growth prospects which create economic stagnation and reduced competition. Inequitable restrictions from government procurement. Limited access to financing or means to invest in expansion or innovation. Minority residents are significantly hampered by unemployment and underemployment due to lack of adequate workforce development opportunities.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Access to Capital

Access to Financing denotes a comprehensive strategy orchestrated by the economic development department to equip registered businesses with the necessary financial resources for sustaining, employing, and expanding their operations. This metric encompasses a spectrum of financial tools and programs tailored to meet the diverse needs of businesses within the city. It involves facilitating capital infusion through loans, grants, and financial assistance programs, ensuring that existing registered businesses have the financial stability required to maintain day-to-day operations and grow their businesses.

Business owners have access to the following funding mechanisms through Buncombe County and the City of Asheville government:

<b>Buncombe County and the City of Asheville</b>	Mountain Community Capital Fund - Loan Guarantee Program
<b>Buncombe County</b>	Covid Recovery Funding - Grant Program
	One Buncombe Small Business Relief Fund Grants - Grant Program
	Community Investment Grants (Isaac Coleman, Tipping Point, and Strategic Partnership programs were specifically reviewed)
<b>City of Asheville</b>	Community Investment Grants (Community Development Block Grant and Neighborhood Matching Grant programs were specifically reviewed).

Small businesses have access to financing through several avenues in Buncombe County.

The first is the Mountain Community Capital Fund, which was established in 2019 through a community partnership between Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, and three Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs): Mountain BizWorks, Self Help Credit Union, and Carolina Small Business Development Fund. This funding mechanism is available to borrowers who may not have qualified for conventional lending options.

Although not a direct funding program, it benefits small and minority-owned businesses through its loan guarantee mechanism. This fund expands access to capital for underserved entrepreneurs in Buncombe County. Based on the data received, 53 applicants were awarded business financing during the analysis period. It is unknown how many applications were submitted for funding from which the 53 were selected. Since the program inception, there has been slightly over \$2 million in funding, of which \$1.2 million (61%) was provided to African American borrowers, \$456K (22%) to Hispanic/Latino borrowers, \$266,861.08 (13%) to White borrowers, and \$80,600 (4%) identified as Other. A mixture of industries is represented, with 45% of loan recipients identifying in the Service Industry and 25% within the Food Service and Accommodation industry.

As a result of this loan guarantee program, new and existing businesses were able to provide or sustain 155 jobs (103 African American, 34 Hispanic, 13 White, and 5 Other). The loan payment status includes 3 businesses who have paid their loans in full and 3 businesses with a repayment status as past due. The CDG research team was later informed, after a MCCF Special Meeting held on February 16, 2024, that reporting associated with MCCF was inaccurate, thereby impacting the data that was originally provided. For this reason, disaggregated, raw source data (excluding any personally identifiable data) should be provided to committee representatives, assessed, and validated to ensure that summarized data is accurate.



Mountain BizWorks provided written responses to clarifying questions related to processes for MCCF. The narrative indicated that over 4,000 loans and \$120 million in total financing went to WNC local businesses, with an average loan size of \$30,240. This specific disaggregated data was not provided for analysis. The quantitative data provided in the report included spreadsheet of loans provided to borrowers between September 2019 and September 2023.

### **One Buncombe Small Business Relief Fund Grants**

Small businesses have access to One Buncombe Small Business Relief Fund Grants, which provides grants up to \$2,500 for solopreneurs or single-member organizations, and \$5,000 for firms with up to 25 full-time employees. A report outlining program statistics and key highlights for March 2021 indicated 279 applications were received, totaling \$1,133,277, and 116 grants were awarded, totaling \$475,000. The written report for November 2021 indicated 193 applications were received totaling \$785,000, and 141 grants were awarded totaling \$562,500. 64% of the funding went to women-owned enterprises in March 2021 and 67% in November 2021.

### **COVID Recovery Funding**

Additionally, businesses had access to COVID Recovery Funding. In reviewing the data associated with the COVID Recovery Funding to determine if funds were equitably available to all applicants, we were provided a scoring matrix that included the organization name, project name, amount of funds requested, and the scores for each area of assessment. The assessment areas included project plan, statement of need, link to COVID19, Population served, results, evaluation, equity impact, project partners, organizational capacity, budget, reviewer questions and comments, and an overall total score represented as a percentage. The CSLFRF Project Awards spreadsheet provided the supplier's name, category, project name, initial award amount, additional award amount and total award amount. The COVID Recovery Grant Funding

Program was the most comprehensive set of data received. 51 projects received over \$50.7M in Covid Recovery Funds. The Buncombe County website provides transparent reporting on the distribution of those funds, the status of the funding project, the organization awarded, and the category of where the funds are being used. This allows constituents to see where the funds are used in the community.

An area for improvement in funding initiatives reporting is to articulate the rationale behind the determination of the amount of funding awarded to an organization. The CDG research team could not locate documentation explaining the funding amount criteria. Based on the data provided, 100% of the organizations that requested funding were granted some COVID Recovery Funding in at least one of the two award cycles.

Per the Covid Recovery Funding website, 13 projects have been completed to date, totaling over \$3.5M. The website lists a "Project Spotlight" for each of the completed projects that indicated the award amount, project dates, impact area, how the funds were used and a results sections that outlined what was accomplished as a result of the funds. The administering team of this grant program is to be commended for the transparency provided for the program and should serve as an example for other funding Initiatives by the County.

### **Key Harm Indicators**

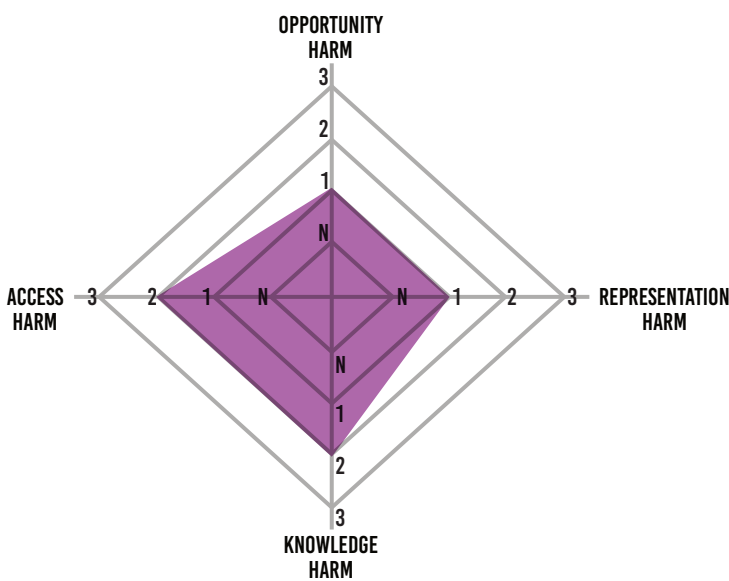
There are a few different funding mechanisms for Buncombe County businesses to access funding through the MCCF loan program, One Buncombe, and Covid Relief Grant programs.

- There is a moderate level of awareness identified for the programs in place. The City and County have information on their websites for each grant program, along with eligibility and application information.
- The MCCF Fund was designed to provide access to loan funding to underserved business owners. While

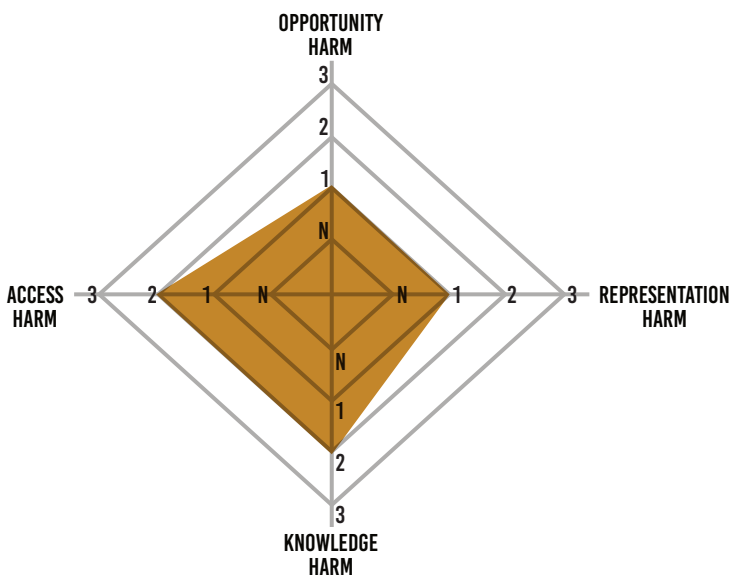
capital has been made available to African Americans, the acceptance-to-denial ratio remains unknown.

- The lack of data on the full lending landscape, including the population of total applications and the acceptance versus denial rate, makes it difficult to assess comprehensively.
- A lack of disaggregated demographic and outcome data creates the inability to verify stated results and outcomes independently.

Access to Capital (BC)



Access to Capital (COA)



## Government Procurement and Contracting

Government Procurement and Contracting aims to provide registered businesses with the essential resources for sustainability, job creation, and growth by fostering mutually beneficial relationships with the city. This metric involves a streamlined process where businesses already registered within the County and City's economic ecosystem gain access to procurement opportunities offered by the local government. These opportunities catalyze long-term viability, enabling businesses to secure contracts, deliver goods or services, and contribute meaningfully to the local economy.

### Buncombe County Government

Buncombe County has recognized the disparity of minority suppliers and vendors within County contracting and purchasing programs and developed a Minority Business Plan which established a “verifiable goal of twelve percent (12%) for minority participation on building construction or repair projects, ten percent (10%) each for procurement, and services.” The Minority Business Plan is undated and does not indicate when this plan was implemented. The Plan outlines a robust set of strategies to encourage MBE participation. There was no information provided on how this plan is tracked and monitored and how the current minority participation percentage currently is related to the established goal.

The Bidders List noted that “these are the parties that receive solicitations directly by email. We also advertised on the County website.” The Bidder lists included an ID, Solicitation Title, Date advertised, vendor solicited, and WMBE designation where applicable.

What is unknown from this dataset is how these companies were selected to receive the solicitation and what system was used to source these vendors. Additionally, no quotes or scoring were provided for any contract bids or

awards to assess the equity in vendor evaluation, scoring, and selection. The challenge in analyzing this data set was that data was separated into different files by fiscal years and appeared to have been manually assembled. This created difficulty in assessing the data longitudinally (over time) to identify any patterns and themes.

The researchers meticulously consolidated the provided datasets for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. This process entailed aligning disparate data formats and standardizing data fields across the entire dataset. This process was crucial to ensure the accuracy and reliability of our subsequent analysis. This data integration approach enabled a comprehensive and uniform analysis, providing a robust foundation for our findings and conclusions. The data consolidation revealed gaps in the data. For example, some solicitations lacked an identification number while others had an identification number present, and others were missing the date advertised. If these challenges are present during a “look-back” exercise, it is expected to be monumentally difficult to assess and monitor equity performance on an ongoing basis.

Additionally, there were 534 unique bidders from the 2022 and 2023 Bidders files, of which 124 were HUB certified, accounting for 19% of vendors solicited to bid on contracts with the County. There was a clear increase from 2022 to 2023 of HUB-certified vendor solicitation. In 2022, 7% (11) of 159 vendors solicited to bid on contracts were HUB-certified. Alternatively, in 2023, 22% (113) of vendors solicited to bid on contracts were HUB-certified. No bidding data was provided before 2022.

Contract data provided spanned 2020 through 2023. There were 1,410 contracts included in the dataset. In a comparison of the 1,410 contracts awarded by Buncombe County, 35 solicited bidders submitted bids on County contracts; 253 contracts were awarded to solicited bidders. Of the 253 solicited bidders awarded contracts, one was a HUB-certified vendor awarded a contract for \$195,011. The data revealed that

80% (28) of the contracts were awarded to repeat suppliers, with 20% (7) receiving one contract during the survey period. This data supports the finding that previously used vendors are heavily favored to provide services which could create a barrier to entry for new businesses.

Purchase order data from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2023, included 3,854 purchase orders issued to 1,548 suppliers. 571 (37%) suppliers were repeat vendors, and 976 (63%) were one-time use suppliers. This data shows that new suppliers were used for purchase order requisitions. No data was supplied to identify the certification status or demographic makeup of vendors that do business with the County.

To close the gap of certification status and demographics, the Purchase Order supplier vendor names were cross-referenced with the Asheville Business Inclusion (ABI) Vendor List and the North Carolina Secretary of State Office vendor database to identify certification status, which may provide insight into supplier demographics. Out of 1,548 suppliers, 23 matched with NC Secretary of State vendor list and two vendors showed to be HUB certified. The cross reference with the ABI Vendor Outreach list showed three suppliers listed on the ABI Outreach list with one vendor being a Woman Business Enterprise (WBE) certified and two vendors being a Black Business Enterprise (BBE). This cross-reference activity could only be conducted using the supplier/vendor name limited to exact name matches. This further highlighted the need to have a more robust and comprehensive vendor tracking system as more vendors could be certified or identified as minority businesses. We were unable to identify them.

The research team received the following documents: current contracts policy, procurement policy, the draft and newly adopted on November 7, 2023, and a copy of the supplier information packet. We have determined that the policies and procedures do outline participation goals for minority, women,

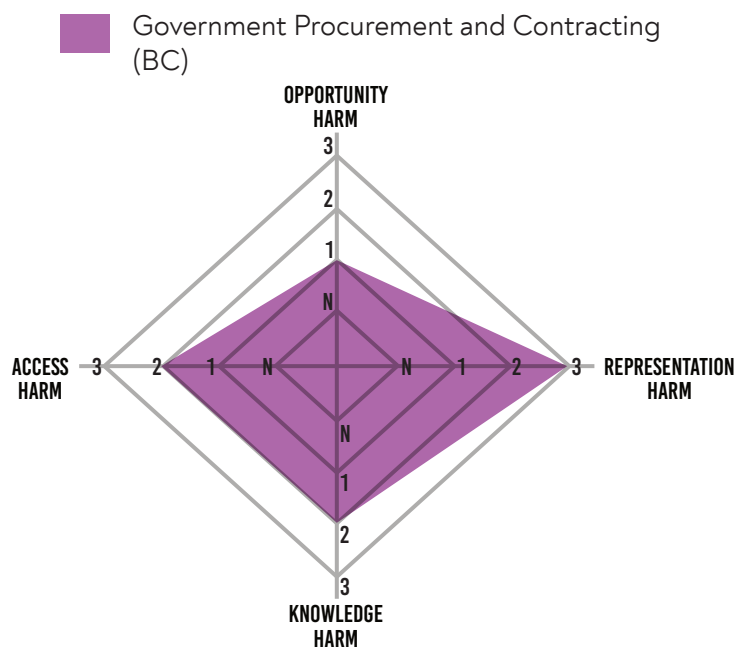
and small business suppliers. Still, there is an inability to track and report progress toward the stated metrics properly due to inadequate data metrics. This lack of transparency creates an additional barrier related to equity in procurement with the County. The Minority Business Plan has clear minimum compliance requirements set forth to actively seek qualified minority businesses and offer opportunities to participate in “all aspects of County contracting and purchasing programs.” Still, no data supports enforcement or compliance with this policy.

Buncombe County government provided purchase orders and contract data for procurement and contracting for 2020–2023. There were 3,854 purchase orders issued during the review period. Based on the procurement policy, goods and services funded through local and state dollars under \$5,000 do not require multiple quotes, purchase order and contracts are optional and P-Card usage is recommended. The unknown in the data set provided is the funding source of the purchase orders provided, as the thresholds differ for local/state and federal funding sources. Using the most conservative funding thresholds of local and state funding, 26% (1,004) of purchase orders issued were under the \$5,000 threshold. Seventy-two percent of purchase orders are awarded to vendors 2 or more times. These lower threshold purchase orders are prime opportunities to create an avenue for small and minority-owned businesses into the procurement pipeline. Demographic data was not provided for the suppliers listed to ascertain the distribution of procurement opportunities by demographics. A concerted effort should be made to seek out small and minority-owned firms at this process level to reduce access barriers.

Relating to contract data in Buncombe County, 1,410 contracts were issued. We cross-referenced bidder data (vendors solicited to bid on contracts) with the contracts issues to determine how many vendors who bid were awarded contracts and, further, how many

identified as MWSBE. Unsure of all direct matches because supplier and solicited names may not have matched in all cases but where matches were identified, 253 contracts were awarded to 35 bidders, with 1 bidder identified as a NC HUB certified Woman-owned business.

The procedures indicate that when formal and informal bidding is required, records of bids must be maintained, and all decisions must be documented and are public records. Public records data should be readily available upon request. The data we received was not all-encompassing of data that should be available to determine how decisions were made. The requestor should not have to specifically request each data element but be provided with reasonable data to evaluate the decision made. The researcher does not believe this transparency of information was provided.



### Key Harm Indicators

There are ample opportunities to do business with the County. Clarity on what the Buncombe County vendor management policy accomplishes was not provided. There could be compounding factors contributing to low representation from 1) the use of known/repeat

vendors, 2) business readiness gaps, and 3) reduced visibility of informal opportunities. Overall, policies have been updated to increase utilization of minority owned businesses. However, what policies and procedures govern the Buncombe County government procurement and contracting process, what equity goals are established, and how stated goals have been met are still unclear.

- Procurement is skewed towards existing relationships and large businesses.
- Lack of minority representation in procurement opportunities.
- No consistent reporting mechanism of vendors who are ready, able, and willing to do business and clear certification status to draw upon when opportunities are available.

### City of Asheville

In May of 1993, the City of Asheville established the Minority Business Program (MB Program) to promote equal opportunities for minority businesses in city contracting. One of the initiatives undertaken was the creation of a Minority Business Directory, aimed at increasing staff awareness of minority and women-owned businesses offering goods and services that the city typically procures. The directory aimed at enhancing the visibility of historically disadvantaged businesses to city staff in need of contracted goods and services. The city of Asheville adopted The Minority Business Plan in May of 1998. The Asheville Business Inclusion Office, formerly known as the City of Asheville's Minority Business Program, was established to support local minority businesses and promote equity within the city's business community. The Asheville City Council passed the Business Inclusion Contracting Policy on October 27th, 2020, which is supported by the Business Inclusion Office. The name change reflects a commitment to advancing equity and inclusivity by reshaping internal perspectives on race, ethnicity, and gender.

One of the significant challenges within the ABI Office revolved around the lack of transparency

and accountability in tracking and monitoring the program's implementation. The City of Asheville's government procurement and data collection process was challenged with reporting, recording, and tracking inconsistencies. There were no information available regarding how the program's progress is monitored or what the current level of minority participation is. Key areas of some contract forms lacked vital information indicating strategic, targeted procurement efforts to Minority businesses. While policies exist to promote race-conscious procurement, adherence to these policies were inconsistent. Duplicate documentation existed under different contracts, and some contract documents were either missing or inaccessible.

Additionally, while the ABI Vendor Outreach list provides comprehensive information such as WMBE designation, commodity codes, and contact details, discrepancies arise when cross-referencing with the ABI-awarded Contract List. These discrepancies include variations in vendor names between lists and the absence of a clear distinction between contracts from government procurement and those awarded through grant applications. Moreover, numerous sections within the "quotes" category are left blank, and minority vendor selections were missing from some signed contracts. Some evaluation sheets lacked scoring and contain unidentified evaluator initials, leading to confusion and a need for clarity.

During our extensive examination of the procurement policies and procedures of the City of Asheville, our findings reveal notable discrepancies in the city's procurement procedures, particularly impacting small businesses owned by Black Business enterprises in certain trade sectors. Specifically, these enterprises exhibit lower contract acquisition rates and receive smaller contract awards than their non-minority and male counterparts.

The City of Asheville Business Inclusion Office (ABI) is responsible for supporting the

implementation of the City of Asheville Business Inclusion Contracting Policy. ABI actively seeks to identify minority- and women-owned businesses for opportunities to participate as providers of goods and services to the City.

From July 2020 to June 2022, ABI awarded over \$153,989,175.50 to 580 unique suppliers. Out of the 580 suppliers, 48 Vendors were registered with NC Secretary of State and none of those registered vendors, appear to be minority certified. 18 of the suppliers are registered as Black Business Enterprises (BBE) on the ABI list and were awarded a total of \$269,120.95 between 11 contracts. This is a 0.001% utilization rate for BBEs. No data was supplied to identify the certification status or demographic makeup of vendors that do business with the City. The ABI office's procurement goal for minority-owned businesses is to award at least 10% of city contracts to certified minority-owned businesses. Similarly, women-owned businesses aim to award at least 10% of city contracts to

certified women-owned businesses.

The Asheville Business Inclusion Office (ABI) policy mandates that the ABI Manager produce bi-annual reports on utilizing certified small women business enterprises (SMWBE) across contract categories and SMWBE goals. However, the extended vacancy in the ABI Manager role and other staffing shortages have hindered the City of Asheville's capacity to consistently generate reports and conduct real-time contract monitoring and certification audits. Additionally, the ABI policy mandate to establish a dedicated small business enterprise (SBE) program has not been met as of this analysis. The City of Asheville does not have policy documents or criteria for vendor performance evaluations.

Although clear guidelines are outlined in the ABI policy, practices indicate an inconsistent procurement process, ultimately undermining equitable practices. Responsibility for administering the ABI Policy is primarily



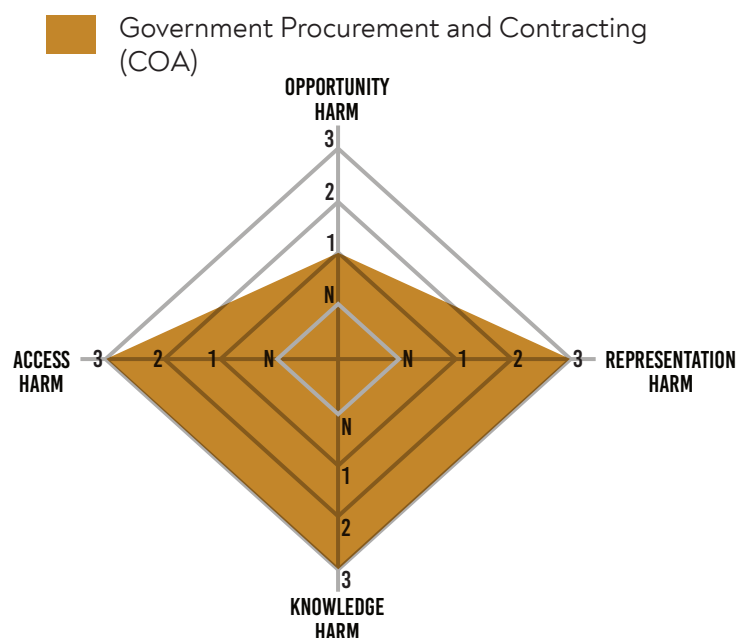
delegated across all relevant COA departments, with little oversight. While departmental staff are aware of the roles of Procurement and the ABI Office, there exists a lack of consensus regarding program responsibilities. This lack of clarity, compounded by the decentralized nature of Asheville's procurement system and the absence of accountability measures, poses significant challenges in ensuring a procurement process that is fair, transparent, and inclusive. Without comprehensive monitoring and tracking beyond basic participation statistics, the COA's objectives for the ABI Policy cannot effectively foster an inclusive procurement environment.

The City of Asheville's government's procurement and data collection processes faced challenges due to inconsistencies in reporting, recording, and tracking. Some contract forms lack essential information for strategic and targeted procurement efforts aimed at minority businesses. Although policies exist to promote race-conscious procurement, adherence to these policies varies. Duplicate documentation is present under different contracts, and some contract documents are either missing or inaccessible. Additionally, several sections within the "quotes" category remain blank, and minority vendor selections are absent from signed contracts. Evaluation sheets often lack scoring and feature unidentified evaluator initials, leading to confusion and lack of clarity.

CDG's extensive examination of the City of Asheville's procurement policies and procedures revealed notable discrepancies in the city's procurement procedures, particularly impacting small businesses owned by Black Business enterprises in certain trade sectors. These enterprises experience lower contract acquisition rates and receive smaller contract awards than their non-minority and male counterparts. Limited forecasting of procurement opportunities hampers proactive engagement, with reliance on the annual capital budget document for public awareness of contracting opportunities.

Despite the City's clearly defined SMWBE inclusion policies, the effectiveness of these policies is hindered by significant personnel shortages in the ABI Office. The ABI office's disjointed and inconsistent process exacerbates this issue, as the government's procurement and data collection procedures suffer from inconsistencies in reporting, recording, and tracking. This inconsistency is evident in several areas, including reliance on repeat vendors, ineffective utilization of the vendor lists, a readiness gap among businesses, limited visibility of informal opportunities, incomplete contract forms lacking information on strategic, targeted procurement efforts for Minority businesses, inconsistent adherence to race-conscious procurement policies, and duplicate documentation.

Document analysis and qualitative feedback reveal an absence of a consistent or organization-wide philosophy or strategy for engaging diverse firms and facilitating connections, with departments relying on the Procurement Department and ABI Office to manage all outreach efforts. We find that specific operational elements within the procurement framework hinder the complete involvement of Black Business Enterprises/ Minority firms.



## Key Harm Indicators

There are ample procurement opportunities for businesses interested in doing business with the City. Solicitations are advertised/requested via various outlets, online, and email, but the CDG researchers could not determine how Black businesses are made aware of solicitations. Factors contributing to low representation include:

- Use of repeat/known vendors.
- Ineffective vendor list utilization due to personnel shortages.
- Business readiness gaps.
- Reduced visibility of informal opportunities.

Policies were updated to increase minority-owned business utilization. However, policy adherence is lacking and significantly disparate, which makes the procurement process suffer from inconsistencies in reporting, recording, and tracking, which then creates barriers to access. This discrepancy underscores the need for more inclusive practices and outreach efforts to ensure equitable representation and growth opportunities for Black-owned businesses within the procurement process.

- Economic stagnation and reduced competition are notable.
- Lack of representation and limited growth prospects.
- Severe underrepresentation of minority-owned firms and significant exclusion from government procurement.
- Gaps in data collection hinder a comprehensive understanding of the disparities in economic outcomes.

## Non-Profit and Grant Support

Non-profit and grant support are strategic mechanisms designed to offer registered non-profit organizations the vital resources needed for sustainability, employment, and growth. This metric encompasses a range of financial support, grants, and programs tailored to address the unique needs of non-profits operating within the city. It involves facilitating

access to funds that enable these organizations to maintain their operations, including covering operational costs, supporting employment opportunities, and fostering an environment conducive to their overall growth.

### Buncombe County Government

The research focused exclusively on grants supporting community economic development activities, specifically evaluating Community Investment Grants such as Isaac Coleman, Tipping Point, Strategic Partnership, One Buncombe, and Covid Recovery Funding. All grant data was consolidated to provide a comprehensive overview, aiming to uncover any recurring themes or trends and determine the holistic allocation of grant funding dollars.

However, the data revealed several gaps, particularly for fiscal years 2022 and 2023, where some grant funding programs lacked complete information. While some data indicated the entities requesting funding during these periods, details about the recipients were missing. For instance, although data on One Buncombe showed the award recipients, award applicant information was absent.

One aspect of the review process involved quantifying the amount of funding allocated to economic development initiatives across the identified grant programs. During the assessment period, 254 organizations requested funding, while 386 organizations received funding through these targeted grant programs. In total, \$55,449,403.25 in awards were distributed to organizations between 2021 and 2024.

In assessing the contract data, it became apparent that grant funding was included in the contract data. The naming of grant funding as a contract name with the FY made it difficult to extract for analysis easily. The research team had to create separate fields for the fiscal year and grant names to identify who were awarded funding and during which period.



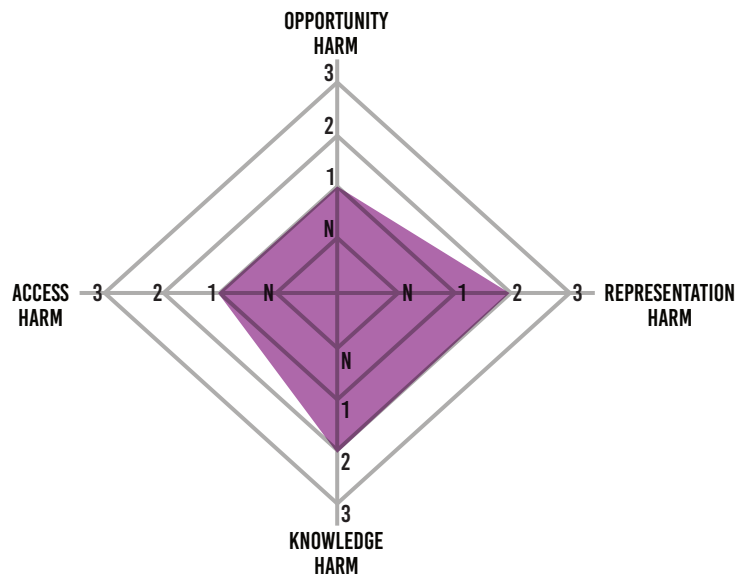
Non-Profit and Grant Support (BC)

The One Buncombe Grant Program is a small business job retainage grant program to assist individuals who have suffered substantial financial damage due to the pandemic"[9-11]. This grant program provided funding to 116 businesses in 2021 and 141 businesses in 2022, awarding \$1,037,500 in both years combined.

Demographic data related to populations served or recipient organization demographic data was not provided. Although demographic information related to outcomes and impact of the One Buncombe Fund is included in the Key Highlights of the program awards and displayed on the Mountain Bizworks website, we were unable to assess the summarized and categorical data provided independently. Disaggregated data is required for this analysis because summarized data may obscure patterns and present a false picture of the underlying data. For example, the detailed data provided by Key Highlights and Detailed Analysis of the Funding program, along with the chart displayed on the Mountain Bizworks' website, shows demographic data that combines Minority enterprise AND Women business enterprise businesses, but we are unable to determine how many African American businesses and how many Women-owned businesses are included in these numbers as those are different demographics.

Several grants are available to non-profit organizations that are identified to support economic development initiatives in the community and education, housing, and justice initiatives.

Moderate information regarding the grant guidelines and timeline is available online. Demographic data regarding recipient organizations or populations served to determine representation is not captured. Greater insight into the evaluation process for each grant program is needed to ensure a fair and equitable selection of applicants. Only the COVID Recovery Grant program provided ample scoring and evaluator information.



### Key Harm Indicators

- Inadequate reporting on the results and outcomes associated with funding provided to organizations hinders accountability and transparency in allocating public funds.

### City of Asheville Government

The research concentrated solely on grants that funded economic development initiatives within the community, specifically evaluating the Community Investment Grants: Neighborhood Matching Grant and the Community Development Block Grant. All grant data was consolidated to provide a comprehensive overview, aiming to uncover themes or patterns and discern the overall allocation of grant funding across various program types.

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, established under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, grants states, cities, and counties to foster urban development, improve housing, and expand economic opportunities, primarily for low- and moderate-income individuals. Emphasizing flexibility and community empowerment, CDBG enables tailored strategies while promoting partnerships among government levels and the private sector.

Eligible activities range from property acquisition to public facility construction, focusing on benefiting low-income communities, addressing blight, and urgent community needs. However, certain activities, like general government building construction and political endeavors, are ineligible. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, established to foster urban development and economic opportunities, plays a crucial role in Asheville's community development efforts.

According to the Community Development Block Grant information and application page, CDBG funds are restricted to the city limits, targeting low/moderate-income areas or addressing blight, with an annual allocation of approximately \$1.5 million, mainly disbursed to nonprofit organizations, guided by the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan. 59 CDBGs were awarded during FY2020-2023 to 16 non-profit organizations. Total funds awarded equaled a little over 3.9 million dollars, and of this total, approximately \$581,000 were awarded to 4 Black-led non-profits and 1 Black male and White male Co-led non-profit. 14% of funds were awarded to Black Led Non-Profit organizations. The City does not fully or accurately collect data on the racial, ethnic, or gender makeup of grant recipient boards, executive leadership, staff, or participants. This absence of data hindered the ability to effectively assess how these grant recipients are utilizing the funding to impact the City of Asheville.

Nine Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) were awarded for the fiscal year 2023-2024, but no information regarding the award amounts or distribution of funds was provided within the assessment timeframe.

In 2021, the City of Asheville initiated the Neighborhood Matching Grant Program (NMG). This program funds neighborhood projects to enhance their quality of life. Administered by the Community Engagement Division, the program aims to build community

capacity and strengthen ties between residents and the city. Projects are planned and executed by residents in collaboration with city staff. Eligible applicants include registered neighborhood organizations, associations, homeowner groups, and coalitions. Ineligible organizations like businesses or nonprofits can partner with registered groups but cannot apply directly. The program emphasizes community involvement, requiring neighborhood contributions equal to or greater than the grant amount. There are 86 active neighborhood groups within the "Asheville's Neighborhoods" organization registered list according to the neighborhood map link within the NMG webpage. 46 of these neighborhoods are currently registered with the city.

The program can award 14 grants per year. The number of awarded grants was as follows:

- 2021: 13 awarded grants.
- 2022: 11 awarded grants
- 2023: 14 awarded grants

The program has awarded a total of \$159,110.00 to 38 awardees. The NMG Review Committee is advised to refer to the Climate Justice Map when scoring applications regarding Neighborhood and Climate Resilience criteria. Since the program launched, 53 applications were received over the 3-year scope, and 38 projects have been awarded to 22 neighborhoods. Of the 38 grant recipients, 6 Legacy Neighborhoods were awarded 10 different Neighborhood Matching Grants of \$5000 each.

### Key Harm Indicators

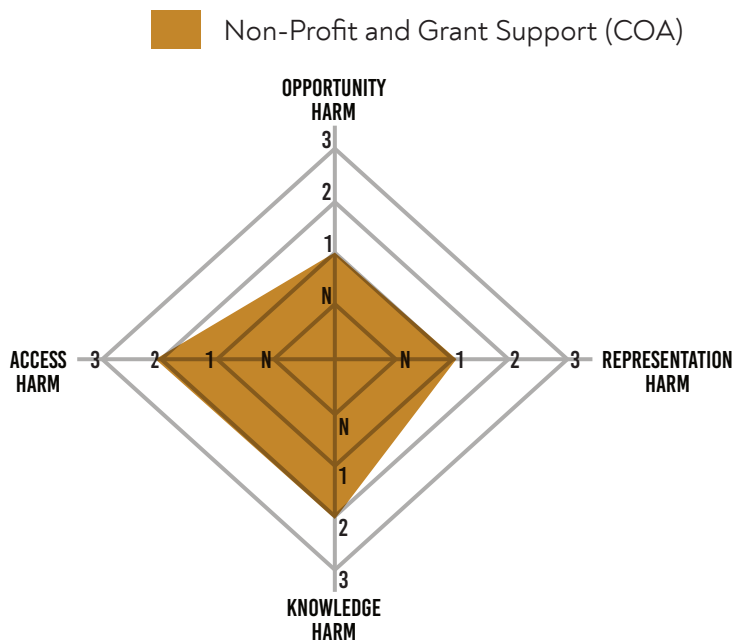
Grants are open to all applicants who are interested in applying. Although information regarding the grant guidelines and timeline is readily available online, some barriers exist within online navigation to identify if these grants are a right fit for the applicant. No demographic data, evaluations, or applications were provided for the Neighborhood Matching Grant applicants and recipients. Demographic data and awardee applications and evaluations

were provided for the Community Development Block Grant evaluation, but not all applicant data was provided. Greater insight is needed into the evaluation process for each grant program to ensure a fair and equitable selection of applicants.

- The lack of transparency in scoring and evaluation mechanisms for grant applicants impeded our capacity to gauge the extent to which the grant allocation process followed equitable practices.
- Lack of Demographic Data Collection: The absence of data on the demographic of individuals affected by grant recipients or the communities impacted by grants hinders assessing how funds are utilized to impact the City of Asheville.
- Inadequate Insight into Fund Utilization: Despite a portion of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds being awarded to Black-led nonprofit organizations, there is insufficient insight into how these funds were utilized and their specific impact on the Black community.
- There is a lack of accurate information about the racial, ethnic, or gender makeup of the individuals who lead or manage the organizations receiving grant funding. Inaccurate data collection on leadership demographics hinders the ability to evaluate whether grant funding distribution practices are fair and inclusive.

## Workforce Development

Workforce development assesses the availability and access to workforce development resources the County and City provides. Specifically, to determine if resources are abundant for residents to partake in workforce development initiatives and if appropriate funding is available to support individual workforce mobility.



### Inclusive Hiring Partners

Led by the Economic Development Coalition, mutually funded by Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments, the Inclusive Hiring Partners (IHP) "is a resource to close the opportunity gap by connecting Buncombe County residents experiencing significant barriers to employment with available jobs in growing industries." The IHP Interest Form Data dashboard indicated 332 referrals were made to IHP between 11/2020 and 10/2023. The referral rate increased each year, with FY2023 experiencing 147 referrals. Although referrals increased for Inclusive Hiring Partners, 56% of candidates expressed they were not interested in the program. The IHP program had 96 total applicants for the program. 51% of candidates Identified as African American, 21% identified as White or Caucasian, 22% were categorized as Unknown, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian and Other.

Awareness of the program came primarily from Case Manager/Peer Support Specialist referrals (50% of referrals), friends, or other community organizations. Based on Candidate interest and follow up data, while participants are aware of the program 60% indicated they were not interested or were exited due to non-responsiveness to follow up. Of the 96

applicants, 72 were actively enrolled candidates in the program during the evaluation period. Ten percent of enrolled candidates were employed outside of IHP, 29% were employed through IHP, and 61% were unemployed and seeking opportunities. There were 30 job placements between 2020 and 2023, with over 40% of individuals placed identifying as African American. There is a video explaining the opportunity gap and how IHP helps. An evaluation may need to be conducted to determine if participation in the IHP program jeopardizes participant eligibility for other services, which could impact their interest in participating.

### NextAVL

Led by the Economic Development Coalition, mutually funded by Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments, NextAVL is a voluntary 9-month professional mentorship program that pairs local university students with working professionals who offer connection, mentorship, and professional development. This program is a potential pipeline to the workforce development of African American young people in the area to establish connections and foster relationships with key strategic partners in the community. The researchers have found that out of the 119 students who applied to the program between 2020 and 2023, 13 (11%) were African American, 63 (53%) were White, <1% Hispanic. Data available through DATAUSA revealed that over 600 African American students are enrolled at the participating universities as potential candidates for program participation. Applications for admission into the NextAVL program appear to be rebounding post-Covid with applications trending upward. There were 38 applicants in 2020; 14 in 2021; 26 in 2022; and 39 in 2023. The gender makeup of applicants was 60% women, 22% men, 3% non-binary/gender fluid, and the remaining unknown.

### Economic Development Incentives

Economic Development Incentives assist companies in selecting the Asheville-Buncombe

County area for corporate relocation of their business to boost economic mobility. Based on the Project Application data provided, Buncombe County has nine economic development incentive agreements, seven of which are still active or in progress; two were cancelled or lost. These projects are expected to bring 1,250 new job commitments to the area, with an average wage of \$56,987.43 for a new capital investment of \$805,200,000. What would be helpful to know is the required skillset for the expected new jobs and develop a strategy to work with local organizations to ensure the area workforce is equipped and skilled to become competitive applicants for the new jobs.

The Economic Development Incentive policy emphasizes a balanced approach to economic growth, focusing on increased taxable property, total employment, and wages. Additionally, the program complements incentive programs adopted by municipalities within Buncombe County or the State of North Carolina, providing support for new and expansion projects through various means, including direct grants and infrastructure development.

Economic Development Coalition assists companies in selecting the Asheville-Buncombe County area for corporate relocation of their business to boost the economic mobility of the area. Buncombe County is currently engaged in several economic development incentive projects, each aiming to stimulate growth and create regional job opportunities. These projects span various industries, including manufacturing, logistics, and pottery. The current companies who have been awarded the Economic Incentive Grants are Pratt and Whitney, Nypro, System Logistics Corporation, BorgWarner Turbo Systems, and East Fork Pottery, LLC, and are receiving or in the process of receiving incentives to support their projected capital investments and job creation goals. Based on the Project Application data provided Buncombe County has 9 economic

development incentive agreements, 5 of which are still active or in progress and 2 were cancelled or lost. The 5 active projects are expected to bring 1,065 new job commitments to the area with an average wage of \$56,987.43 for a new capital investment of \$805,200,000.

Here is the breakdown per project:

- Pratt and Whitney: 800 jobs
- Nypro: 68 jobs
- System Logistics Corporation: 47 jobs
- BorgWarner Turbo Systems: 100 jobs
- East Fork Pottery, LLC: 50 jobs

The success of these projects is indicative of the collaborative efforts between Buncombe County and its partners, which include local governments, financial institutions, economic development organizations, and educational institutions, all working together to foster a supportive environment for business growth and community prosperity.

Per the policy:

Jobs created must be retained and filled for a minimum period of three (3) years past the term of the incentive agreement at the average wage rate following the effective date that the job was incentivized. The initial investment includes the company’s investment for buildings and equipment. If equipment is included in the initial investment, the equipment portion of the initial investment will be adjusted by a reduction of 42.4%, which represents the estimated value of depreciation that can be recovered by companies over the first three years’ class life of the equipment. The building investment plus the adjusted equipment investment shall equal the Total Adjusted Investment. We provide funding to other organizations to help with workforce development.

There is a lack of demographic data collected regarding the employees hired by Economic Development Incentive Program grant

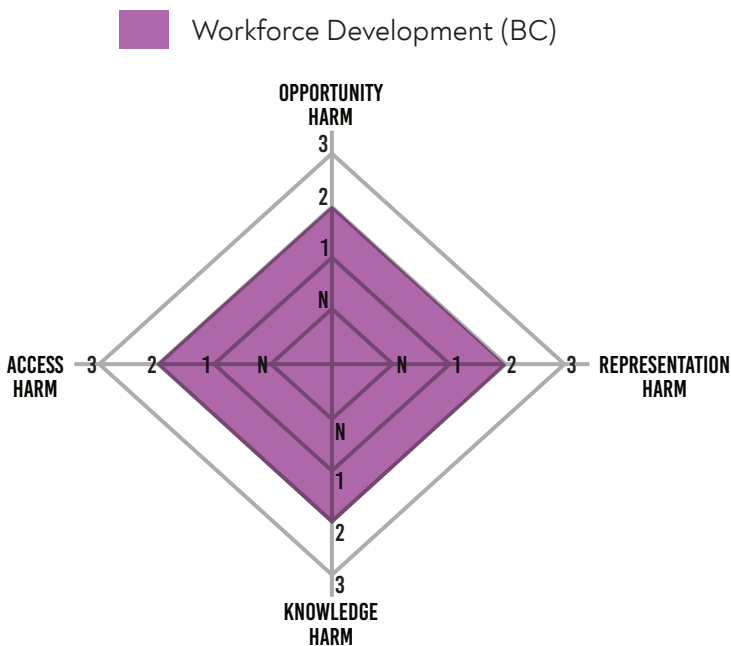
recipients. The failure to gather demographic data exacerbates the economic disparities faced by Black residents in Asheville and Buncombe County.

It would be beneficial to identify the required skillset for the expected new jobs and develop a strategy to work with local organizations to ensure the area workforce is equipped and skilled to become competitive applicants for the new jobs.

### Key Harm Indicators

There are limited programs that are targeted toward working adult workforce development. Of the programs that exist, while more could be done to express the objectives and participant outcomes of the programs, an effort is being made for programs such as Inclusive Hiring Partners (IHP).

- Consistent data tracking of key demographic data elements for programs as well as impact and outcome data from the use of the funding provided to organizations.
- Clear enrollment periods for the programs (NEXTAVL, IHP) may help potential participants plan for the application period.



### City of Asheville Government

In 2007, the City of Asheville initiated the City of Asheville Youth Leadership Academy (CAYLA) program, aiming to introduce talented Asheville High School students to civic careers and encourage college savings. Supported by Buncombe County and in partnership with Asheville City Schools Foundation, CAYLA selects students through a competitive process involving applications, recommendations, and interviews. The program offered 8-week internships in various City and County Departments, as well as with local nonprofits and businesses, providing students with valuable hands-on experience. Since its inception, there has been 16 CAYLA summer internships.

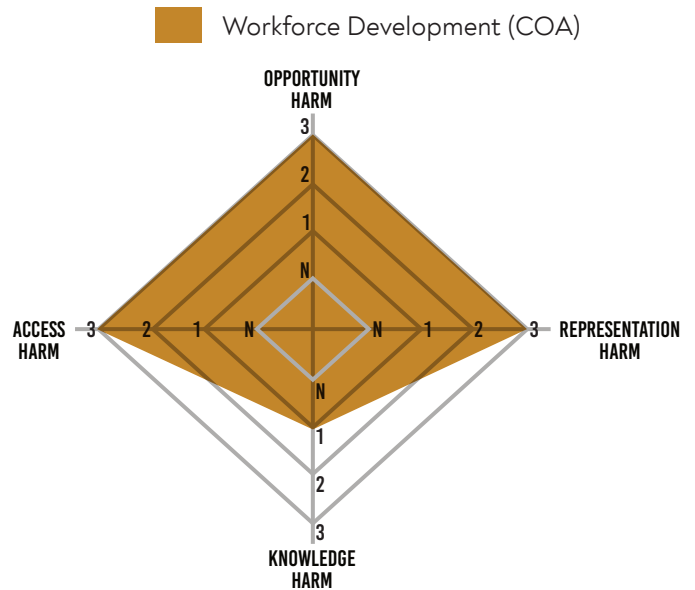
CAYLA students work 20 hours per week and earn \$15.00 an hour. According to city staff, the students are paid by the city and apply for the program through an online application portal for employment. According to the CAYLA information website, the program has awarded \$2,174,074 in total scholarship funds between 2007 – 2023 and 100% of CAYLA program seniors have been accepted to college. No

demographic and applicant data was provided were provided for review.

### Key Harm Indicators

There is only one program within the City of Asheville that impacts the city's workforce development. There is a lack of data that can accurately assess the impact of this program on the development of the workforce and if its impact directly affects the Black unemployment rate.

- There is inconsistent data tracking of key demographic data elements for programs as well as impact and outcome data.
- There is no performance tracking gathered by the internship sites to assess whether the participant is performing to program standards.
- There are no workforce development programs specifically tailored for adults aged 18 and older, aimed at preparing, enhancing, or developing the skills necessary to enter, advance, or sustain a career with the Asheville workforce.



## Economic Development Recommendations

### Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

- 1. Support the establishment of a Buncombe County Black Chamber of Commerce.** The National Black Chamber of Commerce is "the largest Black business association in the world and is dedicated to economically empowering and sustaining African American communities through entrepreneurship and capitalistic activity in the United States". This organization can help reduce the readiness gap between the County needs and vendor readiness. A Black Chamber of Commerce would directly contribute to economic empowerment of Black entrepreneurs by providing them with business resources, training, and networking opportunities. It provides increased visibility and advocacy for black-owned businesses. The Black Chamber of Commerce can advocate for policies and initiatives as a collective body that supports the interests of Black-owned businesses, ensuring their needs and concerns are represented at the local government level. Connecting the local Black Chamber with the National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC) amplifies the voices of Black business owners and provides a platform of national visibility of local businesses. The NBCC offers additional support to Black entrepreneurs on a larger scale and offers resources and best practices that can be utilized at the local level.
- 2. Increase Support for Start-Up Firms.** Create additional opportunities for firms in the Start-Up phase. Resources appear to be primarily focused on established businesses.
- 3. Increase Third-Party Partnership Accountability.** The County and City should pay heightened attention to the opportunity, representation, access, and community knowledge of programs earmarked as initiatives that positively reflect the County and City's commitment to economic development supported by a third-party company or organization. For example, the City highlights programs such as NEXT AVL, IHP, Mountain BizWorks, and the Asheville Chamber of Commerce. Third-party organizations should be required to share representative data related to objectives and outcomes.
- 4. Enhance reporting through standardization.** Develop a comprehensive data dictionary that defines all data elements, metrics, and naming conventions to be used across reports. This should include a clear definition of terms, acceptable values (e.g., for gender, use a standardized set of terms like "Female", "Male", "Non-Binary", etc.), and formatting guidelines (e.g. date formats should follow a standard convention). Ensure all reports include a standard set of core data elements to avoid gaps in data collection. For example, the Next AVL applicant data included one report that identified gender as "Woman/Man" and another year's report identified gender as "Female/Male."

### Procurement

- 5. Develop an Industry & Utilization (IU) Dashboard that captures City and County procurement dollars spent over a selected period.**
  - The IU Dashboard is a user-friendly reference for entrepreneurs seeking to know where the local city and county government purchase goods and services. Indicate dollars spent on goods and services using standardized commodity codes.
  - Develop a vendor management process and create reporting that tracks and monitors progress towards the Minority Business Plan and Asheville Business Inclusion participation goals and outreach efforts. Ensure reporting includes visibility of subcontracting metrics that are established for prime contractors.

6. **Ensure that vendor SMWBE classifications are consistent with the state guidelines.**
7. **Conduct a Request for Vendors (RFV) proposal process to develop an active vendor registry.**
  - Develop and maintain an active vendor registry through the creation of a vendor list based on a specific scope of work through an RFP process for each category of procurement.
  - Host consistent networking events to connect vendors with government departmental staff; not just procurement individuals because staff are able to self-source for lower dollar amounts.
8. **Establish metrics to track the business readiness gap for procurement opportunities.**
  - Monitor and address the business readiness gap for minority businesses.
  - Allocate increased grant funding to address readiness issues (additional workshops on how to submit proposals for government opportunities; workshops on how to obtain various certifications and the purpose of acquiring those certifications).
9. **Increase Reporting on Minority Representation.**
  - Increase reporting to assess minority representation per policy-stated metrics.
  - Evaluate the sourcing platform and process used for purchase order suppliers to determine how those vendors are being identified. Evaluate effectiveness in identifying vendors.
10. **Implement a standardized and electronic vendor selection process.** Implement a standardized and electronic vendor selection process characterized by uniform procedures, consistent forms, and clear steps to minimize deviations. This approach aims to reduce bias, align with the county's Minority Business Plan and the city's Asheville Business Inclusion (ABI) policies, and ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of vendors in government procurement processes.
11. **Enhance Grant Evaluation Transparency.** It is recommended that the City of Asheville and Buncombe County establish explicit and transparent criteria for evaluating grants. Furthermore, the city should adopt a practice of publicly disclosing detailed scoring and evaluation sheets, allowing stakeholders and the community to understand the assessment process thoroughly.

### Access to Capital

12. **Provide Disaggregated Demographic and Outcome Data.** Provide detailed demographic and outcome data concerning applicants and awardees to offer a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact. Offer transparency on how loan interest from this funding is utilized, ensuring accountability and clarity in financial management.
13. **Conduct Independent Audit of MCCF Processes.** Conduct an independent audit of MCCF processes, operations, controls, and reporting to ensure documented controls are implemented effectively, data accuracy is validated, and transparency is maintained. Use audit recommendations to refine and enhance MCCF operations, ensuring the fund adapts to changing economic landscapes and remains a vital community resource.

### Non-Profit and Grant Support

14. **Promote equal funding distribution across strategic initiatives:** Consider trying to equally provide funding to all of the strategic initiatives to reduce the likelihood of some funding categories routinely receiving more funding than other strategic priorities.
15. **Enhance reporting on the allocation of funds.** Provide more robust reporting around the



allocation of funds to each of the funding priorities (education, economic development, housing, justice, etc.) This visibility will help ensure that there is a clear line of sight into how grant funding is allocated.

16. **Require recipients to provide outcome and results data.** Require funding recipients to provide outcome and results data to ensure that funding is impacting target populations. Collect, analyze, and report on these metrics on a consistent basis.
17. **Separate grant guidelines and grant applications into separate downloadable files.** The grant guidelines on the grant information pages have questions that are listed in the document but it may be confusing to differentiate whether or not the grant questions are the application. These two things would be better as separate documents to provide grant applicants clarity in the process.
18. **Allocate a percentage of Grant Funding to For-Profit Organizations.** By extending grant opportunities to for-profit entities, the City and County can foster economic growth, innovation, and job creation within the community. This strategic allocation aims to provide vital resources to businesses, empowering them to pursue sustainable development initiatives and contribute to the overall prosperity of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville.

### Buncombe County Recommendations

19. **Increase African American participation in Mentorship Programs.** Increase African American student participation in professional mentorship programs like Next AVL and Inclusive Hiring Partners. We encourage the Asheville Chamber of Commerce to connect with Black student-led organizations to increase representation of Black students.

### Website Enhancement

20. **Update information on grant information pages to reflect the grant timeframe accurately.** For grant programs not offered annually, ensure website updates to inform visitors of the application timeframe and the next grant awarding period. This will ensure visitors are aware that the site information is current and help set expectations for the next grant cycle.
21. **Update Information on the website about upcoming events.** Regularly update the website with information on upcoming events to enable participants to plan effectively and showcase past events for reference and transparency.

### Contracting and Procurement

22. **Conduct a Disparity Study for Inclusive Procurement Practices in Buncombe County.** Governmental entities across the country authorize disparity studies in response to the City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co., 488 U.S. 469 (1989) and subsequent cases to determine whether there is a compelling interest for the creation or continuation of remedial procurement programs, based upon race, gender, and ethnicity.

### Non-Profit and Grant Support

23. **Update Grant Timeline and Process Regularly.** Grant timeline and process should be updated regularly for each fiscal year offered. The website currently has the timeline listed in the Isaac Coleman Grant Guidelines as the grant opening on December 19, 2022.

24. **Implement “Closed Loop” Process for Grant Programs.** All grant programs should require a “Closed Loop” process for recipient organizations to provide metrics and tracking data on use of funding and outcomes related to the funds provided. This data will help determine if the community’s needs are being met and if funding allocated toward key economic development initiatives is receiving the expected results.

### Workforce Development

25. **Actively Promote the NextAVL program to Students of Color.**
- While NextAVL is a voluntary program, a concerted effort should be taken to promote the program to students of color on the college and university campuses (i.e., partnering with Black Student Associations, sorority and fraternities, and civic organizations) to increase visibility of the program on university campuses. This in turn helps the unemployment rate for students who remain in the area seeking work opportunities.
  - Provide additional information about the Next AVL program on the website, such as the program duration, necessary commitments for program completion, and the outcomes that participants can expect. This information does not appear to be available on the website.
26. **Enhance IHP reporting**
- Develop tracking to follow progress of candidate referrals through IHP program. Provide increased education and training regarding the benefits of the IHP program. Residents do not appear to be drawing the correlation between participation in this program and tangible outcomes that resonate with their situation.
  - Increase awareness of benefits and outcomes participants should expect from participating in the IHP program.
  - Track demographics regarding candidates and participants of the program to provide meaningful metrics on what population of residents are using and benefiting from the program.
  - Collect additional data from referral candidates on why they are not interested in the program. This data will help provide insight into whether additional education is necessary regarding the program if residents do not experience the expected value from the program.
27. **Collect Data on Economic Development Incentive Program Skills Requirement**
- Economic Development Incentive Program - collect data regarding skill set needed for the expected new jobs as a result of the economic incentive and adequately prepare the workforce through partnership with area organizations offering workforce development initiatives.
  - Ensure the collection of critical data from companies receiving incentives regarding workforce job readiness, demographics of applicants, and employees hired, along with other associated metrics to show success and adherence to incentive agreements.
28. **Demographic Data Collection within Economic Development Programs.** Implement a system for collecting demographic data within economic development programs, such as the Economic Development Incentive Program, to address disparities in employment outcomes effectively. This strategic integration of data collection will provide valuable insights into the impact of these programs on different demographic groups and facilitate targeted efforts to promote inclusivity and equity.

## City of Asheville Recommendations

### Workforce Development

29. **Enhance Data Tracking.** Implement a comprehensive data tracking system to capture key demographic data elements for CAYLA program participants, including race and ethnicity. This will enable accurate assessment of the program's impact on the development of the workforce, particularly within the African American community.
30. **Establish Performance Metrics.** Develop clear performance metrics and tracking mechanisms to assess the CAYLA program participants' performance against program standards during their internships. This will ensure accountability and help measure the effectiveness of the program in providing valuable hands-on experience.
31. **Expand Workforce Development Programs.** Create workforce development programs specifically tailored for adults aged 18 and older from the African American community. These programs should focus on preparing, enhancing, and developing skills necessary for career advancement and sustainability within the Asheville workforce.

### Government Contracting and Procurement

32. **Align SMWBE classification with the state guidelines.**
  - The ABI vendor outreach list classification of business enterprises does not align with state certification classification of BBE's and WBE's which could hinder accurate outreach practices between prime contractors and subcontractors. It was explained that the Asheville Business Inclusion office allows their vendors to register as a BBE and a WBE which does not distinctly separate White Women-Owned Business Enterprises from minority or Black Business Enterprises. Having both classifications does not provide Black Business Enterprises, who are also Women Business Enterprises, an advantage for being both MBE and a WBE so the combined classification is not necessary. Align SMWBE classification within the ABI list with the state and minimize discrepancies in outreach.
33. **Implement a comprehensive staff training program aimed at fostering a culture of inclusion in the administration of City contracts and expenditures.**
  - Per ABI Policy: The intent of staff training is to create a culture of inclusion with respect to administration of City contracts and expenditures. The Asheville Business Inclusion Manager, with the assistance of the appropriate City departments, shall conduct seminars, workshops, and roundtable discussions to acquaint small businesses with City contracting activities and opportunities. Topics shall include, but not be limited to, the process used by the City in preparing bids and quotes, and information on accessing small business assistance programs. Additional classes may be provided with the assistance of the appropriate department on a project-by-project basis through structured seminars, classes, and individual assistance provided to minority and women businesses requesting this type of support. (Should be for Buncombe also).

### Website Enhancements

34. **Enhancing Accessibility and Clarity of Business Resources on the Economic Development COA Website**
  - Revise the website layout by creating a dedicated tab for the Business Resource Library on the Economic Development COA Website. Rename the link to accurately represent the

library's purpose as a comprehensive resource hub tailored specifically for small businesses within the COA community.

- 35. Enhance the website's user experience for small business owners by improving the consistency of resource names and incorporating more visuals and explanations for each link.**
- This will help to address the limited focus on startups by ensuring the available resources cater to the needs of both existing businesses and startups.
  - Create dedicated menu tabs for Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships and Grants programs on the Economic Development COA website.
  - Relocate the CAYLA program under the Workforce Development tab to better align with the nature of its offerings.
  - Add descriptive paragraphs to the dedicated workforce development resource page on the COA website to provide clear information about the purpose of the page and each linked program.



# EDUCATION



## EDUCATION IFA REPORT

Racial inequities in education can have profound and lasting effects on individuals and society. These inequities refer to disparities in educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes based on race or ethnicity. The impact can be directly observed in the academic achievement gap and disciplinary disparities for Black students in K-12 education and limited representation among teachers, administrators, and the curriculum. Buncombe County and the City of Asheville's reparations resolution recognizes the historic disparity in education amongst gifted, honors, and advanced placement students. Additionally, the resolution acknowledges the disproportion in retention and graduation rates and the discriminatory disciplinary practices at every level of education.

Wide achievement gaps exist between Black and White students amongst the 44 schools in the Buncombe County Schools district and 10 schools in the Asheville City Schools district. The North Carolina Early Learning Inventory (NC ELI) is a data sharing collaborative on student achievement between Asheville and Buncombe County Schools and Buncombe County government. The Fall 2022 report indicated only 11% of Black students in grades three to eight were considered proficient in math in the 2021-22 school year based on end-of-year standardized tests, compared to the 66% of white students who were deemed proficient. The data trends similarly for the previous two years. Buncombe County Schools enrolls 22,298 students with a 7% Black student population. The district's minority enrollment is 32%. Asheville City Schools enrolls 4,300 students with an 18% Black student population. The County has taken steps to expand access to quality early childhood education and the and City has taken steps to reduce the opportunity and achievement gap amongst school-aged children.

### Governance

The Office of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is funded through the federal government, giving \$10,747,915,429 funding annually through the Office of Head Start and the Department of Health and Human Services. The Office of Head Start administers Head Start programming as it partners with states, tribes, territories, and local community organizations to implement and support programming and direct services for the educational and social development of children from 0 to age 5. The office's stated mission is to explicitly prepare students for success in school, and services are typically at no cost to families.

Besides Head Start initiatives, ECD also administers programs in The Office of Childcare, The Preschool Development Grant Program and the Tribal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. According to the Early Childhood and Learning Center, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 in December 2022. The funding for programs under the Head Start Act is \$11,996,820,000, an increase of over \$960 million over fiscal year 2022. All programs and initiatives are designed to give children, families and care recipients high quality services and direct interventions in a safe, healthy setting that academically and socially prepare children for school success. The scope of services varies at schools, home-based or family childcare centers, before and after school settings, nursery schools, and even hospitals. Many programmatic services focus on the child and/or can be delivered as wrap-around services for parents and other caregivers.

The County and City have each made strategic partnership grants available to organizations with early childhood education programs and youth-led initiatives to close the opportunity and achievement gaps. Grant funds are allocated through the County and City general funds and administered by the

County’s Strategic Partnership Department and the City’s Community & Economic Development Department. The application process, scoring criteria, relevant deadlines, and process to award are outlined in the grant guidelines. The County and City hope to impact the education outcomes of students in Asheville and Buncombe County school districts. While the County funds the school board, they have no direct jurisdiction school-based operations, and no direct classroom oversight that impacts reading and math proficiency, special education referrals, absenteeism, discipline, and graduation rates.

## Education Harm Assessment Scale

Education Harm Assessment Scale			
	1	2	3
Education	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent racial disparities in developmental milestones, reading and math proficiency, special education referrals, discipline, and graduation rates.  Minor racial disparities in reading and math proficiency outcomes, education referrals, and discipline.	Apparent and ongoing disparities in developmental milestones, reading and math proficiency outcomes, education referrals, and disciplinary actions.  Lack of comprehensive data compounds the systemic racial disproportionality in educational programs, which enables inadequate policies and practices that lead to a widening gap in educational outcomes among different racial and ethnic groups.	Excessive racial disparities in special education referrals and placement, disciplinary actions that result in contact with law enforcement, reduced graduation rates, high truancy, tremendously reduced graduation rates, and learning climates that reflect poor support programs. Resulting in the reduction of access to higher education and career opportunities.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Education IFA Metrics

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville provided the Education CDG research team with nearly 140 artifacts to analyze. Among those artifacts were listings of grant recipients, budget allocation reports, samples of scoring criteria, and grantee quarterly reports.

- **Programmatic Effectiveness** refers to how educational programs and interventions achieve their goals and objectives in supporting children's learning, development, and school readiness.
- **School Districts Academic Achievement Data** refers to information collected on children's academic performance, progress, and attainment of learning objectives. Specifically, reading and math data in grades 3, 4, and 8.

## Grant Funding

### Buncombe County

In 2018, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners established the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund. According to the County website, the purpose of the fund was to advance the strategic priority to ensure every child in Buncombe County has an equal opportunity to thrive during their first 2,000 days, including access to quality early childhood education. The fund received an annual investment of \$3.6 million beginning in the FY2020 budget with an annual increase of 2% in future years.

The grant guidelines indicate funding was earmarked to support early care and education for children from birth through kindergarten, using the following categories: infants/toddlers – ages six (6) weeks to three (3) years old; preschoolers – ages three (3) to five (5) years old; and pre-kindergarteners, 4-year-old rising kindergarteners. Emphasis in the fund was given to preschool and pre-kindergarten initiatives.

In FY2021, \$3.6 million was awarded across 19 early childhood programs. In FY2022, \$3.7 million was awarded across 21 early childhood programs. In FY2023, \$3.8 million was awarded across 22 early childhood grant programs. Funding recipients included Buncombe County Schools initiatives for childcare resources and teacher workforce development. Other recipients included Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and the

Community Action Opportunities programs by the Lonnie D. Burton Center and Johnston Elementary. Buncombe County early childhood funded programs average 800 to 900 students, averaging 65% White, 18% Black, and 9% Hispanic or Latino.

### City of Asheville

According to the City's grant guidelines, the purpose of the Strategic Partnership Grant Program funding is to support program outcomes of nonprofit organizations that are in alignment with Asheville City Council's 2036 Vision of an equitable and diverse community by eliminating the opportunity gap in our school system and increasing access to quality schools and other educational resources and by fostering economic mobility.

The City of Asheville relaunched its strategic partnership grants in the summer of 2022, awarding \$375,500 across nine programs. In FY2023, \$356,209 was awarded across six programs. Funding recipients included Literacy Together, Read to Succeed Asheville, Serve to Lead, the Western Carolina Rescue Mission, and The Christine Avery Learning Center. Student demographic data was not collected.

## Programmatic Effectiveness

Programmatic effectiveness in education refers to the degree to which a program or intervention achieves its intended outcomes and goals in supporting the developmental



milestones and well-being of young children. It involves assessing how well a program functions in its design, implementation, and impact on children's learning, social-emotional development, and overall school readiness. This includes curriculum design, assessment and monitoring, family and community engagement, and professional development.

### **Buncombe County**

Buncombe County's Early Childhood Fund requires grant applicants to align with one or more of the County's strategies for early childhood:

- Increase slots for enrollment.
- Increase quality.
- Develop/diversify the early childhood workforce.
- Support families.
- Enhance effectiveness of overall system of early care education.

Grant recipients are required to submit quarterly and annual reports detailing their activities, outcomes, and alignment with EC Fund strategies. For instance, OnTrack Financial Education & Counseling, which received a grant

for SECURE Matching Savings for Childcare Workers and Preschool Families (SECURE ECE), reported the number of program enrollees, demographics served, and learning gains achieved within their financial literacy and savings program for childcare workers and preschool families in FY2022.

Bent Creek Preschool received funding for technology needs, including laptops for teachers and tablets for students. Additionally, the funding supported purchases for classroom carts, projectors, and screens. However, no demographic data for the school or information on learning outcomes was provided in the report.

Similarly, the Southwestern Child Development Commission, which received a grant for the Valley Child Development Center in FY2022, reported statistical data on student enrollment by age, attendance, number of learning materials distributed, and teacher retention percentages. Yet, no demographic data for the school or information on learning outcomes was included in the report.



Buncombe Partnership for Children was granted funds for early childhood systems coordination, focusing on gathering family input regarding specific needs for NC Pre-K's pilot program. Additionally, they established a workgroup to explore options for expanding childcare for younger children. This coordination objective aligns with the County's racial equity plan, aiming to enhance wrap-around services, develop mapping visualization tools for collaboration, and create a series of short, story-based teacher training videos featuring local black and brown parents.

While funding for early childhood education (ECE) entities spans various areas such as financial literacy, technology, wrap-around services, and direct learning initiatives, the reporting process lacks consistency in providing information on students' learning outcomes or the specific outcomes of the EC fund strategies. Although technology generally aids learning, it remains unclear whether funds allocated for technology needs have resulted in improved developmental milestones. The broad spectrum of services complicates the assessment of outcomes, which appear vague based on the provided reports.

There are inconsistencies in reporting and data received from early childhood centers. For instance, while some centers reported racial demographic data, such as Bent Creek Center serving one Black child and several children of mixed race, others like the Buncombe Partnership for Children did not provide racial/ethnic data. It is essential for all grantees to report specific data points to evaluate the effectiveness of programming. Moreover, the reporting structure should ensure clarity regarding the EC fund strategy for both grantee and grantor.

### City of Asheville

The Strategic Partnership Fund (SPF) provides funding for nonprofit organizations that served Asheville residents linked to City Council Strategic Priorities. Referred to as the opportunity gap, the SPF may go toward health,

economic stability, food access, community and social, and education initiatives. Education initiatives include programs that impact:

- Literacy and Language
- Early Childhood Education
- K-12, Vocational and Higher Education

Recipients of Strategic Partnership Grants (SPG) submitted quarterly and annual narrative summaries detailing their related activities. For instance, the CHOSEN Positive Opportunities Develop Success (P.O.D.S) Afterschool/Summer program reported on their collaboration with Read to Succeed (R2S), implementation of daily social-emotional learning groups, reading and math interventions, social-emotional development activities, and experiential learning opportunities for students. The staff continued to support students with social and emotional learning tools and extended assistance into classrooms to aid students with extreme behaviors and coping skills during after-school sessions.

Funding was allocated to the Literacy Together Igniting Superhero Readers program to pilot the expansion of their summer camp youth internship program into the academic school year. This initiative aimed to offer tutoring to elementary students requiring additional support and mentoring to enhance their reading skills. The program engaged adult volunteer tutors and provided a paid internship opportunity for youth aged 15 to 21. According to their report, the program benefitted struggling readers and young adult tutors, who gained new skills and paid work experience. The Literacy Together program outlined the number of students served, results achieved, learning gains in pre- and post-assessment domains, and the number of interns involved. However, a demographic breakdown of student participants was not provided.

The Performance report for the Read to Succeed (R2S) Community Literacy Support at Edington initiative highlighted that R2S reading teachers and staff utilized the CORE Phonics assessments for student instruction and group/

one-to-one lessons. Additionally, R2S collaborated in hosting the Community Holiday Extravaganza, featuring a live read-aloud session by Black author Jorge Redmond of his book “Black Boy, Black Boy.” The report noted that attending families received specially curated literacy kits containing signed copies of Redmond’s book along with an extra culturally responsive book and comprehension guide. However, the report did not provide a comprehensive breakdown of the number of students served, racial demographics, or measures of program effectiveness.

The Aspire Youth & Family Vocational Skills program’s annual report elaborated on their measurable objectives:

“For the Kids at Work track, the first measurable objective was to improve the participants’ interpersonal skills for greater success at home, school, community, and workplace via the Say it Straight Program. This is a goal that we were able to accomplish. A pre/post assessment questionnaire was used to monitor participant’s progress and allow for a baseline comparison. Additionally, qualitative conversations/interviews were undertaken during the pendency of the program to determine the continued effectiveness of the program from the perspective of all participants involved. What evolved from these conversations was the knowledge that our cooking/interpersonal skills program was a necessary intervention which not only provided the opportunity for a practical application of life skills, but also the opportunity for social connectedness and role modeling for career planning and

potentially\higher level education.”

The report further expounds on its five measurable outcomes and cites the participation and completion rates. No racial demographic data was supplied.”

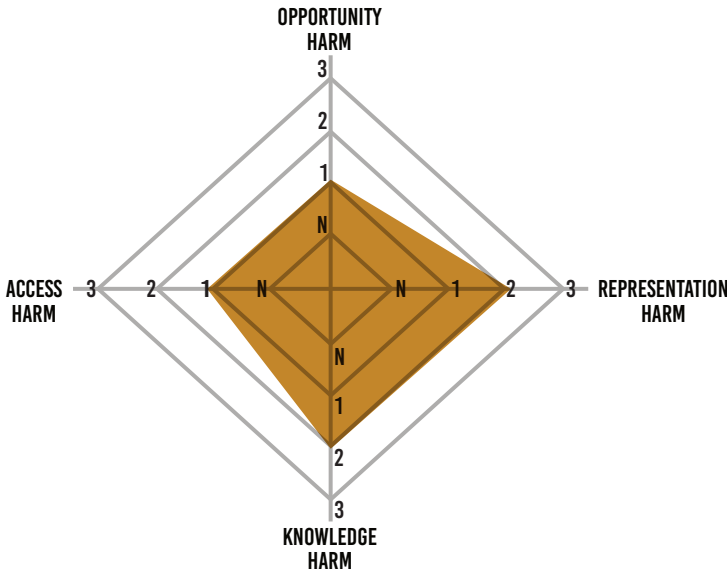
The Serve to Lead program included pertinent quantitative and qualitative data in its annual report, encompassing the number of students served, attendance rate, and pre- and post-assessment results of kindergarten students utilizing the Foundations to Rise curriculum. Additionally, they highlighted the use of the MClass and Star Assessments to measure academic learning gains in reading and math among elementary students in the program. Notably, the report did not include racial demographic data.

In general, the City’s six grant recipients focusing on education were more inclined to report on the effectiveness of their programs. Nevertheless, there is a need to gather more data to comprehend the specific impact of grant funds on African Americans.

### Survey

During the assessment research phase, the Carter Development Group distributed a survey on program effectiveness to grant recipients in both the County and City. CDG aimed to collect data regarding the racial composition of grant applicants, encompassing their board members, executive leadership, staff, and served participants. However, the response to the survey did not yield a sufficient sample size. In Asheville, only eight respondents participated, with only six completing the survey. Similarly, Buncombe County had 14 respondents, of which only seven completed the survey. Nonetheless, the survey exemplifies the comprehensive data collection approach that the County and City should adopt to evaluate grant funds’

 Programmatic Effectiveness (COA)



## School Districts Academic Achievement Data

Beyond the early childhood and opportunity gap grants provided by the County and City, additional school district data can be considered when evaluating harm. According to the North Carolina Early Learning Assessment (NC ELI), Buncombe County School District boasted a graduation rate of over 90% in the 2022-23 academic year, surpassing the statewide average. Similarly, Asheville City Schools saw a graduation rate of 93.5% in the 2021-22 school year, slightly higher than the 91.5% rate in the 2019-2020 school year.

However, questions arise regarding employment opportunities when considering graduation rates alongside high school proficiency in reading and math. While graduation rates are high, proficiency in reading remains notably lower, raising concerns about potential career readiness. Disciplinary rates are also highest amongst Black students, including contact with school resource officers. This prompts inquiry into potential correlations with criminal justice trends. Moreover, it prompts consideration of the economic ramifications of high school

graduates who may face unemployment or underemployment.

A brief examination of achievement data from Buncombe County and Asheville City reveals a significant achievement disparity between White and Black students, evident in both reading and mathematics. For instance, in the 2022-23 school year, only 9% of Buncombe's third-grade Black students demonstrated proficiency in reading, compared to 40% of their White peers. Similar discrepancies are observed in 4th and 8th-grade reading proficiency, where only 17% of Black 4th graders were proficient, compared to 49% of White students. In eighth grade, proficiency rates are 13% for Black students and 40% for White students. Comparable disparities are also evident in mathematics, where although the specific figures vary, the gap persists. See the table below.

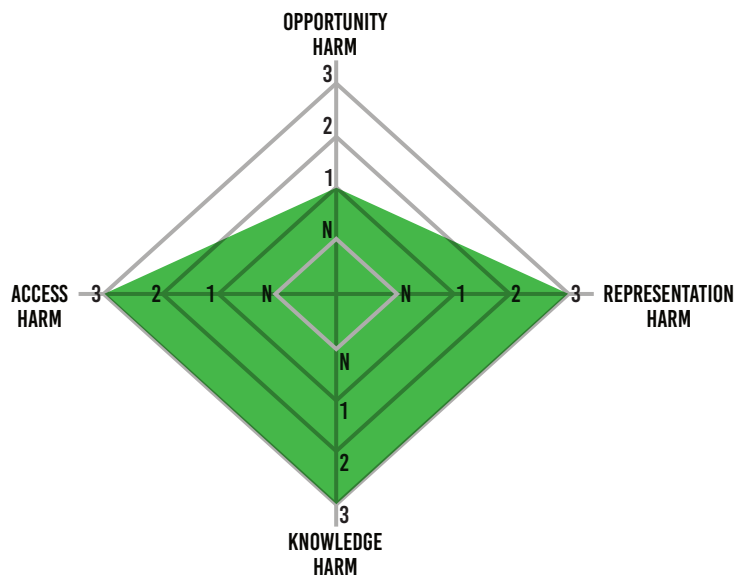
The data presented above underscores the potential for diminished life outcomes and significant harm, as it contrasts proficiency rates between Black and White students and further breaks down proficiency rates for Black males, who typically exhibit lower academic performance. In Asheville, several grade bands have less than 5% of students scoring proficient. Notably, statewide data does not include information on advanced students in reading or math. When addressing efforts to cease harm and combat racism in education, it's imperative to consider disparities in suspension rates, office referrals, special education referrals, curriculum impartiality, hiring practices, and access to Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes. While these metrics fall beyond the scope of this study, the preliminary analysis of achievement data for Buncombe and Asheville intersects with critical areas linked to the broader study. Specifically, reading and math achievement in grades 3, 4, and 8 are notably low for African American children, particularly boys. Furthermore, historically, special education students have tended to perform poorly academically, with lower high school graduation rates.

These data points can have far-reaching effects, impacting juvenile justice involvement, economic opportunities, underemployment, housing, and overall quality of life. Without more intentional and explicit data collection and goal setting, it becomes challenging to discern how progress made in early childhood grant funding contributes to mitigating harm.

Buncombe County SY 2022-23							
	Black	White	Black Males		Black	White	Black Males
Reading 3rd	9	40	12	Math 3rd	8	44	11
Reading 4th	17	49	13	Math 4th	14	49	10
Reading 8th	13	40	13	Math 8th	20	51	22

Asheville City SY 2022-23							
	Black	White	Black Males		Black	White	Black Males
Reading 3rd	>5	61	>5	Math 3rd	>5	63	>5
Reading 4th	>5	64	>5	Math 4th	>5	60	>5
Reading 8th	>5	50	>5	Math 8th	>5	56	>5

■ School Districts Academic Achievement Data



# DRAFT

## Education Recommendations

### Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

1. **Use one assessment tool for early childhood growth and development.**
  - Use one assessment tool for early childhood growth and development across all agencies, grantees, schools. The tool should measure social emotional, mathematics, language and literacy, cognitive development, and physical development. This recommendation allows for standardization across Asheville and Buncombe early childhood programs and aligns with North Carolina Early Learning Inventory (NCELI).
  - This allows for progress monitoring, best practices, universal tracking of outcomes, and a unified approach to goal setting, conversation about student outcomes and accountability of the use of grant funds. Grant decisions should be based on data outcomes from a universal assessment tool.
2. **Hire or contract education subject matter experts.**
  - Subject matter experts will help disaggregate data coming from grantees and review the methodology and determine the capacity of grantees to implement program features.
  - Subject matter experts can also determine which grant applicants are best suited to meet community and student needs by giving insight(s) on pedagogy, current research, best practices, and educational trends as per the grant.
  - Subject matter experts can also audit and progress monitor throughout the grant implementation cycle to ensure program goals are being met.
3. **Survey grant applicants and/or collect data on the racial makeup of company/center staff members, board of directors, executive directors/company leadership, and populations served.** This data should be tracked longitudinally.
4. **As a result of the academic achievement data for both Buncombe County and Asheville, Buncombe County should engage in a full-scale equity audit to assess academic achievement outcomes for students in grades k-12.** This would allow for a broader and deeper dive into practices that harm African American children.
5. **Assess and ensure School Resource Officers undergo racial equity training** in response to the disproportionate rates of Black students disciplinary contact and police referrals.

### Buncombe County

6. **Pursue legislative changes at the state level for more jurisdiction over school districts.** Such laws should demand that funding appropriated by Buncombe County are measurable and beneficial to populations in need. As it stands now, Buncombe County is the primary funding source, but there is no accountability from school boards for the monies received. Accountability measures will ensure alignment between Buncombe County, Buncombe County Schools, and Asheville City Schools.
7. **Update grant reporting forms to link with EC Fund strategies more accurately.** Update grant reporting forms to indicate the Early Childhood Fund strategy guiding the grantee. Request grantees report their progress and outcomes with both quantitative and qualitative information that robustly connects to the County's EC Fund strategy.

### City of Asheville

8. **Develop more clearly defined Strategic Partnership Grant Program impact goals for Early Childhood and K-12, Vocational and Higher Education categories.** The broadness of this goal makes it more challenging to measure. In contrast, literacy and language as educational outcomes are more direct and measurable.

A woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a white lab coat, is looking at a tablet computer. She is in a medical setting, with a grid of medical scans visible in the background. A large purple diagonal shape is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# HEALTH & WELLNESS



## HEALTH & WELLNESS IFA REPORT

Racism plays a pivotal role in perpetuating healthcare disparities within minority communities, resulting in substantial and detrimental effects on healthcare quality and overall well-being. Structural racism, biases in healthcare delivery, and unequal access to resources all contribute to the disparities observed. This paper delves into how racism fuels these disparities, assesses their broader impact on healthcare and life outcomes, and proposes strategies involving county public health systems, local hospitals, community organizations, and policy changes to mitigate these disparities.

The resolutions on reparations adopted by both the City of Asheville and Buncombe County acknowledge the structural racism in healthcare that perpetuates disparities and creates barriers that hinder minority communities from accessing equitable healthcare services. Factors such as limited health insurance coverage, fewer healthcare facilities, and reduced funding for healthcare programs result in delayed diagnoses, inadequate treatment, and poorer health outcomes for minority individuals. Implicit biases within the healthcare sector also contribute to disparities. Stereotypes and prejudices can influence medical decision-making, leading to differential treatment based on race or ethnicity. Such biases result in undertreatment, misdiagnosis, and compromised patient-provider relationships, impacting health outcomes and eroding trust.

The Public Health Departments, particularly in regions like Buncombe County, stand at the forefront of public health initiatives, playing a pivotal role in reducing both morbidity and mortality associated with communicable diseases and in promoting women's health and family planning. Their comprehensive approach, which spans across surveillance, prevention, education, and community involvement, is instrumental in tackling the spread of communicable diseases, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Furthermore, their commitment to women's health and family planning is multifaceted, addressing a wide array of health concerns from reproductive health to chronic disease prevention.

### Governance

The Buncombe County Health and Human Services (HHS) provides a range of services to strengthen the communities by advancing health, safety, and opportunity by providing public assistance, social work services, veteran services, and promoting public health. Federal, state, and local laws and regulations govern public health departments managing communicable diseases, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), tuberculosis (TB), family planning, and women's health maintenance.

The Public Health Service Act, enacted in 1944, authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to manage and oversee various public health programs, including disease prevention and control efforts. Title X of the Public Health Service Act, which focuses on family planning, provides federal funding for family planning services, especially for low-income or uninsured individuals. This includes services related to contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and other aspects of reproductive health.

Other notable healthcare legislations and programs include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Regulations, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act of 1990, designed to help communities and states increase the availability of care for low-income, uninsured, and under-insured victims of AIDS and their families.



The North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 130A-Public Health guide state, county, and local health departments in operating and managing public health concerns, including communicable diseases, environmental health, and various community health initiatives.

## Health & Wellness Harm Assessment Scale

Health & Wellness Harm Assessment Scale			
	1	2	3
Health & Wellness	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent to minor racial healthcare disparities that include variations in access to healthcare services, limited availability of resources, or minor differences in health outcomes compared to other demographics.	Evident healthcare disparities through higher rates of chronic diseases, limited health literacy, limited access to preventive care, or disparities in healthcare utilization that lead to poorer health outcomes overall.  Lack of comprehensive data compounds the systemic racial disproportionality in healthcare policies and practices, which hinders equal access to healthcare resources and services, and intensifies growing challenges in health outcomes.	Persistent healthcare barriers to accessing healthcare services, inadequate resources, and systemic biases that disproportionately affect minorities. The impact can be observed through higher rates of chronic diseases, maternal mortality, infant mortality, and severely reduced overall health and quality of life.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Health & Wellness IFA Metrics

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville provided the Health and Wellness CDG research team with over 75 artifacts to analyze, including the Community Health Assessment, Community Health Implementation Plan, government web pages, and policy documents. The following metrics were assessed to determine the level of harm in the Wealth and Wellness impact focus area:

- **Health Disparity Outcomes** refer to differences or inequalities in health outcomes among different population groups. These differences can manifest in various ways, such as variations in disease prevalence, mortality rates, life expectancy, and quality of life.
- **Access to Healthcare Services** refers to the ability of individuals to obtain timely and appropriate healthcare when needed. It encompasses physical access to healthcare facilities, availability of healthcare providers, affordability of services, health insurance coverage, and cultural or language barriers.
- **Health Education and Literacy** involve the provision of information, resources, and skills necessary for individuals to make informed decisions about their health and healthcare.
- **Healthy Food Access & Food Insecurity** refers to the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. It is a condition where individuals or families experience difficulty in obtaining enough food due to financial constraints or limited resources.
- **Parks and Recreation**
  - Equity and Inclusion Initiatives & Impact is the strategic efforts and outcomes of implementing policies, programs, and practices within parks and recreation services designed to ensure fair access, representation, and participation for all community members.
  - Health-Related Programming evaluates the effectiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility of these programs.

## Health Disparity Outcomes

Health disparity outcomes refer to the measurable differences in health status, disease prevalence, morbidity, mortality, or access to healthcare services. Health disparity outcomes often occur due to social determinants of health, including socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, education level, access to healthcare, and environmental factors. Addressing health disparity outcomes involves identifying and mitigating the underlying factors contributing to these inequalities to achieve health equity for all population groups.

The NC General Assembly requires local public health departments to conduct community health assessments every three to four years. The Community Health Assessment (CHA) is a systematic process that involves collecting, analyzing, and using data to understand the community's health status, needs, and health issues. It gathers data on various indicators such as disease prevalence, health behaviors, social determinants of health, and environmental

factors. It provides a detailed picture of health trends, disparities, and social determinants affecting community well-being.

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is a strategic plan developed to address the issues identified in the CHA. It outlines specific goals, strategies, and actions to improve community health and reduce disparities through collaboration among public health officials, community organizations, healthcare providers, and community members.

The CHIP results in targeted initiatives and interventions designed to make measurable improvements in community health. The Buncombe CHIP Advisory comprises more than 40 community organizations whose services address many facets of individual and community health. In 2020, the CHIP Advisory (community collaborative led by Buncombe County Health and Human Services) identified cross-sector strategies for CHIP work: to dismantle white supremacy systems, undo the harms of racism, and create trauma-informed systems to eliminate the perpetuation of harm.

### Relevance and Importance of the CHA/CHIP

As an integral component of their Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) process, local health departments and organizations systematically monitor and analyze disaggregated data based on race and ethnicity. This detailed examination encompasses a wide range of health indicators, including disparities in morbidity and mortality rates, infant mortality and birth outcomes, access to prenatal services, birth weight metrics, emergency room visits for mental health crises such as suicidal ideation or attempts, and incidents of substance use overdose. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the health challenges different demographic groups face within the community, facilitating targeted interventions. The CHA/CHIP identified three health priorities for Buncombe County: Birth Outcomes/Infant Mortality, Mental Health and Substance Misuse, and Chronic Health Conditions: Heart Disease & Diabetes.

### Birth Outcomes/Infant Mortality

The CHA/CHIP report indicated Buncombe County's overall infant mortality rate declined from 5.1 to 4.8 for 2015-2019. However, during the same period, Black American infant mortality rate was 7.4% compared to White infants at 5.2%, a 2.2 difference. According to the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, the Infant Mortality (Black/White Infant Mortality Ratio) has experienced a 56% baseline decrease from 2018 to 2022. The CHA/CHIP process identified a long-term 10-year health focus area for infant mortality/birth outcomes.

### Mental Health and Substance Use

The CHA/CHIP report indicated a “trending increase of reported mental health symptoms (depression and suicidal ideation), continued increase in drug overdose deaths.” The CHA/CHIP further indicated 42% of survey respondents have experienced symptoms of Chronic Depression (compared to 33% from

2018 Buncombe CHA and 30% in the United States); 13% of survey respondents identified that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life (a 4% increase from the 2018 Buncombe CHA).

### Chronic Disease (Diabetes and Heart Disease)

According to the CHA/CHIP, the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics (NCSCHS) reported that “chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and lower respiratory disease are among the top causes of death for Buncombe County residents.” Buncombe County's 2015–2019 diabetes mortality rates for Black/African American men are nearly 7 times higher than rates for all Whites combined (NC Center for Vital Statistics, 2021). Buncombe County's 2015 – 2019 disaggregated heart disease mortality rates reflect Black/African American men have almost double the death rate compared to all Whites combined.

According to the County Health Rankings of 2020, Buncombe County has a slightly higher number of primary care physicians, nurses, and mental health providers per 100,000 residents than the state average. However, the availability of dental care providers is marginally lower. Buncombe County has several non-profit, federal government-qualified health centers and free clinics to address this need. These facilities offer a range of medical, dental, and specialty care, catering to low-income, uninsured individuals or on Medicaid.

## Access to Healthcare Services

Evaluating the availability, accessibility, and quality of health-related services focuses on identifying and addressing gaps that contribute to unequal health outcomes, understanding how well healthcare systems provide equitable care, and addressing the specific health needs of black communities to reduce health disparities. Access to healthcare services is essential for promoting health, preventing disease, and

managing and treating existing health conditions. Disparities in access to healthcare services can result in unequal health outcomes among different population groups and contribute to health disparities.

### **Buncombe County Health Programs and Partnerships**

The Buncombe County Public Health Department promotes numerous health services in coordination with community partnerships to ensure residents can make healthy choices within a healthy environment. County health services include clinical services, cancer screening, immunizations, communicable disease control, STI testing, nutrition, and environmental health.

The Western North Carolina Community Health Services (WNCCHS) provides comprehensive medical, dental, and mental health services to underserved populations, regardless of their ability to pay. Among these initiatives are the Care Coordination for Children (CC4C) and Pregnancy Care Management (PCM) programs, which provide tailored support for at-risk children from birth to 5 years old and high-risk pregnant women, respectively. Additionally, the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP) offers crucial screening and follow-up services to detect breast and cervical cancer early, while the Wise Woman program extends cardiovascular disease screening and interventions to participants of the BCCCP, prioritizing the reduction of heart disease and stroke risks.

Services such as family planning, immunization, and STI testing and treatment contribute to reducing disease burden and promoting sexual health within the community. The Public Health Mobile Team plays a vital role in delivering healthcare services to underserved areas through mobile units, addressing disparities in access to healthcare facilities. Furthermore, the Nurse-Family Partnership offers valuable support to first-time mothers, while the Syringe Exchange Program works to mitigate the spread

of infectious diseases among injecting drug users. Additionally, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program provides essential nutritional support and education to promote the health and well-being of low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and young children.

The Buncombe County CHIP Advisory consists of over 40 community leaders and organizations. Using the Community Health Assessment as a guide, the county identified its main three priorities over the past three years as infant mortality/birth outcomes, mental health and substance misuse, and chronic disease (heart disease and diabetes) prevention.

### **Infant Mortality/Birth Outcomes**

The county has partnered with Community Health Advisory Council members/agencies, YWCA-Asheville, Project Nurturing Asheville and area Families, Mount Zion Community Development, Asheville Buncombe Institute for Parity Achievement (ABIPA), Sistas Caring 4 Sistas (SC4S), MAHEC, Buncombe County Women, Infant, and Children (WIC), Buncombe County Care Management & Nurse-Family Partnership programming orgs to combat infant mortality and disparate birth outcomes.

### **Mental Health and Substance Misuse**

The county has partnered with at least 14 organizations to address mental health and substance misuse. Some of those organizations include the Sunrise Community for Recovery & Wellness, Appalachian Mountain Community Health Services, Umoja Health, Wellness and Justice Collaborative, and VAYA, a medicaid-provider service, and other community-based crisis centers. According to the Healthy North Carolina (HNC 2023), NC DETECT provides data points for emergency room (ER) visits related to suicidal ideation/thoughts/plans/intent. For all people in Asheville, suicidal ideation/thoughts/plans/intent has increased by 5% but for the Black population, specifically, it has decreased by 18%. On the other hand, the NC State Health Statistics indicated the drug

poisoning death rate for Black Non-Hispanic increased by 535% since 2015 and continues to trend upward.

### **Chronic Disease (heart disease and diabetes)**

The county has partnered with various community organizations to prevent and manage chronic disease, including the YMCA of Western North Carolina, Asheville Buncombe Institute for Parity Achievement (ABIPA), Institute for Preventive Healthcare & Advocacy, and Buncombe County Adult & Aging services. According to North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, Diabetes mortality rates have decreased for African Americans by 12% since 2018 and Heart Disease mortality has increased by 9%. Also, there was a decrease in life expectancy for black residents in North Carolina by 3%.

### **Community Partners**

Buncombe County Public Health has partnered with nearly 40 community organizations as part of the collaborative process for the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), of which \$4 million across 28 community partnership organizations between FY2020 to FY2023. Over 40 programs were funded to address health concerns around diabetes, mental health, opioid overdose, syringe disposal, and health education programs.

Community partners are typically funded by a request for proposal. Partnerships are also established with the county through a memorandum of agreement and may receive the benefit of free space allocation and access to the county's social media platform. The County also provides one dollar leases to behavioral health programs, an accrued value that offsets the cost of rental space.

Programs such as Babies Need Bottoms Diaper Assistance for Families in Crisis were awarded \$ 16,887 to provide diapers to social service agencies serving families in crisis. The Buncombe County Schools Family Resource Center the Face of Hope was awarded \$ 15,000

to assist families and students with housing referrals, food stamps, Medicaid applications, tutoring, food, hygiene products, diapers, wipes, formula, school supplies, and household items. Items are delivered to students and families weekly while the school operates virtually. Western Carolina Medical Society Foundation Project Access® Social Resources Initiative was awarded \$ 24,000 to provide low-income, uninsured Buncombe County residents access to comprehensive medical care.

Programs also included Safer Together Mental Health Services, Helping Ourselves and One Another – BIPOC Church Outreach & Shiloh Community; Substance Free Youth; Suicide Prevention & Awareness Campaign; Harm Reduction Coordination – Syringe Exchange Program; and Minority Diabetes Prevention Program.

Buncombe County does not track the full cost for services, staffing ratio to ensure adequate service, appointment times and gaps, and location of services amongst community partners.

The county also does not collect data from its community partners on the number of people served, racial demographics of people served, and the accessibility of service based on location, and service options (in-person, online, telehealth). Additionally, it is unknown if partnership programs' staff receive racial equity training.

### **Data Evaluation & Tracking**

Data evaluation is created in partnership with contract/service providers for ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness on health equity outcomes. The performance measures are embedded in the contract. However, who tracks program effectiveness and ensures accountability of the program outcomes was relatively vague.

In 2021, the Buncombe County Public Health, along the Community Health (CHIP) Advisory

Council, developed the Healthy North Carolina (HNC) 2023 Scorecard to track the progress of community partners and its health priorities. The HNC2023 Scorecard tracks performance indicators of partnership programs in the areas of birth outcomes and infant mortality, mental health and substance misuse, and chronic illnesses. Community partners such as Nurse-Family Partnership reports the Number of Buncombe County Nurse-Family Partnership babies born full-term and at healthy birth weight (2022-2023). The Harm Reduction/Syringe Exchange partner organizations (WNC AIDS Project/WNCAP, Sunrise Community for Recovery & Wellness, Holler Harm Reduction, and Steady Collective) track the distribution number of overdose reversal kits, fentanyl test strips, and xylazine test strips (2023). The Minority Diabetes Prevention Program, run by the YMCA of WNC, tracks the number of Buncombe BIPOC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (MDPP) participants who engage in diabetes prevention activities and programming with the YMCA (2022).

The HNC2023 Scorecard is an important tool to identify progress and build community trust. However, of the nearly 30 organizations and approximately 75 metrics being assessed, a noticeable amount of the data was missing or incomplete.

#### Low-cost/no-cost Medical/behavioral health providers

The 2021 U.S. Census Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE) indicated the Buncombe County uninsurance rate of people under 65 was 12.6%. The state of North Carolina was 12.5% versus a national average of 10%. Healthcare services for uninsured residents are mitigated through no-cost/low-cost providers. Buncombe County offers 50 low-cost/no-cost medical facilities, 111 low-cost/no-cost behavioral health providers, and 47 substance use treatment sites throughout its incorporated and unincorporated areas. Of those totals, the City of Asheville has 35 low-cost/no-cost medical facilities, 81 low-cost/no-cost behavioral health providers, and 34 substance use

treatment sites. The list of behavioral health providers includes individual practitioners and clinical sites.

#### Emergency Medical Services

Emergency medical services include the post-overdose team, homeless outreach, multiple community partners, Community Paramedics, and Community Paramedicine Team. The paramedicine team was implemented in 2019 and began digitally tracking participants in 2023. The team provides ongoing support to individuals who have overdosed or are experiencing a substance use disorder crisis. They also educate and connect community members to other support systems such as food and shelter emergency assistance, mental health crises, de-escalation, transportation, trauma assistance, and rehab. The program serves as an intervention mechanism that can potentially reduce police contact, lowers arrest, and reduces jailing. Since 2020, Family Preservation Services, Umoja Health, Justice, and Wellness Collective, and Counterflow have received approximately \$781,000 in funding to support the community paramedicine team. The funds included support for 9 full-time employees and one part-time staff.

Community health workers are dispersed throughout Buncombe County service points, including Justice Services, the Detention Center, Health and Human Services, Communications & Public Engagement, and Emergency Services with a primary objective to collaborate closely with emergency medical services (EMS) and community paramedicine teams. Some Community Health Workers (CHWs) focus on outreach in specific communities, while others provide health education and address health-related issues specific to their department. CHW must foster trust, transparency, equitable access to services, and must provide feedback to medical personnel to enhance service delivery.

#### Public Health Mobile Team

The public health mobile team's mission is to

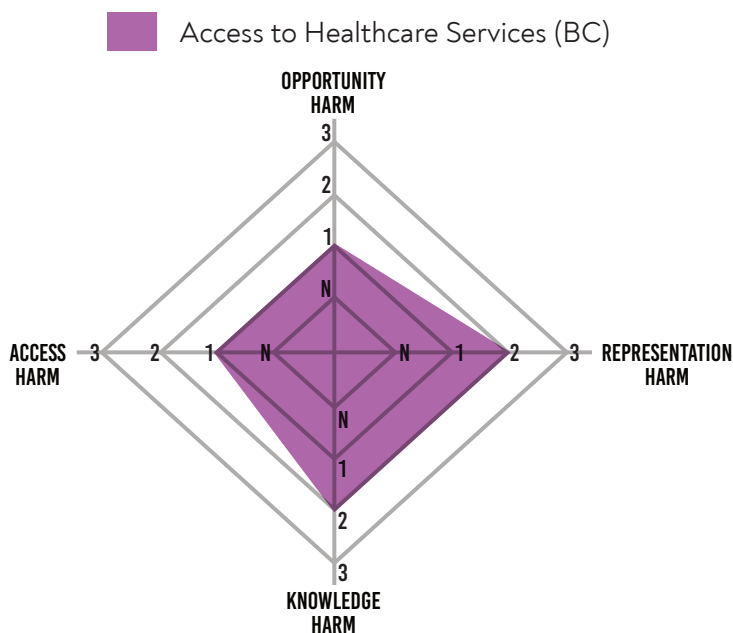
partner with the community to increase equitable access to public health services, focusing on the historically underserved by the healthcare system, low-income areas, and rural communities. Its current services include vaccinations, vaccine record review, rapid HIV & Hep C testing, harm reduction resources & education, community resource navigation, and health education. The mobile team has provided its services nearly 240 times at various locations and events throughout the county. The outreach service has been requested 48 times by phone. Requests can also be made via email and phone. Participants' demographic data is collected and maintained in the county's electronic health record system. The breakdown of participant racial demographics was not provided.

### Health Promotions Team

The Health Promotion team is integral in coordinating ongoing efforts supporting health improvement throughout Buncombe County. The team is responsible for collecting health data for the CHA/CHIP and connecting with community partners to fulfill state contracts for health focus areas through grants and procurement. Identifying healthcare providers and community assets and aligning grant and procurement opportunities to implement the CHA/CHIP goals.

One of the team's notable works includes the one-page CHA/CHIP report summaries on birth outcomes/infant mortality, mental health, substance misuse, chronic disease, and other relevant information disseminated throughout the county. The team partnered with Asheville Buncombe Institute for Parity Achievement (ABIPA) to implement a Black youth mental health initiative in one of the public housing developments. Programming included outreach, education and learning activities, and peer leadership. Data outcomes reflected that 80% of youth involved with programming reported an increased sense of belonging and connection with their peers and community. The team also partnered with the Institute for

Preventive Healthcare & Advocacy (IFPHA) to implement a home visiting program with nurses and mental health clinicians to better support home-bound BIPOC elders accessing mental health services. To date, 64% of people who have been outreached have been linked to mental health services.



### Key Harm Findings

- Lack of data collection prevents a plausible solution to reducing or eliminating the lack of available healthcare providers.
- The 2021 CHA/CHIP report indicated a notable lack of available healthcare providers caused by a “lack of appointments, provider shortage, transportation, lack of sliding scales, BIPOC providers, and realistic payment arrangements.”
- Currently, staff involved in these programs are not required to undergo racial equity training, which is crucial for ensuring that services are delivered in a manner that is sensitive to and inclusive of the community's diverse needs.
- Furthermore, essential operational

metrics, such as the cost of services, staffing ratios to ensure adequate service delivery, monitoring appointment times and gaps, and the geographical location of services, are not being tracked. This lack of data collection and analysis may hinder the ability of partnership programs to effectively assess their accessibility, efficiency, and overall impact on the communities they aim to serve. Addressing these gaps is essential for enhancing the quality, equity, and effectiveness of the services provided through these partnerships.

## Health Education and Literacy

Health education promotes health literacy, encompassing understanding and using health information effectively to maintain and improve health. This includes knowledge about preventive measures, healthy behaviors, disease management, treatment options, and healthcare system navigation. The distribution of health education utilizes strategic communication and media relations to inform, educate, and engage with the public on health-related issues. This includes developing and implementing targeted communication campaigns, media outreach, and community engagement practices to promote health awareness, influence health behaviors, and foster a positive relationship between healthcare providers and their communities.

### **Communications & Public Engagement (CAPE)**

The Communication & Public Engagement team is an active Community Health Improvement Plan member. CAPE partners with seven organizations to promote health awareness as part of its Community Engagement plan. The County's website describes Community Engagement as a liaison between the County and the community to increase public awareness of and participation in County programs, services, and initiatives. Community Engagement utilizes a framework known as

"ICEP," which is an acronym for Inform, Consult, Engage, and Partner.

### **Community Engagement Markets**

According to the Buncombe County website, Community Engagement Markets consists of 12 locations in under-resourced areas of the community. These markets offer a way to build relationships and connections by providing food at no cost to the public and resource connections to services offered by the County and community partners. The markets are coordinated by part-time staff referred to as Community Connectors. Community Connectors are community leaders with knowledge and experience within the neighborhoods being served. The Community Engagement Markets are open to the community and located throughout Buncombe County. The markets provide onsite representation from organizations to assist with chronic disease prevention and management, connections to employment opportunities, librarian assistance, and healthy food demonstrations and education.

The Community Engagement Market calendar, located on the County's website, indicated more than 650 events were coordinated from 2020-2023 at locations such as the Edington Center, Enka Middle School, Aston Park Apartments, Shiloh Community Market, Ivy Community Center, and the Senior Opportunity Center. With an average of 17-20 monthly events, markets are supported by a network of volunteers who support their neighbors by sharing their time to help increase access to healthy food and connections to County and community resources.

CAPE also promotes health-related outreach and engagement as a guest on WRES radio, issues press releases, and utilizes the language access team to disseminate multi-language material.

### **Buncombe County Website**

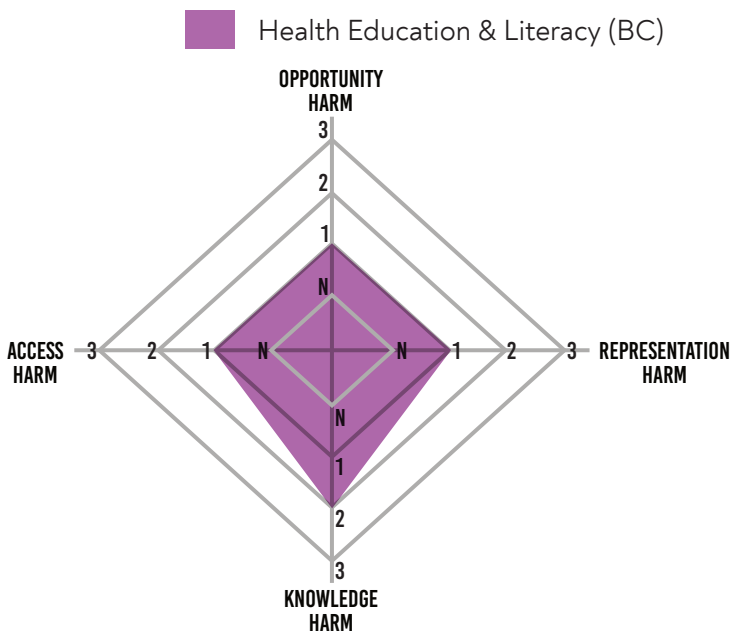
The Buncombe County website provides easy



navigation to public health information, a calendar of events, forms, and contact information for County employees and community partners.

The website also informs residents about access to BCAlerts From CodeRED, an emergency and critical messages notification system that residents may subscribe to through text messaging. According to the County website, the CodeRED notification system will also enhance community engagement by releasing important but non-emergency information such as vaccine site notifications, inclement weather closures and schedule changes, and other county service information.

pantries, community kitchens, or emergency food assistance programs. This indicates food deserts. The USDA describes food deserts as a geographic area where access to affordable and nutritious food, such as fruits and vegetables, is limited or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores, farmers' markets, and other healthy food providers. Food deserts are typically found in low-income communities where residents may have limited transportation options and are often located far from supermarkets or stores that offer fresh and healthy food choices. Low access is characterized by at least 500 people and/or 33 percent of the tract population residing more than 1 mile from a supermarket or large grocery in urban areas, and more than 10 miles in rural areas.



The Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council (ABFPC) works with local Black leaders to address food security through reparations recommendations. The Food Action Plan aims to improve food access and support local food systems, with specific actions targeting food insecurity.

The City of Asheville established a Food Action Plan in support of the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Agenda, emphasizing the importance of access to healthy, nutritious, and locally grown food for all citizens. This plan aligns with the city's commitment to food sovereignty, ecological sustainability, and the preservation of biodiverse forest ecosystems. The plan, integrated into the city's Sustainability Management Plan, outlines several long-term food policy goals and specific actions.

## Food Access & Insecurity

Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. This entails a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life and the limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, such as through food

Key goals include improving food access for those facing food insecurity, strengthening the regional food economy, meeting community nutritional needs with regional foods, preparing for food emergencies, and collaborating with regional partners.

The action plan details steps like utilizing the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to

support local food production and distribution, optimizing permitting for farmers markets, finding a permanent location for the Asheville City Market, and establishing local food purchasing policies. Other actions involve partnerships for regional food options at city events, implementing a citywide curbside composting program, prioritizing edible landscaping on public property, and encouraging organic and permaculture practices on underutilized city land.

The plan also includes updating the city's recommended plant list, enhancing access to food sources through improved transportation, allocating Community Development Block Grants towards food policy goals, setting baselines and metrics for these goals, engaging food deserts with healthy food markets, and incorporating food policy into education programs for city staff and the public.

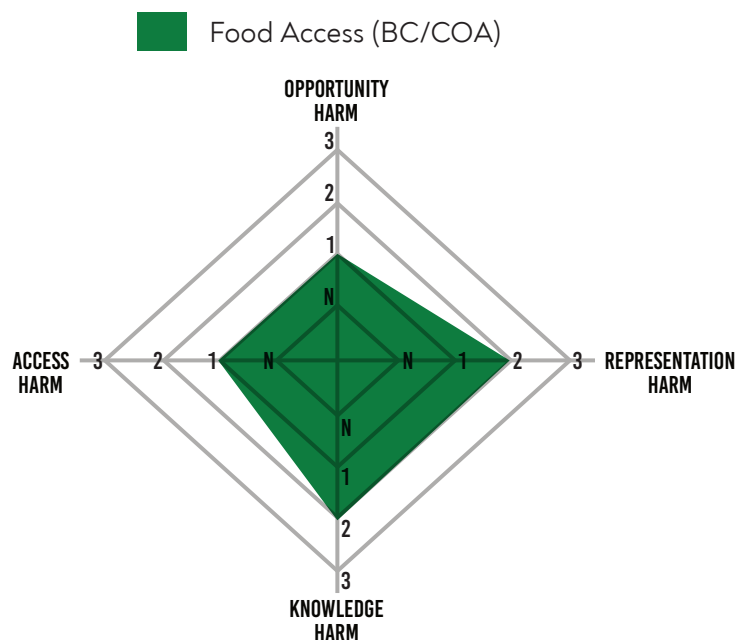
City and county governments collaborate with various stakeholders to address food insecurity, integrating efforts with state and federal programs.

The food insecurity rate for Black households in Buncombe County is significantly higher at 29%, compared to just 14% for white households, highlighting a stark racial disparity in access to sufficient and nutritious food. Nearly one-third of Black households in Buncombe County face challenges in consistently accessing enough nutritious food, underscoring the critical need for targeted interventions to address food insecurity within these communities. 31,172 residents live in seven identified food desert areas across Buncombe County, indicating significant barriers to accessing fresh and healthy food options for a substantial portion of the county's population.

Nineteen percent of Buncombe County residents have expressed concerns about running out of food or have experienced running out of food at least once in the past year, reflecting widespread food insecurity that

impacts the well-being and health of the community.

Through collaborative efforts between the city and county, initiatives are underway to tackle food deserts and improve food access. Community-driven programs such as the Southside Community Farm and Shiloh Community Garden provide direct access to fresh produce while engaging in food sovereignty efforts. Policy and planning endeavors, such as the Food Policy Action Plan and reparations initiatives, are also being implemented to target systemic issues contributing to food insecurity in Black communities. These combined efforts represent a multifaceted approach to address the root causes of food disparities and promote equity in access to nutritious food options.



### Key Harm Findings

- The presence of food deserts in Buncombe County, particularly in low-income communities and areas with predominantly Black residents, indicates a lack of access to affordable and nutritious food options.
- There is a significant disparity in food



access between Black and white households in Buncombe County, with Black households experiencing a much higher rate of food insecurity. This disparity suggests unequal opportunities for accessing sufficient and nutritious food, leading to unequal health outcomes between racial groups.

- The high food insecurity rate among Black households in Buncombe County indicates a lack of knowledge or awareness of available resources and support systems for addressing food insecurity.

## Parks and Recreation Health-Related Programming

Health-related programming in parks and recreation evaluates the effectiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility of these programs, assessing how well they engage diverse populations, disseminate health and wellness knowledge, incorporate community representation in program development, and ensure equitable access to all, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of underserved and marginalized groups.

### **Buncombe County**

In Buncombe County, the approach to parks and recreation emphasizes the availability of parks over indoor facilities, leading to the strategic setup of various program locations throughout different parts of the city. These programs are predominantly youth-oriented, offering a range of activities aimed at engaging younger community members in outdoor and recreational pursuits. Adult programming, by contrast, is less frequent, typically occurring in conjunction with special events or occasions. This model leverages the natural landscapes and open spaces of Buncombe County to foster a connection with nature among its residents, particularly the youth, but it also highlights a gap in regular, structured

recreational opportunities for adults outside of these special events.

The focus on primarily outdoor programming, such as hiking and trails, poses challenges during the winter months when weather conditions can deter outdoor activities. The lack of indoor recreational facilities means that during colder weather, residents have fewer options for staying active and engaged in parks and recreation programs. The reliance on outdoor spaces is particularly impactful for lower socioeconomic communities, for whom parks often serve as the primary, if not the only, accessible venue for exercise due to the sometimes prohibitive costs associated with gym memberships. This seasonal limitation underscores the need for programming that includes indoor or all-weather activities, ensuring that the community has year-round access to health and wellness opportunities.

To address transportation barriers and enhance access to its parks and recreational programming, Buncombe County offers Mountain Mobility, a fixed-route public transit service open to the public. This service ensures that all residents can participate in the county's recreational offerings regardless of location or mobility. While Mountain Mobility is a valuable resource for improving access, the effectiveness of this service in fully bridging the accessibility gap can be further maximized by aligning transit routes and schedules more closely with program timings and locations, especially for those programs situated outside of the most frequented routes or for events scheduled outside of regular transit service hours.

### **City of Asheville**

In the City of Asheville, a notable effort has been made to ensure accessibility to youth programs through transportation. By facilitating easy and safe access to these programs, Asheville is taking significant steps toward fostering an inclusive environment where all youth can engage in enriching

activities that promote their physical and mental well-being.

The distribution of residents within an acceptable distance to parks in Asheville reveals a demographic pattern where a higher percentage of Black residents, 56%, live within walking distance to parks, compared to 43% of White residents. This statistic is encouraging as it suggests that Black communities have relatively better access to green spaces, which are vital for recreational activities, relaxation, and community gatherings. Such access is essential for promoting health and wellness and offers a foundation for building stronger community ties and encouraging active lifestyles among Black residents.

Community-led programming has emerged as a vibrant aspect of Asheville's approach to recreational activities, with initiatives such as step classes initiated by residents. This grassroots involvement is indicative of a community that is actively engaged in shaping its recreational landscape, tailoring it to meet its members' unique needs and interests. Such programming enhances the diversity of offerings and strengthens the sense of ownership and community among participants, making recreation more meaningful and personalized.

The Burton St Community Center has had increased programming and community engagement. From FY 18-19 to FY 22-23, there has been an astounding 800% increase in adult programming and a 247% increase in youth programming. This significant growth underscores a concerted effort to expand and diversify recreational opportunities for all age groups, particularly emphasizing adult engagement. Such increases are a testament to the city's commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its residents through a broad spectrum of activities that cater to varied interests and needs.

The strategic placement of fitness facilities, with 6 of 8 located in predominantly Black

communities, demonstrates a targeted approach to improving access to health and wellness resources. These facilities, which are accessible to everyone but primarily used by elderly African American residents, play a crucial role in promoting physical health and social interaction within these communities. The focus on making fitness and wellness resources available in neighborhoods where they are most needed is a commendable strategy for addressing health disparities and encouraging active lifestyles among Asheville's diverse population.

The current approach to marketing within the organization is centralized, with no specific strategies tailored to address the unique needs and preferences of different regions. This one-size-fits-all marketing strategy overlooks the diverse demographics and cultural nuances of various communities, potentially missing opportunities to connect with and serve these populations more effectively. The absence of targeted marketing efforts for specific regions suggests a gap in the organization's outreach and engagement strategies, which could be critical in fostering stronger relationships with diverse community segments and enhancing the overall impact of its services.

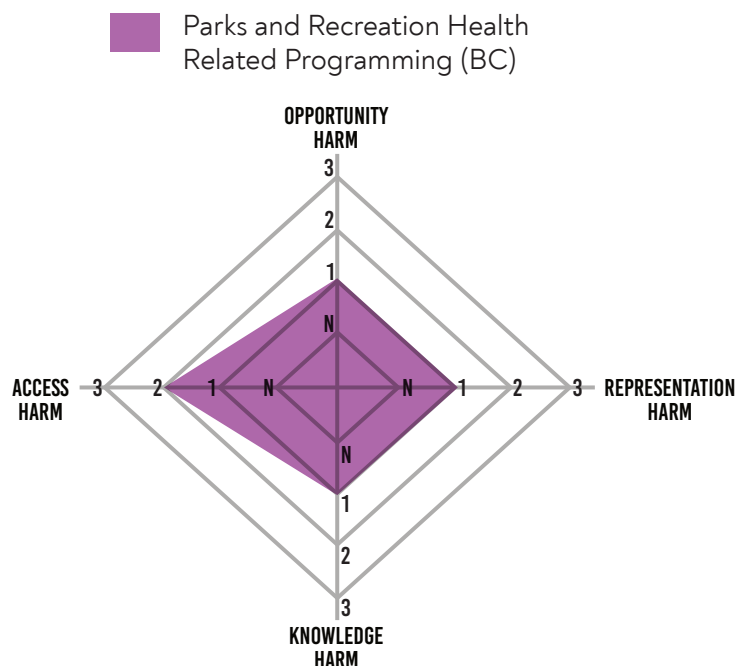
To address issues of diversity and inclusion, the organization created a Racial Equity Action Plan covering the years 2017 to 2020. However, since the initial publication of this document, there have been no formally reported updates or progress reports. This lack of communication raises questions about the implementation and effectiveness of the action plan.


The organization's adoption of an affordable pricing strategy has proven beneficial for lower socioeconomic communities. By making essential services more accessible to individuals and families with limited financial resources, the organization is taking a significant step toward reducing economic disparities. The program operates both in parks and school sites, offering abundant opportunities for children to get involved. For Asheville residents, the cost is

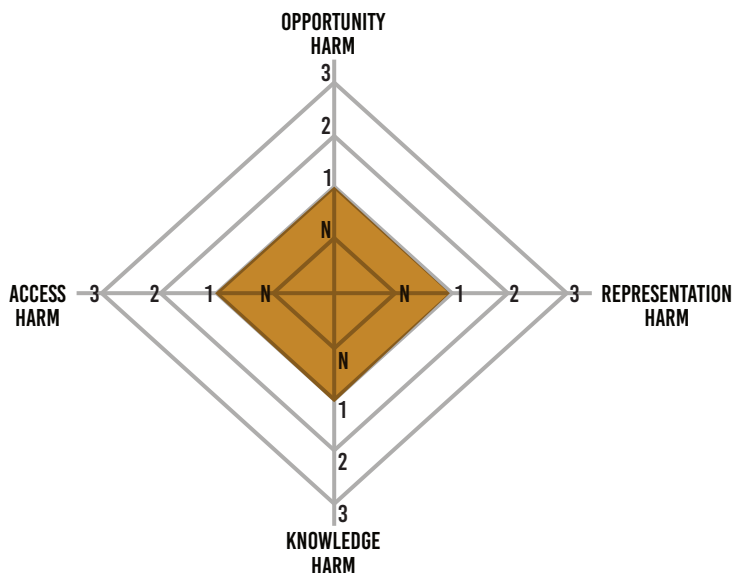
set at \$40 per week, with an additional option of \$5 per "fun day" – days when schools are closed, providing an affordable way for children to stay engaged and active. Recognizing the financial challenges some families may face, the program also offers financial support to ensure that no child is left out due to economic constraints. This initiative ensures inclusivity and accessibility, allowing children from all backgrounds to participate and benefit from the program. This approach not only supports the economic stability of these communities but also promotes inclusivity and equity in access. The positive impact of affordable pricing strategies highlights the importance of considering the economic realities of underserved populations in organizational policies and practices.

### Key Harm Findings

- While some adult-oriented activities exist, the focus on youth-oriented activities may overlook the recreational preferences and priorities of adult residents.
- Some accessibility gaps may exist for programs outside of regularly serviced routes, during off-peak hours in Mountain Mobility in Buncombe County, and transportation initiatives in Asheville.



 Parks and Recreation Health Related Programming (COA)



## Parks and Recreation Equity and Inclusion Initiatives & Impact

The strategic efforts and outcomes of implementing policies, programs, and practices within parks and recreation services are designed to ensure fair access, representation, and participation for all community members. This metric assesses the effectiveness of these initiatives in creating inclusive environments, promoting diversity, and eliminating barriers to participation in recreational activities. It focuses on evaluating how well these efforts foster equitable opportunities for health, wellness, and engagement in public spaces and the extent to which they contribute to the community's overall inclusivity and social cohesion.

### Buncombe County

In Buncombe County, a notable concern within the Parks and Recreation Department is the lack of diversity among its staff, with a departmental breakdown reported as 100% white by the staff. This homogeneity in the workforce raises questions about the department's ability to fully understand and serve the diverse needs of the community it aims to support. The absence of racial and ethnic diversity among staff members

can lead to a narrow perspective on recreational needs and priorities, potentially overlooking the unique cultural, social, and recreational preferences of minority communities within the county. Addressing this issue is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where all community members feel represented and valued.

The introduction of an Equity Matrix by the department represents a step towards recognizing and addressing disparities in access and participation. However, the matrix's focus on primarily internal stakeholders and department employees, with a noted lack of community involvement, suggests a missed opportunity for deeper engagement with the diverse populations served by the department. Genuine community involvement is essential for understanding the varied interests and needs of residents, especially those from underrepresented groups. By expanding the scope of the Equity Matrix to include extensive community input, the department can ensure that its equity and inclusion initiatives are grounded in the real-world experiences and preferences of the community members they aim to serve.

Recognizing the need for a more inclusive approach to planning and service provision, the department is initiating a "whole parks master plan" to gather information directly from the community about areas of need. This initiative represents a significant move towards inclusivity, aiming to capture a wide range of voices and perspectives in the planning process. By actively seeking input from the community, the department can identify gaps in services and facilities, understand the barriers to access faced by different groups, and develop targeted strategies to address these challenges. This community-driven approach is essential for creating parks and recreational programs that are truly reflective of and responsive to the diverse needs of Buncombe County's residents, ensuring that all community members have equitable access to high-quality recreational opportunities.

## City of Asheville

In the City of Asheville, the departmental breakdown reveals a more diverse workforce with Black employees constituting 25% of the staff, while White employees make up 66%. This diversity within the city's departments is indicative of Asheville's commitment to creating a more inclusive municipal workforce. Such a composition is crucial for ensuring that the city's services and programs are reflective of and responsive to the community's diverse demographic makeup. By fostering a diverse workforce, Asheville is better positioned to understand and address the unique needs and challenges of its residents, promoting a more equitable and inclusive community environment.

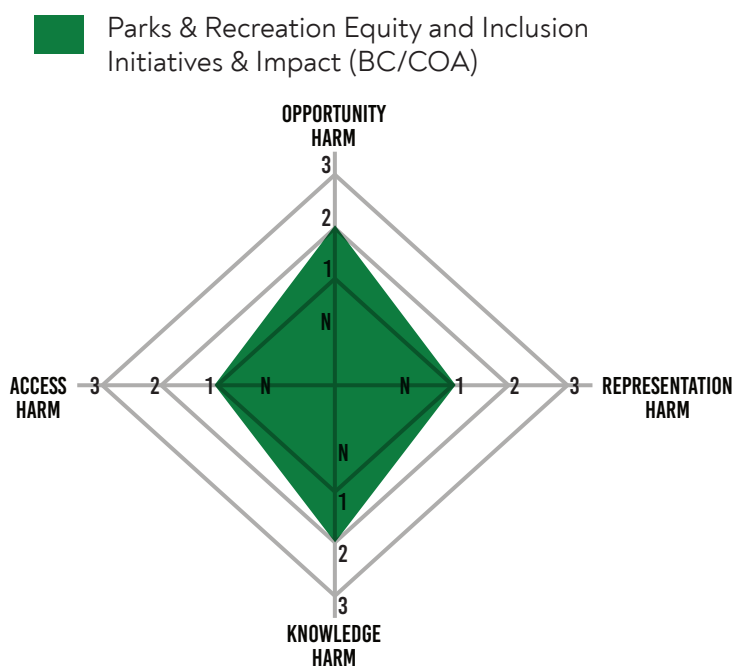
The City of Asheville has implemented an equity dashboard that serves as a comprehensive resource for information on workforce equity data, business inclusion, racial healing, and professional development training. This tool is designed to track progress and highlight areas needing improvement, making the city's efforts towards equity more transparent and accountable. By providing accessible data on these critical areas, the equity dashboard empowers city officials, employees, and the community at large to engage in informed discussions and decision-making processes regarding equity initiatives, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and inclusivity.

The City of Asheville has incorporated equity scores into the process of determining project priorities. This approach ensures that projects and initiatives that are critical for advancing equity and addressing disparities within the community are identified and prioritized. By systematically integrating equity considerations into its planning and decision-making processes, the city is taking a proactive stance in ensuring that its resources are allocated in a manner that maximally benefits all residents, particularly those from historically marginalized communities.

Understanding the financial barriers that can limit access to recreational programs, the City of

Asheville offers an affordable after-school program priced at \$40 per week, along with scholarships for families in need. This initiative demonstrates the city's recognition of the importance of providing all children, regardless of their family's economic status, with access to safe, engaging, and enriching after-school activities. Such programs are vital for supporting the holistic development of children and ensuring that opportunities for growth and learning are equitably available to every young resident of Asheville.

In a significant move towards enhancing recreational spaces in underserved areas, six out of the eight parks located in predominantly Black communities in Asheville have been updated or renovated. This targeted investment in park infrastructure not only improves the quality and accessibility of recreational facilities for these communities but also signals the city's dedication to rectifying historical inequities in access to public spaces. By upgrading parks in predominantly Black neighborhoods, Asheville is actively working to ensure that all its residents have equal opportunities to enjoy the benefits of outdoor activities and community gatherings, contributing to the overall well-being and cohesion of the community.



## Key Harm Findings

In Buncombe County, the concern about the lack of diversity among Parks and Recreation Department staff members raises questions about the department's ability to serve the diverse needs of the community effectively. A workforce breakdown of 100% white staff suggests a lack of representation of minority communities within the department.



## Health & Wellness Recommendations

### Buncombe County Health

#### 1. Develop more robust data-driven practices

- Acquire more data from community partner programs to include racial demographics, clients served, location, service availability, staffing quotas, and more to develop key metrics for partnering in addition to other data-driven decisions.

#### 2. Transportation services for expectant Black mothers

- Buncombe County should establish a dedicated transportation service to address Black maternal health disparities. This service should provide safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options for expectant Black mothers, ensuring access to prenatal appointments, birthing classes, and hospitals.
- [The Dunklin County Health Department](#) provides a similar service.
- This service may be offered through local partnerships. Organizations such as Ride in Bliss offer maternity transportation service.

#### 3. Develop culturally competent healthcare teams

- For Buncombe County to effectively serve its African American and minority residents, we urge the County to prioritize ongoing and comprehensive cultural competence training for healthcare providers. Such training enhances the quality of care and contributes significantly to reducing healthcare disparities and advancing health equity. By embracing this approach, Buncombe County can set a standard for culturally sensitive and inclusive healthcare, ensuring that all community members receive the respectful and effective care they deserve.

#### 4. Social Media Engagement

- To improve the dissemination of health information and increase community engagement, it is recommended that Buncombe County create a separate social media page dedicated explicitly to its Public Health department. This separate space would allow for focused communication on health-related topics, ensuring that vital information is accessible to the community without overshadowing other county updates or unrelated content. Examples include:
  - <https://www.instagram.com/kcpubhealth>
  - <https://www.instagram.com/lakecohealth>

#### 5. Add public health updates to BCAlerts From CodeRED

- Include public health notifications in BCAlerts via CodeRED to ensure timely dissemination of crucial health-related information to the community.

**6. Partnership Funding Transparency**

- To improve transparency and accountability, we recommend implementing visible reporting or grant-tracking mechanisms detailing the county's contributions to partnerships addressing community health needs. This will enhance trust among stakeholders by providing clear insight into the county's financial, resource, and logistical support for each initiative, similar to the information posted for other County and City grant recipients.

**7. Increase community health workers**

- Increasing the number of community health workers (CHWs) in Asheville, particularly focusing on areas of concern, is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable healthcare environment for Black residents. Research shows that having Black healthcare providers and staff increases health outcomes for Black people due to increased visibility, trust, and cultural competence. By leveraging the unique position of CHWs within the community, they can serve as trusted intermediaries who understand the cultural and social nuances of Black residents, thereby bridging the communication gap and promoting preventative care and help-seeking behaviors.

**Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville****8. Enhancing event outreach practices to the Black community through non-digital channels**

- To effectively reach the Black community and residents with limited digital access, it is recommended to utilize non-digital outlets for marketing and advertising events alongside current methods through digital outlets. This may include strategies such as distributing flyers in community centers, churches, local businesses, and schools and advertising through traditional media channels like radio, newspapers, and community bulletin boards. By diversifying advertising methods, we can ensure that important event information reaches all community members, including those without digital access.

**9. Establish a comprehensive directory showcasing Black therapists, doctors, and nurse practitioners in Asheville**

- This directory aims to increase the visibility and accessibility of Black medical providers to the community. Research from the Association of American Medical Colleges underscores the importance of representation in healthcare, indicating correlations between Black healthcare providers and improved health outcomes, including reduced infant mortality rates, greater patient adherence to healthcare guidelines, higher patient satisfaction, and better patient understanding of health risks. Additionally, studies like the GMU study of infant mortality highlight the significant impact of Black physicians on reducing health disparities among Black patients.

**Food Security Recommendations****10. Indoor Winter Markets**

- To ensure year-round access to fresh produce and support local farmers and artisans, the City of Asheville should consider opening additional indoor Winter Markets, with a specific focus on locating them within Black communities in the city and county.

**11. Healthy Corner Store Initiative**

- Buncombe County and the City of Asheville are recommended to initiate a Healthy Corner Store Program. This endeavor aims to introduce affordable, healthy food options in local communities to combat food deserts and enhance access to nutritious foods in underserved areas.

**Parks and Recreation Recommendations****12. Marketing Language and Cultural Access Plan**

- To effectively engage and serve the diverse communities within the city, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive Marketing Language and Cultural Access Plan. This plan should prioritize the creation of marketing materials and communication strategies that are not only linguistically accessible but also culturally resonant with the various demographic groups represented in the community.

**13. Improve data collection**

- Improved data collection and visibility regarding program demographics and community involvement are crucial to enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of city programs and services. This enhancement will provide valuable insights into the reach and impact of initiatives, allowing for better-informed decision-making and more targeted resource allocation to address community needs effectively.

**14. Health and fitness challenges**

- It is recommended that a city-wide health and fitness challenge be launched to promote health, wellness, and community engagement across the city. This initiative would encourage residents of all ages and fitness levels to participate in activities that foster physical health, mental well-being, and social connectivity.

A photograph of a man and a woman from behind, embracing each other. The man is wearing a red, white, and black plaid shirt, and the woman is wearing a red t-shirt. They are looking towards a house in the background. The image is framed by a large white diagonal shape that cuts across the top left and bottom right corners.

# HOUSING



## HOUSING IFA REPORT

The ability to own a home or possess a piece of property through ownership or renting are critical tools for wealth building and financial security in the United States. Since the inception of the United States of America, there have been critical barriers in place that make the ability to secure land and expand the wealth building capacity of property ownership and affordable rental housing extremely difficult. The barriers in place over the centuries of this country's existence have created almost exclusively White homeownership and benefitted their households while removing the opportunity for people of color to access the wealth building benefits. Across the country as continued displacement, exclusion, and segregation has expanded, it has been proven to be difficult for people of color to obtain and retain safe, affordable, versions of homeownership and housing.

From the time of owning enslaved humans to the present, the issue of who or what is property, and who gets to own property has been a pervasive issue in American society. The consistent battle of property rights and ownership has led to consistent stark racial inequities in wealth and financial security, especially between Black and White households. Homeownership and affordable housing are not an end all be all fix for eliminating racial inequities but is seen as one of the foundational tenets of the well-being of a race or group. Through this lens, the ability to assess the purported 'health' of a race or group must examine ways to right the historical inequities that have been entrenched in our legal system and society.

The historical racial impact of redlining, bank loans, gentrification, and economic development affected the impact of using homeownership as a financial vehicle. The Asheville Resolution Supporting Community Reparations For Black Asheville Resolution #20-128 and the Buncombe County Resolution to Support Community Reparations for Black people in Buncombe County recognizes the effects of urban renewal in destroying/disrupting homes and businesses owned by Black families in Asheville and Buncombe County at large. This has led to greatly harming many traditional minority neighborhoods while displacing many people to live in public housing communities or being displaced from the area entirely.

According to the US Census, 5.76% of the population of Buncombe County are Black or African American. In the city of Asheville, 10.9% of residents identify as Black or African American. 12.3 percent of residents in Buncombe County are at poverty level incomes or below while in the city of Asheville, 15 percent of the population are at or below the poverty level. Buncombe (11.5%) county has median household income growth projections that are well below the region-wide projected increase of 15.2%. Buncombe County (36.6%) was one of two counties in the Western North Carolina region with a higher proportion of renter-occupied households than the state-wide percentage of 35.6% in 2020. On a county level, almost half (47.7%) of the households are on a wait list are within Buncombe County (2,645 households) for public housing services with 2,924 vouchers issued. Buncombe county is one of two study areas that are among the three highest average rents and estimated home values in the state of North Carolina leading to Buncombe County having the highest share of renter cost burdened households. Population growth for both Buncombe County and the City of Asheville have seen similar levels of growth and expansion with Asheville seeing a 13.1 percent growth level, higher than the overall growth and expansion across North Carolina.

### Governance

The Fair Housing Act, Title VIII of the 1968 Civil Rights Act, made it illegal to discriminate in the

buying, selling or renting of housing because of a person’s race, color, religion or national origin. Sex was added as a protected class in the 1970s. In 1988, the Fair Housing Amendments Act included familial status and disability in the federally protected classes list. Federal fair housing statutes are largely covered by three pieces of legislation: The Fair Housing Act, The Housing Amendments Act, and The Americans with Disabilities Act.

State or local government may enact fair housing laws that extend protection to other groups as well. In North Carolina, the Fair Housing Act includes the following protected classes: race, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, familial status, or “except as otherwise provided by law, the fact that a development or proposed development contains affordable housing units for families or individuals with incomes below 80% of area median income.” Buncombe County’s ordinances in support of housing are Section 42-6 and Section 98-1-6. Section 42-6 falls under Discrimination in Public Accommodations and Section 98-1-6 speaks specifically to rental housing. For the City of Asheville, Section 4-201 of the city ordinances refers to housing with language mirroring the Buncombe County housing ordinances.

## Housing Key Harm Assessment Scale

Housing Harm Assessment Scale			
Housing	1	2	3
	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent racial disparities in affordable housing practices or home values assessment. Evidence of racial disparities in home purchases or sales, housing rental, mortgage lending practices, determining creditworthiness, or assessing home values.	Roadblocks to affordable housing, inequitable enforcement practices, or violations of the Fair Housing Act.  Lack of comprehensive data compounds the systemic racial disproportionality of the development of effective housing policies and access to fair housing opportunities for marginalized communities.	Evidence of poor housing practices marked by substandard housing and below-market housing valuation resulting in the saturation of frontline low-income communities.  Housing practices resulting in high evictions, foreclosures, homelessness, blight, dilapidation, and gentrification leading to displacement.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Housing IFA Metrics

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville provided the Housing CDG research team with approximately 50 artifacts to analyze. Those artifacts included information on the Housing Trust Fund, Fair Housing complaints, Planning and Development processes, Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice report, the Bowen National Research Buncombe County Housing Needs Assessment, and website links containing various qualitative and quantitative data. The following metrics were assessed to determine the level of harm in the Housing impact focus area:

- **Housing Market Dynamics** refer to the various factors and forces that influence the supply and demand of housing in a particular area, including but not limited to economic conditions, population growth, housing prices, rental rates, and housing development trends.
- **Housing Access and Support** pertain to the availability of housing options and the resources and assistance provided to individuals and families to secure suitable housing.
- **Regulatory Compliance** involves adhering to laws, regulations, and policies related to housing development, construction, rental, and property management. This encompasses zoning regulations, building codes, fair housing laws, landlord-tenant regulations, and other legal requirements governing the housing sector.

## Housing Market Dynamics

Housing market dynamics refer to the ever-changing conditions, forces, and factors that influence the buying, selling, and pricing of residential properties within a specific geographic area. Key components that collectively determine the state and trajectory of the housing market of housing market dynamics include supply and demand, demographics, policies, urban development, and home pricing trends.

Based on analysis from the 2020 US Census, findings reveal a significant Black homeownership gap at 31.9 percent in the City of Asheville, ranking at 151st highest among all metropolitan areas nationwide. While the overall homeownership rate in Asheville stands at 67.6 percent, Black homeownership lags significantly at 37.8 percent, ranking at 152nd lowest among all metros in the country. In contrast, White homeownership stands at 69.6 percent, reflecting a substantial gap between Black and White homeownership rates in Asheville.

### Homeownership in Asheville

According to the 2020 Census, the average median income in Asheville stands at \$64,548, while in Buncombe County, it is \$68,019. However, the census data from 2022 reveals a lower average

income of \$43,641 for individuals over 25 in Asheville, which is notably the lowest among comparable cities outlined in the Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the Zillow Housing Value Index indicates a significant increase in housing values within Asheville, surpassing both Buncombe County and the state of North Carolina. The Cost-of-Living Index, as updated in September 2023 by the Council for Community and Economic Research, highlights that Asheville's cost of living is 6% higher than the North Carolina state average and 2% higher than the national average, with housing costs soaring 20% above the state average. The average monthly rent in Asheville is \$1717, with homes typically selling for around \$465,000, presenting a considerable barrier to homeownership, particularly for those with median incomes.

Examining the disparity further, the 2022 American Community Survey data indicates a substantial gap between White and Black median household incomes in Asheville. While White households boast a median income of \$70,209, Black households only average \$22,312, significantly trailing behind city and county averages. Moreover, households with Black or African American

heads of households experienced a 12% decrease in median income between 2012 and 2022, exacerbating the economic challenges faced by Black families in Asheville.

### **Asheville Rental Housing Market**

In Buncombe County and the City of Asheville, the challenge of homeownership is increasingly daunting for Black families, as indicated by findings from both the Cost-of-Living Index and the American Community Survey. Renting poses similar difficulties, particularly for Black families in Asheville. Notably, Asheville's average rent of \$1717 per month surpasses that of other major North Carolina cities. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fair Market Rent for 2023, the fair market rates for various housing units further underscore the affordability crisis. HUD annually computes median family income estimates to establish income limits, which determine eligibility for federally funded housing assistance programs. For Buncombe County, a segment of the Asheville Metropolitan area, including Henderson and Madison Counties, the 2023 HUD income limits reveal that to afford a two-bedroom apartment, a resident would need an income of approximately \$58,640 or a wage of approximately \$28.19 per hour.

According to the 2022 American Community Survey, Asheville faces a rental vacancy rate of 12.4 percent, with over 54.5 percent of its residents experiencing rent burden, paying 30 percent or more of their income towards rent. However, data from the Dogwood study, supplied by both the city and the county, was not included in the assessment due to its comparison method, which does not distinguish by race or ethnicity and combines all demographic groups. To afford the average monthly rent of \$1717 while allocating only 30 percent of their monthly income to rent, individuals would need to earn approximately \$5723 per month or about \$68,676 annually. The average median household income for Black families in Asheville is \$22,312, which places them significantly below the affordability

threshold for rental units in both Asheville and Buncombe County. Additionally, much of the recent rental development over the past 5 to 10 years has been situated on the City's outskirts, with limited access to public transportation, as outlined in the Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan.

When housing expenses become unmanageable, families bear the brunt of the burden. According to the North Carolina Housing Coalition, Buncombe County witnessed 110 families undergoing foreclosure and 1,495 families facing eviction in 2023 alone. Neither Asheville nor Buncombe County has established programs or initiatives to aid families at risk of losing their homes, leaving households primarily reliant on local non-profit organizations for assistance.

The proliferation of short-term rentals in Asheville has only exacerbated the strain on the rental housing market. With limited options available to families seeking rental accommodations, the situation is compounded by profit-driven motives. Notably, 40% of the housing inventory in Asheville comprises vacant seasonal homes. This scarcity in affordable housing for both purchase and rent forces Asheville residents to compete with tourists and visitors, setting the stage for potential conflicts between residents and the local government.

### **Buncombe County Affordable Housing**

Buncombe County has recognized the increasing need for more housing inventory as the population of Asheville and Buncombe County grows. In 2022, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners set forth housing goals, including constructing 1,500-1,850 new affordable units for rent, 500 income-eligible homes marked for repair, and more. Of the 2750 units needing to be created or repaired in Buncombe County, only 326 units have been marked as complete. Of the units of less than 80 percent created for AMI, only 84 of 1766 have been completed. None of the rental units averaging 60 percent AMI or less, rental units



leveraging LIHTC, and rental units for 30 percent AMI or less have been completed. For the new homes built to meet the threshold of families at 80% of AMI or less, only 32 of 400 have been completed to date.

According to the 2022 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice report:

- City of Asheville’s racial equity mapping analyzed the displacement of Black people within the city over the last decade, and shows population increases in areas away from downtown and into areas of Buncombe County.
- Based on mortgage denial rates in 2021 by race/ethnicity, POC in Buncombe County may be anywhere from 1.5 to 2 times as likely to be denied a mortgage than Whites.
- Typically, in healthy and well-balanced housing markets, availability rates are between 2.0% and 3.0%. Buncombe County’s rate is 0.7%. Out of an 18-county WNC region, only Burke County (0.3%), McDowell County (0.4%) and Henderson County (0.6%) have lower rates of housing availability.

- While housing availability isn’t an overt form discrimination in the Building and Construction Industry, housing availability can have secondary discrimination effects such as builders only building higher-end housing given limited and more expensive land, therefor effectively excluding low-income buyers and renters from the larger real estate market.

## Housing Access and Support

Housing access refers to the availability, affordability, and inclusivity of housing options within a community, ensuring that individuals and families have the means and opportunities to secure safe and suitable living arrangements. Support for affordable housing involves governmental initiatives and programs designed to promote, fund, and facilitate the development and maintenance of housing that is accessible to individuals with varying income levels, particularly those with limited financial means.

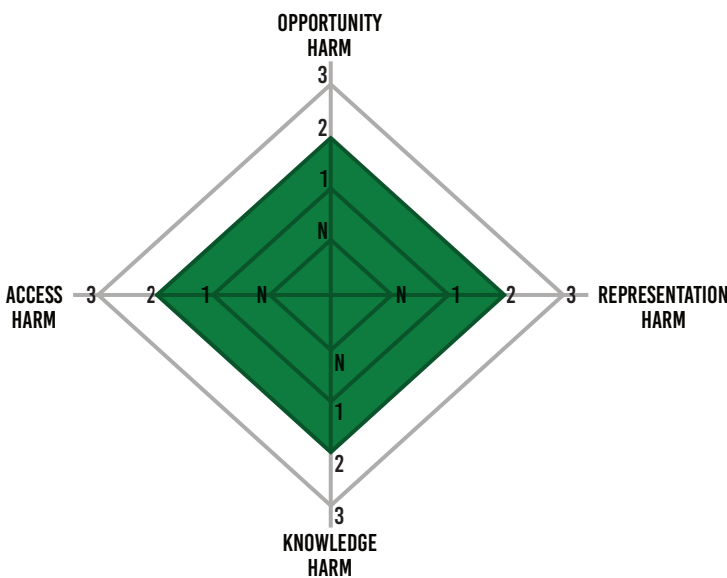
### Buncombe County Affordable Housing Assistance

Within Buncombe County’s Office of Planning and Development are listed renter resources that offer sources of funding through county-supported programs and non-profit organizations. Areas that residents can seek assistance with include emergency repair programs, rental assistance, evictions assistance, financial counseling, down payment assistance, homelessness aid, crisis intervention, and energy assistance.

### Buncombe County Assistance Programs

The emergency repair program allows County residents to apply for assistance to help make their homes safe and accessible for income-eligible households. Examples of repairs approved are accessibility and disability features, roof repair, and HVAC system replacement. Buncombe County’s emergency

 Housing Market Dynamics (BC/COA)





repair program is administered and performed by Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity and Mountain Housing Opportunities. These target families are at 70% AMI or below and 50% AMI or below, respectively.

Buncombe County used existing county staff to implement its rental assistance program and later added contract staff over the last 18 months at approximately \$175,000. The rental assistance and eviction assistance programs similarly assist residents facing hardship and aim to prevent homelessness or displacement. These programs focus on families at 80 percent AMI or below and can assist with rent or mortgage payments, security deposits, or assistance to prevent eviction or foreclosure. In Buncombe County, except for the Buncombe County Department of Health and Human Services tenant-based rental assistance program, nonprofit organizations provide many of the financial assistance to residents. Those organizations include Eblen Charities, The ARC of Buncombe County, and Asheville Buncombe

Community Christian Ministry. Additionally, legal services to assist residents with the eviction process are supported by Pisgah Legal Services.

The rental assistance program was developed through local policies based on the limited guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Treasury upon receipt of the funds. The County can pull reporting data through its locally designed system. However, they have not based on not receiving any data request from the Treasury Department to date.

From FY20 through FY23, rental and eviction assistance funding approximate \$2.58 million dollars.

- Emergency repair \$1.75 million
- Tenant Based Rental Assistance, \$334,384
- Financial Counseling, \$50,000
- Homeowner Resources, \$450,000

For Buncombe County homeowners needing assistance, county programs offer support throughout the foreclosure process and provide necessary repairs. Additionally, partnerships with Asheville Area Habitat for Humanity and Mountain Housing Opportunities offer down payment assistance for eligible households, while the Buncombe County New Start Program offers financial counseling to households at or below 80% of the area's median income (AMI). The County provided mortgage assistance through One Buncombe, County and local donations, and Community Development Block Grants. An estimated \$100,000 in County funds went toward mortgage assistance. The County has also provided a Homeowner Grant program that assists homeowners with county funds for property taxes, mortgage assistance, or insurance costs. The county budget for this assistance is \$300,000 annually.

Whether renting or owning, Buncombe County residents can access energy assistance programs such as the Crisis Intervention Program and the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) for heating or cooling emergencies, provided their income falls below 150% of the poverty income level. These programs offer one-time vendor payments to help eligible low-income families cover their heating bills. LIEAP assists households with elderly or disabled members with December energy bills.

There is a standard inquiry form that applicants can complete online, apply by telephone through the County's call center, or apply in person at 40 Coxe Ave for these various services. Racial demographic data is tracked, however, no racial demographic tracking has been coordinated. For the unhoused community, various non-profit organizations in Buncombe County offer a range of services, including Rapid Rehousing, the AHOPE Day Center, Crisis Ministry, Beloved Asheville, and the Haywood Street Congregation.

Finally, residents encountering discrimination

are encouraged to report incidents to Buncombe County's Equity and Human Rights office. Following federal and state guidelines, the office documents complaints residents may have experienced, including those related to housing discrimination. Through informal investigations, the Equity and Human Rights office assesses whether housing complaints can be resolved through alternative means or require further investigation and referral to external bodies beyond the county's jurisdiction. Official housing complaints are directed to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing. Presently, there is no indication that Buncombe County requests data from HUD's Office of Fair Housing regarding the volume of complaints received within the county.

The Health & Human Services department works with the Communication and Public Engagement (CAPE) department to advertise means-based programs through social media, print media, and on the County website. They also utilize community partnerships with local non-profit organizations to distribute information through alliances such as the Safety Net Coalition, BEACON, a crisis assistance network, and Buncombe Aging Services Alliance (BASA).

#### **City of Asheville Affordable Housing Assistance**

The City of Asheville, under the purview of the Community and Economic Development office, acknowledges its responsibility in addressing the challenge of affordable housing and bridging the affordability gap within the city. Recognizing the importance of diverse housing options, Asheville understands the need for various housing types in its inventory, given that the current wages and incomes of its residents are insufficient to afford both homeownership and rental properties. Due to the disparity between high housing costs and relatively low salaries, a considerable portion of Asheville's population experiences financial strain, struggling to afford their rent or mortgage payments.

### **Affordable Housing Plan and Related Programs**

The Asheville Regional Housing Consortium (ARHC) consists of local governments within the Asheville metropolitan area collaborating to obtain an allocation from HUD for HOME funds, with Asheville leading the consortium's compliance and reporting obligations to HUD. Together, the consortium devises strategies to address various needs, allocate funds, implement intricate housing initiatives, and track expenditures.

### **Home Investment Partnerships Program & the Housing Consortium**

Through a variety of initiatives, the Asheville municipal government has engaged in collaborative efforts to formulate housing plans and proposals aimed at bolstering affordable housing initiatives. Every five years, in partnership with the Housing Consortium, the city develops a Consolidated Plan outlining goals and strategies for the utilization of federal funding. Since 2008, with updates in 2015 and the forthcoming 2024 revision, Asheville has identified areas where affordable housing is lacking. However, over the years, there has been a deficiency in a comprehensive plan guiding the allocation of local funds and resources, including the Housing Trust Fund, Land Use Incentive Grants, and Bond allocations. An updated plan will enable the city to strategize for future bond programs and establish funding priorities for partnerships with other entities such as Buncombe County and Dogwood Health Trust.

Through the HOME program, overseen by the Housing Consortium, formula grants are disbursed to states and localities, often in collaboration with local nonprofits, to finance a range of initiatives, including the acquisition, construction, and/or renovation of affordable housing for rental or homeownership, as outlined on the HUD website. This program also facilitates direct rental aid to low-income households and stands as the primary federal block grant exclusively designated for affordable housing for low-income families, according to HUD. Local governments meeting specific formula criteria are entitled to a

minimum of \$500,000 in direct funding. Cities like Asheville, which join forces with neighboring municipalities in a housing consortium, can combine efforts to meet the threshold for direct funding.

Moreover, cities can access Community Development Block Grant funds to bolster various community support initiatives. Between Fiscal Years 2019 and 2022, Asheville allocated \$2.235 million to numerous local nonprofits to bolster housing endeavors, encompassing rental and homeowner assistance programs.

### **Housing Trust Fund**

Utilizing funds allocated to the city from various revenue streams, the Housing Trust Fund was established in 2000 with the objective of offering financial support for the development and preservation of low-income housing within Asheville's city limits. Applicants to the Housing Trust Fund are eligible to receive low-interest loans to facilitate the creation of affordable housing units. Notably, the Housing Trust Fund does not offer grants. Eligible developers encompass for-profit corporations, private nonprofits, public housing agencies, as well as state and local governments.

Developers who secure loans from the Housing Trust Fund are required to adhere to Asheville's Land Use Incentive Policy. This policy mandates that developers integrating Trust Fund resources into their projects must incorporate a designated number of affordable units into their plans. Additionally, developers are obligated to engage with local organizations and non-profits to publicize the availability of affordable rents. Failure to comply with the Land Use Incentive Policy beyond the initial 30-day period of non-compliance and opportunity for rectification will result in the repayment of all funds allocated from the Trust Fund.

### **Homeowner Property Tax Grants & Dogwood Health Trust**

Two additional grant programs accessible to residents or governmental entities in Asheville and Buncombe County are the homeowner

property tax grant program administered by Buncombe County and the Dogwood Health Trust. The homeowner property tax grant program enables individuals whose income falls at or below 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) to apply for a tax credit on their property taxes or a designated sum towards home repairs. This program accepts applications at intervals determined by the county.

Furthermore, for local governments, the Dogwood Health Trust offers grants to nonprofits and governmental bodies to bolster housing, education, economic opportunity, and health and wellness initiatives.

According to the 2022 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice report there are inadequate housing supply, both for-sale and rental; inadequate supply of accessible housing options; lack of housing finance options to achieve homeownership; discrimination based on source of rental income and previous eviction history; and lack of awareness of fair housing laws.

Buncombe County’s 2023 Affordable Housing Services Program (AHSP) developed goals to

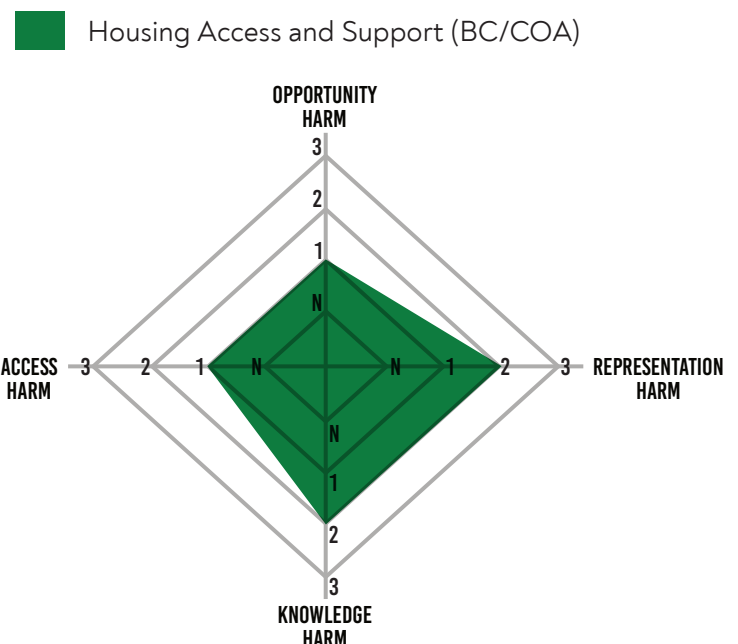
- Increase the supply of Affordable Housing for rent.
- Increase the supply of Affordable Housing for homeownership, especially for BIPOC households.
- Preserve the supply of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH).
- Support activities that achieve functional zero Homelessness.
- Support activities that encourage the use of all vouchers.

### Key Harm Indicators

- The significantly lower Black homeownership rate compared to the White homeownership rate suggests a disproportionate distribution of housing opportunities.
- The discrepancy between median

household incomes and housing costs, particularly for Black families, highlights a lack of access to affordable housing despite awareness of available programs and resources. This indicates barriers to accessing housing options even when individuals possess knowledge about them.

- The significant increase in housing values and rental costs in Asheville, coupled with stagnant or declining median incomes, signifies a lack of equitable access to affordable housing opportunities. This disparity indicates that housing opportunities may not be accessible or feasible for many residents, particularly those with lower incomes or belonging to marginalized communities.
- While mechanisms exist for Buncombe County too access the racial demographic data in its software system, there is a lack of racial equity focus, data-driven practices that create missed opportunities for promoting services in underserved communities.
- Landlords are not required to give disclosure about fair housing and the non-discrimination ordinance to their residents.



## Regulatory Compliance

Regulatory compliance in housing refers to the adherence and conformity of housing-related activities, policies, and practices to the laws, regulations, and standards established by local, state, and federal governing bodies. The objective is to ensure that individuals, organizations, and entities involved in housing-related activities operate within the legal framework, promoting fair, safe, and equitable housing practices. Key components include anti-discrimination laws, tenant and landlord regulations, building codes and safety standards, and zoning and land use regulations.

### Fair Housing Process

Residents of Asheville who believe they have faced housing discrimination based on their protected class can lodge a complaint with the Office of Equity and Human Rights. The office may refer them to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing. Complaints can be submitted online, by phone, or by mail. HUD primarily investigates complaints involving alleged violations of the Fair Housing Act, civil rights, HUD-funded programs, and the Violence Against Women Act. Complaints undergo investigation by teams of interviewers before determinations are made and remedies sought. Cases warranting litigation are forwarded to HUD's Office of General Counsel.

### Zoning

Zoning encompasses regulations dictating where, how, and what can be built on land and permissible activities on properties. Rooted in the Constitution's grant of police power to governments, zoning aims to maintain order, prevent harm, and manage land use. Over time, zoning laws have evolved into intricate frameworks profoundly shaping neighborhoods and communities. Historically, during periods like slavery and Jim Crow, zoning was used to enforce racial segregation, although explicit race-based zoning was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917). Despite this ruling, local governments

employed indirect discriminatory practices, notably through exclusionary zoning. Exclusionary zoning erects barriers limiting housing supply by restricting housing types or converting residential areas to commercial zones, effectively displacing unwanted residents. This practice can inflate home prices in certain neighborhoods while depressing them in segregated areas, directly impacting property tax revenue for local schools and educational outcomes. Additionally, exclusionary zoning perpetuates racial disparities in environmental conditions, job opportunities, and wealth accumulation. The CDG research team, due to a lack of data, was unable to determine if zoning practices were racially motivated and creating harm against African Americans.

### Code Enforcement

Code enforcement refers to the regulations and standards implemented by cities or governments to safeguard the quality of constructed buildings and residences. These codes encompass safety measures concerning the structural integrity, appearance, and overall livability of buildings and homes. Additionally, they play a role in maintaining the aesthetics and upkeep of neighborhoods and urban areas to prevent nuisances. Zoning regulations and code enforcement are closely intertwined, as zoning laws and codes dictate whether a structure can be inhabited by its intended occupants. However, the historical legacy of indirect exclusionary zoning practices and ongoing racial disparities introduces the potential for discrimination and subjectivity in the implementation and enforcement of code regulations. The CDG research team, due to a lack of data, was unable to determine whether code enforcement practices exhibit racial bias and harm African Americans.

### Property Tax Implications

The historical trajectory of property taxation predates the establishment of the United States and its governmental structures. Taxation, in various forms, has long served as a fundamental revenue-generating mechanism for governing bodies. Property tax assessments typically

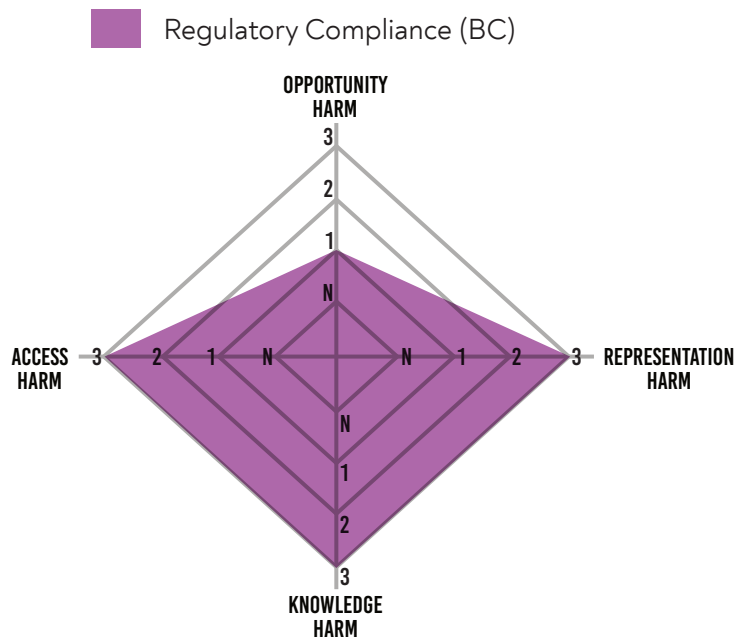
correlate with the value and appraisal of residential properties. The direct impact of property tax rates and revenues on local educational institutions introduces a notable degree of subjectivity in enforcement practices.

Initial findings suggest that property tax assessments in Buncombe County may lack full equity, particularly concerning Black and Brown families residing in historical neighborhoods. Syneva Economics conducted a multi-year analysis of home sales in Buncombe County, revealing that lower-valued homes, particularly those in historical neighborhoods, were appraised at or near their market values compared to newer, more affluent neighborhoods. The possible over-assessment of lower-valued homes, primarily owned by Black and Brown families, underscores a disparity in property tax burdens, resulting in higher tax obligations for these demographics.

### Key Harm Indicators

Lack of data collection, tracking, and analysis can or may have created the following:

- Potential for ongoing use of zoning laws to enforce racial segregation and perpetuate disparities in housing and neighborhood quality.
- Potential for subjective enforcement of codes and regulations, leading to discriminatory practices and unequal treatment.
- Potential of disparities in property tax assessments, resulting in higher tax burdens for Black and Brown families compared to their white counterparts will require additional research.



## Housing Recommendations

### Eviction and Foreclosures

1. The county should approach the courts to update forms to separate data from housing from businesses versus and include racial demographic information.
2. Capture demographic data on landlord, tenant, and homeowner during evictions and foreclosures.

### Code Enforcement

3. Code enforcement citations should be tracked by HOH race.
4. Review developmental ordinances to determine if Black populations are disproportionately and harmfully impacted by their enforcement.

### Affordable Housing Plan

5. Revise the County's affordable housing strategy in light of changing housing needs to support Black population needs across all age groups and economic levels.
6. Identify funding sources and allocate budget in order to sustain and expand rates of Black homeownership over the next three years
7. Create targeted funding and develop a budget to address specific affordable housing needs for Black population over the next three years; ensuring geographic regions and specific populations receive the appropriate housing intervention.
8. Develop timeline and goals for collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as community partners, to create affordable housing for Black populations and eliminate barriers to fair housing.

### Social Determinants of Health

9. Embed the social determinants of health as a guideline when building additional housing or lowering income standards to ensure consideration of all other factors that impact housing affordability. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the social determinants of health (SDOH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.

### Rental Housing

10. Require landlords to provide disclosures about fair housing and the non-discrimination ordinance to their residents.
11. Develop timeline and goals for collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as community partners, to create affordable housing for BIPOC populations and eliminate barriers to fair housing.
12. Create a developer map to track upcoming and planned construction.
13. Limit number of developers granted permits to build in legacy neighborhoods unless building housing for low income or extremely low-income tenants/owners
14. Implement suggestion of 500 extra units built /created per year for the next 20 years.
15. Fee rebate program for developments that comply with price limits have not been implemented.









# INTERNAL PROCESS REPORT



2024 Cease Harm Comprehensive Audit

# DRAFT

## INTERNAL PROCESS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The foundation of organizational culture heavily relies on human resource departments and their methods for creating and enforcing policies and procedures that foster inclusive community development. Recruiting talent, providing training and professional growth opportunities, fostering employee engagement, and managing compensation and benefits, among other responsibilities, represent only part of their significance. Their more profound and impactful role lies in shaping the organizational climate of psychological safety. An expansion of this responsibility encompasses the equity, inclusion, and human rights offices, which also have a significant impact on shaping policies, procedures, practices, outcomes, and the overall organizational culture. The cease harm audit aimed to understand the role and impact of these two departments across Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments.

### **Internal Workforce Overview**

Critical areas for improvement were observed in Buncombe County and the City of Asheville HR practices. Firstly, there is a pressing need to establish comprehensive systems for tracking diversity metrics to ensure equity and inclusion in the workforce. The assessment identified a shortage of nonwhite managers, underscoring the importance of targeted professional development initiatives, particularly for Black employees. Secondly, inconsistencies in recruitment and onboarding processes raise concerns about potential biases, especially affecting Black female employees in the City's practices. Additionally, the absence of employee-wide engagement surveys for over five years limits the ability to address latent inequities within the workplace. Establishing consistent feedback mechanisms is essential for identifying areas of improvement and creating a more inclusive work environment.

### **Equity, Inclusion, and Human Rights Overview**

While both Buncombe County and the City of Asheville demonstrate efforts to address equity and inclusion, there are areas for improvement. Mandatory racial equity training and consistent engagement surveys are crucial for fostering inclusive workplace cultures and mitigating potential harm. Within the City government there is a lack of robust policy review with an equity lens and no racial equity plan to holistically guide the organizational culture. Immense potential for harm exists due to the high number of staff not trained in racial equity within the County and City governments.

### **The Groundwater Approach for Workforce Inequities**

According to the Groundwater Foundation, "groundwater is the water found underground in the cracks and spaces in soil, sand and rock. It is stored in and moves slowly through geologic formations of soil, sand and rocks called aquifers." Groundwater eventually surfaces to drinkable water. Inequitable workforce practices operate similarly. Human resource and equity and inclusion departments operate at the groundwater level of the organizational culture, which ultimately surfaces as the consumed experience of the workforce. Therefore, there exists a business imperative for inclusive community building practices that impact employee moral, production, and organizational commitment. This report presents a profound opportunity for the Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments to engage in transformative workforce initiatives. The findings are not to blame but serve as an opportunity for inclusive community building.



# INTERNAL WORKFORCE



## INTERNAL WORKFORCE

Human Resources is a critical function that touches various aspects of an organization, from talent acquisition to employee development, culture building, and continuous growth. Its multifaceted role creates a workplace where employees thrive, and the organization flourishes. HR's contribution can be positive and negative, depending on the policies, practices, and initiatives implemented. Without proper attention from HR, the organization can swiftly develop into a culture of biased recruitment, exclusionary networks, subjective evaluations, and limited access to training opportunities, mentorship, and sponsorships. Employees may also experience micro and macro aggressions and implicit bias in disciplinary actions. A lack of efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming environment may contribute to low morale, low productivity, and higher turnover rates among certain racial groups. The ripple effect of exclusive practices across the organization will impact the perception of equity across the functionality of all departments.

### Harm Assessment Scale

Harm Assessment Scale			
	1	2	3
IFA	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent or infrequent effects were consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization.	Frequent effects consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization. Compounding effects of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization caused by the lack of data.	Considerable and notable effects are consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization with outcomes resulting in a tremendously diminished quality of opportunities, knowledge, representation, or access.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Internal Workforce Metrics

Policy and procedure reviews and multiple qualitative meetings were hosted with Buncombe County and the City of Asheville's internal workforce departments to determine the harm caused within their operations. The following findings, assessed metrics, harm assessment ratings, and recommendations aim to support and enhance the inclusive building practices of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville's internal workforces.

- **Workforce Diversity Metrics** refer to the quantitative measures used to assess the demographic composition of an organization's workforce, including factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other dimensions of diversity.
- **Recruitment and Onboarding** refer to the processes of attracting, selecting, and integrating new employees into an organization.
- **Employee Development & Advancement Process** involves the strategies and programs implemented by an organization to support its employees' professional growth, skill development, and career progression.
- **Employee Satisfaction/Engagement Surveys/Exit Surveys** are tools used to gather feedback from employees about their experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction with various aspects of their work environment and employment relationship.

### Buncombe County

Buncombe County's internal workforce comprises 1663 employees across 31 departments, of which 7% are Black or African American, 5% are Hispanic/Latin, and 81% are White. Approximately 29 Black or African American employees, or 1.7%, are in management roles—making them the highest number of nonwhite employees in management. Nonwhite employees make up 3.2% of all managers. The overall employee demographic is consistent with the County's racial makeup. Buncombe County receives nearly 8,000 applications annually, hires about 350 employees, and has 1,700 total positions.

Buncombe County's hiring managers must complete professional development training before hiring new employees. Training includes implicit bias training, creating equitable interview questions, how to work with HR on providing accommodations, considering substantially equivalent education and experience (equity), how pay is calculated, and general employment law. Buncombe County also uses a substantial equivalency model, which counts relevant education as equivalent experience. As of August 2022, Buncombe County offers an online exit survey or in-person exit interview to employees who leave the organization. Stay Surveys have also been enacted for areas experiencing high turnover to help leaders identify why employees stay and what they can proactively do to continue to retain them. The Human Resources Department and Strategy and Innovation Department administer these surveys. Interview panel members also undergo bias training.

The Buncombe County policy writing process includes an equity and inclusion review. In addition, Buncombe County policies are usually written using a Policy Writers Committee of a diverse group of individuals from various professional backgrounds and departments. Buncombe County has various policies that include language around equity and inclusion, including the Personnel Ordinance, Affinity Groups Policy, Employee Pay Policy, and Flexible Workplace Policy. Additional policies, including the Supplemental Pay Policy, Paid Parental and Family Leave Policy, Leave Policy, and Travel Policy, provide guidance for topics that align with equitable treatment for employees of differing familial or bilingual statuses. There are no interview panel policies or procedures, which can create opportunities for disparities for employees seeking advancement and external candidates seeking to be hired.

The organization has undertaken a comprehensive 3-year initiative aimed at updating County policies. This project focuses on crafting employee-centric procedures with a strong emphasis on equity and the elimination of ambiguity in our processes.

### City of Asheville

The City of Asheville's internal workforce comprises 1185 employees across 19 Departments, of which 7% are Black or African American, 3% are Hispanic/Latin, and 84% are White. Approximately 1% (14) Black/African American employees are in management roles. Nonwhite employees make up approximately 2.4% of all managers. The overall employee demographic is consistent with the City's racial makeup. The City receives nearly 6549 applications annually, hires about 372 employees, and has 1290 total positions.

The City does not require training for hiring managers and panel interview members. There are currently no standard guidelines or policies for panel interviews, leading department leaders to establish subjective requirements and processes. Additionally, the Recruitment and Selection Policy for internal postings is vague, leaving room for harm.

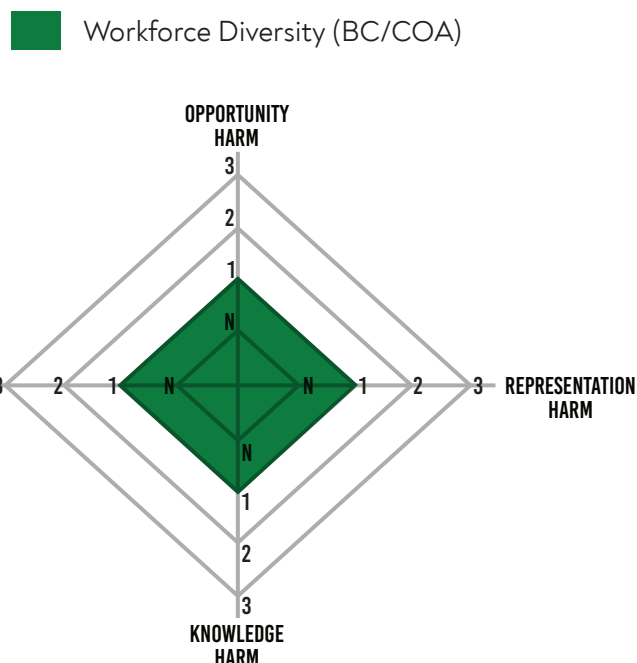
As a result of this trifecta (no panel review guidelines, subjective practices, vague policy for internal job postings), approximately 17 Black female employees have lodged complaints about the City's employee development and advancement process, describing a pattern of not being internally promoted. CDG's discussions with the COA Legal and Human Resources departments concluded that Black female employees have been systematically prejudiced in the City's hiring and salary allocation due to a lack of or unclear policies that guide the recruitment and hiring process. The subjectivity and inconsistency in practice have created a covert and evasive bias toward Black female employees.

The City has standard policies for equal employment opportunity, ethics, workplace harassment, personnel, and flexible work arrangements. The City indicated that it also conducts exit surveys.

## Workforce Diversity

Diversity metrics help HR departments track the workforce's representation of different demographic groups. This data is essential for promoting a more inclusive workplace where employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected. Diversity metrics provide insights into whether equal opportunities are available to all employees, irrespective of their background. HR can use this information to address disparities and ensure a level playing field for career advancement.

The County and City do not collect relevant workforce metrics that track equity and inclusion throughout their workforce. For example, tracking internal vs external hiring rates provides HR with





valuable insights and contributes to strategic decision-making regarding succession planning, employee development, diversity and inclusion, and skill gaps. The recommendation section will outline several metrics to address the infrequent but potential harm from insufficient workforce diversity metrics.

Assessment of the workforce diversity metrics revealed the low number of nonwhite managers in the County and City, present an opportunity for professional development and targeted training for succession and future leadership roles filled by Black employees. The harm score reflects the infrequent effects of harm evidenced during the assessment.

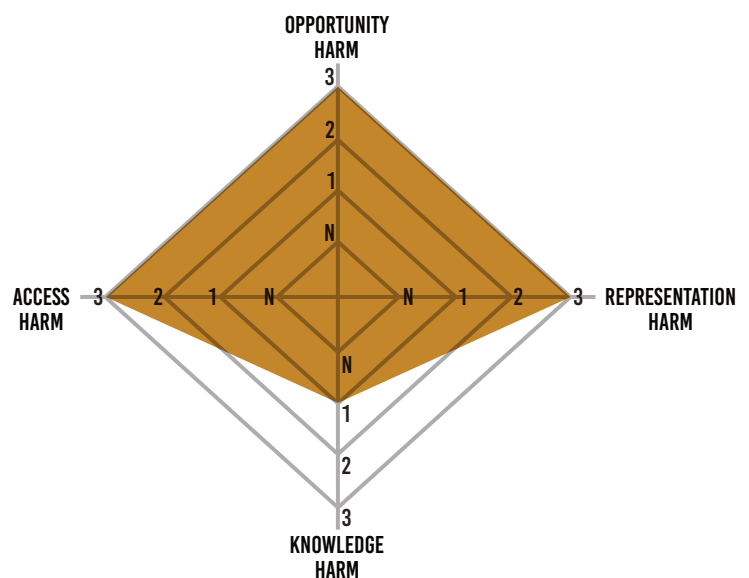
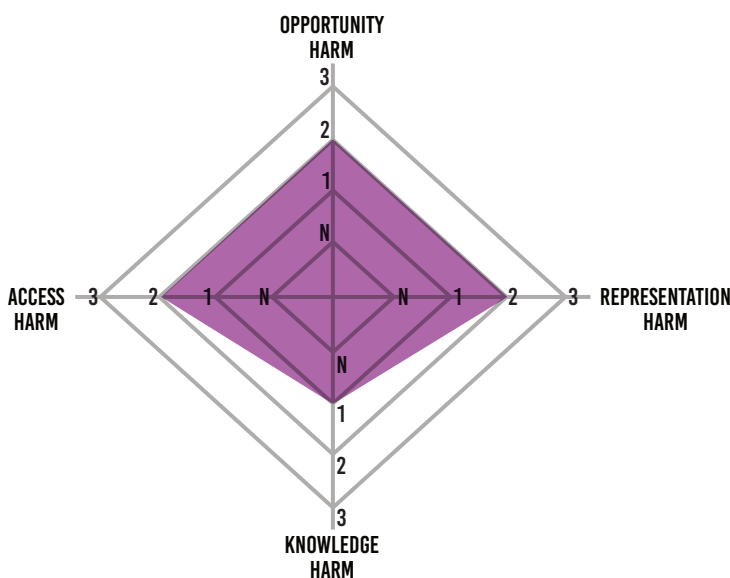
## Recruitment and Onboarding

Well-designed recruitment and onboarding help HR departments identify candidates with the skills, qualifications, and attributes necessary to succeed in a particular role. A structured interview and selection process promotes fairness and equity in hiring. It helps minimize biases, ensuring all candidates are evaluated based on their merits and qualifications.

The County and City’s current interview and selection process is inconsistent across departments, leaving room for interpretative practices that may and have created implicit, explicit, covert, and overt outcomes against White and nonwhite candidates. Assessment of the County’s interview process did not reveal any cases of racial inequity. However, the harm assessment score reflects the potential undue burden of inequities that can undermine the organizational culture based on current interview panel practices. In the case of the City, a harm assessment score reflects the significant effects consistent with disproportionality and exclusion impacting the advancement of Black female employees. Furthermore, the evidence of current harm may be unreported or underreported amongst other groups.

Recruitment and Onboarding (BC)

Recruitment and Onboarding (COA)



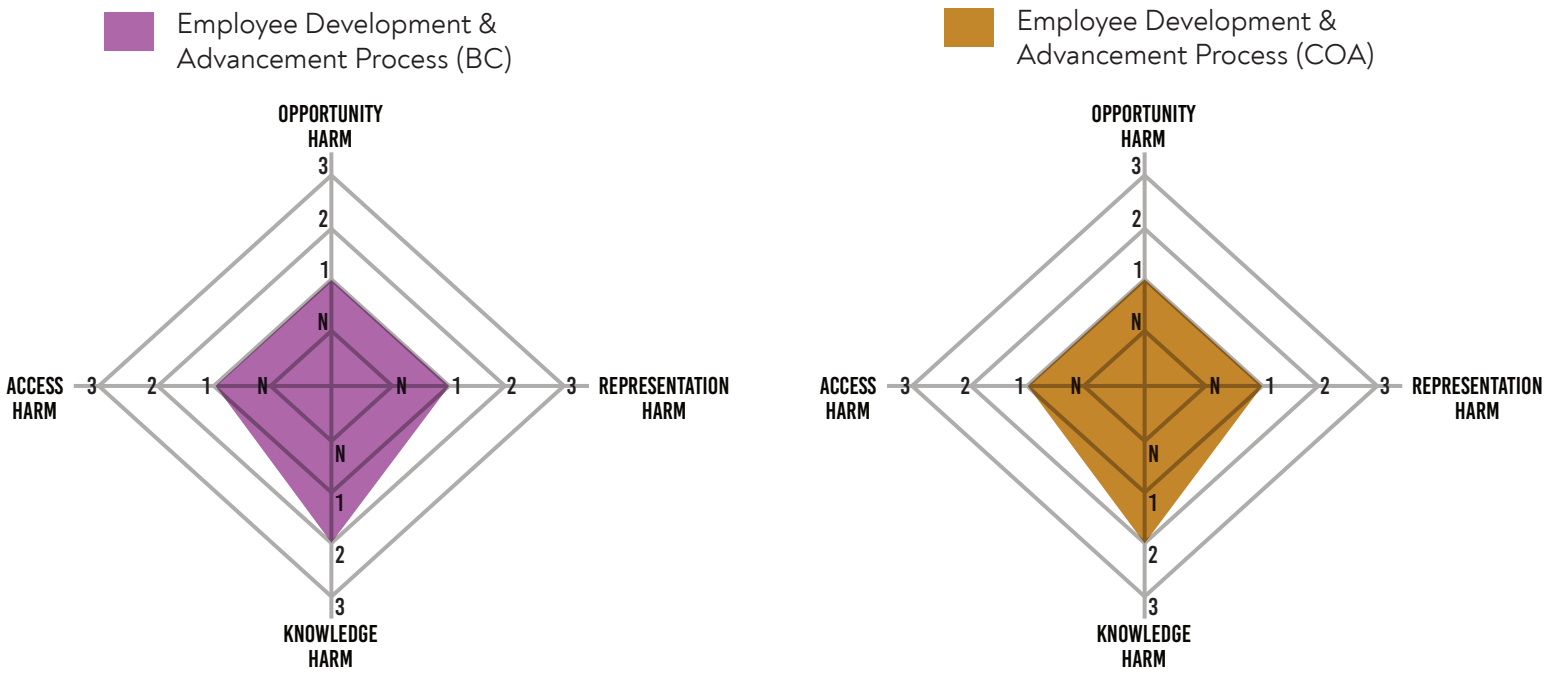
## Employee Development & Advancement Process

Providing opportunities for employee development and advancement helps retain top talent. Employees are likelier to stay with an organization that invests in their growth and career progression. Employees with access to development opportunities and a clear path to advancement are generally more satisfied with their jobs. This satisfaction contributes to higher levels of motivation and engagement.

Buncombe County developed Buncombe County University (BCU) in 2023 to offer 32 professional development courses for new employees, career employees, and upper management. Topics include emotional intelligence, change management, behavioral interviewing, values and business ethics, and racial equity training. As part of BCU, three focused growth and development programs were developed to complement the employee's career journey: BC Foundations, BC Lead, and BC Skill-Up. BC Foundations is a required learning program for all new employees. BC Lead is a leadership development program with pathways to help leaders at all levels develop, grow, expand, and share their leadership skills and philosophy. BC Skill-Up is a professional skill-building program with job-specific learning pathways.

The City of Asheville employees have engaged in professional development training on diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, no internal professional development courses are offered for ongoing leadership development.

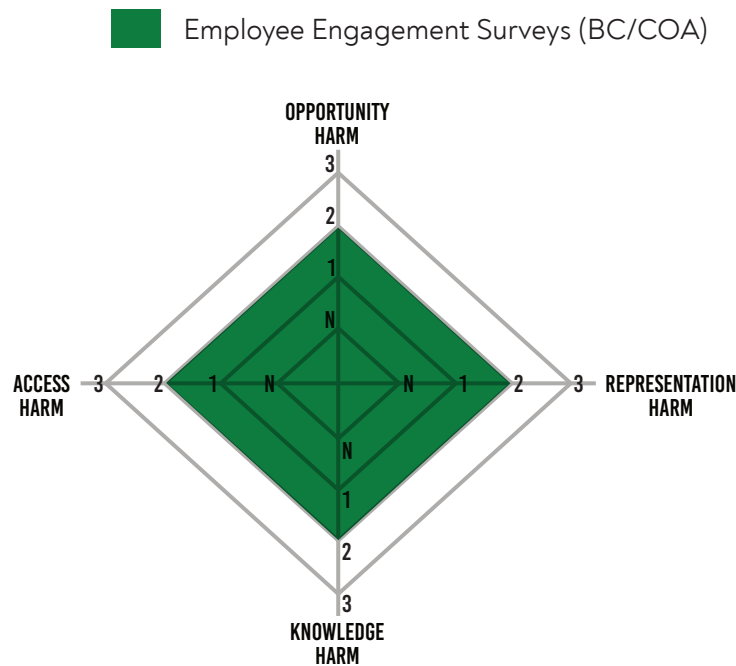
Overall, there is no mechanism indicating how the professional development courses will directly impact advancement opportunities for staff. Combined with the interview panel process, a key step in pursuing advancement, it is unclear how professional development will directly impact those opportunities. The potential harm rests in the need for clearer succession planning and pathway to advancement for both County and City employees.



## Employee Satisfaction/Engagement Surveys/Exit Surveys

Engagement surveys allow HR to collect valuable feedback directly from employees. This feedback provides insights into their perceptions, satisfaction levels, and overall organizational experience. Through survey responses, HR can identify areas where the organization excels and areas that need improvement. This data guides targeted initiatives to enhance the work environment.

The County nor City has administered an employee-wide engagement survey for over five years. Opportunities for latent and covert inequities within the organizational culture may occur when HR has not received consistent employee feedback.



## Internal Workforce Recommendations

### Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

#### 1. Interview Panels

- Transitioning from an interview panel process to a search and screen committee approach is common, particularly in college and university hiring practices. This method introduces a noticeable separation between the hiring manager and the candidates. Under this approach, the hiring manager forms the committee and appoints a chair. Typically consisting of three to five members, depending on the position, the committee collectively screens applicants, selects interviewees, and schedules interviews. The hiring manager and committee collaborate to determine the appropriate number of interviews for each position. CDG recommends this start at positions with a supervisory role.
- Implementing policies and procedures that clearly delineate this revised hiring manager and interview panel process can benefit the County and City. The selection of members for search and screen committees should prioritize diversity, encompassing factors beyond race and gender. Considerations should include tenure, areas of expertise, abilities, and representation across different generations and age groups.

#### 2. Adopt A Rationale for No Diverse Finalist Policy

- Typically, the search and screening procedure culminates in the committee recommending three finalists to the hiring manager for the position. If there are no diverse candidates among the finalists, including women or individuals from historically marginalized groups like Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), the committee chair is required to provide a justification to Human Resources.

#### 3. Recruitment Stream Audit

- Ensuring equity in the job recruitment process is essential for guiding fair practices by the hiring manager and the search and screen committee. CDG suggests that the County and City audit their recruitment process to assess the demographic composition of applicant pools, the volume of rejected applicants, and the effectiveness of recruitment channels. The objective is to identify any patterns or trends that could impede qualified candidates from progressing through the hiring process equitably.

#### 4. Data Reporting of Key HR Metrics

- CDG advises that HR establish a culture of data reporting focusing on key metrics to monitor personnel trends. These metrics should encompass comparisons between external hires and internal promotions and the class and compensation structure categorized by race. Additionally, data should capture accommodations provided to staff and grievances across all employee levels, including upper management and executive leaders. GARTNER's DEI Metrics Inventory offers a comprehensive list of relevant workforce and HR metrics that can guide this initiative.

5. **Conduct an employee engagement survey**
6. **Blind Resumé**
  - Identify the benefits of a blind resumé process and consider adopting it within your recruitment process.
7. **Professional Development**
  - Develop a concrete racial equity certification program for the internal workforce comprised of internal and external development opportunities. Ensure the professional development engagements directly benefit advancement with an incentive plan for course completion. This should include mandatory and non-mandatory development.

### Buncombe County Recommendations

8. **Training Incentive Plan**
  - Develop an incentive plan for course completion for BC Lead and BC Skill-Up.

### City of Asheville Recommendations

9. **DEI Training for Managers**
  - Establish mandatory DEI training for managers.
10. **Women's Leadership Program**
  - Develop a women's leadership program with an incentivized plan and clear path for advancement.
11. **360 Evaluations**
  - Engage in 360 evaluations that is scaled throughout the organization, beginning senior leaders.
12. **Conduct compensation review**
13. **Conduct comprehensive HR policy and procedure review**



# EQUITY, INCLUSION, & HUMAN RIGHTS



## EQUITY, INCLUSION, & HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICES

Buncombe County’s Equity and Human Rights Office and the City of Asheville’s Equity and Inclusion Office are deliberate steps toward advancing equity throughout the County and City. With racial and social equity as top priorities, they undergird the local government’s commitment to fostering a fair, diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace and community. Their role is pivotal in mitigating bias, providing training and development opportunities, promoting cultural competence and leadership development, and supporting data-driven decision-making. Equity, inclusion, and human rights offices signal the government’s commitment to social responsibility, community relations, and continuous improvement.

In July 2020, the City of Asheville Council passed a resolution supporting community reparations for Black Asheville. In August 2020, Buncombe County declared racism a public health and safety crisis and adopted a resolution to support community reparations. Both resolutions acknowledge the atrocities of slavery and the systemic impact it has had on African Americans. The County and City’s equity, inclusion, and human rights offices support the resolution goals through internal workforce and community initiatives.

### Harm Assessment Scale

Harm Assessment Scale			
	1	2	3
IFA	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent or infrequent effects were consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization.	Frequent effects consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization.  Compounding effects of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization caused by the lack of data.	Considerable and notable effects are consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization with outcomes resulting in a tremendously diminished quality of opportunities, knowledge, representation, or access.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

## Findings and Key Harm Indicators

The following findings, metrics, harm assessment ratings, and recommendations aim to support and enhance the inclusive building practices of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville's equity, inclusion, and human rights offices.

## Diversity & Inclusion Policies & Procedures

Diversity and inclusion policies and practices make the organization more attractive to a diverse talent pool. Moreover, they contribute to the retention of diverse employees by fostering an inclusive environment where individuals feel valued and respected. Inclusive workplaces where employees feel a sense of belonging are more likely to have higher levels of engagement. Diversity and inclusion initiatives create an environment where all employees are motivated to contribute their best.

### Buncombe County

The Buncombe County Government Equity & Human Rights Office is supported by the county's nondiscrimination ordinance, which was approved in April 2021. The Equity and Human Rights Office manages the reporting, investigation, and scoring evaluation of discrimination claims to determine if has occurred. To date, 40 complaints have been lodged using the non-discriminatory filing process. Complaints include allegations of discrimination in public transportation, disparate landlord practices, and unfair hiring practices based on race, disability, or sexual orientation. No substantial discrimination claims were identified. Complainants did not follow through on more than 50% of their cases. Other disposition of the cases included lack of jurisdiction, withdrawal of the case, or no discrimination found. The County has not had a discrimination lawsuit brought against it based on racial discrimination or racial inequities within the past three years.

Buncombe County has effective diversity and inclusion policies and procedures in place that have led to the creation of affinity groups and employee resource groups.

The County conducts policy reviews through several committee processes, including the Policy Management Committee and the Policy Steering Committee. The policy review process began in 2019 and is guided by the policy review framework. The Equity and Human Rights Department reviewed 24 policies throughout 2023 to ensure asset-based and inclusive language and impact on the workforce and community. Policies are reviewed every one to three years.

### City of Asheville

The City of Asheville Equity and Inclusion Office is supported by the nondiscrimination ordinance, which was approved in April 2021. Each department within the City of Asheville government has an equity and inclusion liaison responsible for communicating information and upholding the standards of equity. The COA Office publishes an equity dashboard that provides information on workforce equity data, business inclusion, racial healing, and professional development training.

To further its equity mission, in March 2022 the City established a policy equity analysis team of interdepartmental members to analyze existing and proposed City internal policies, ordinances, and practices. Also, the City Council Equity & Engagement Committee was developed in 2022 to provide community members an opportunity to review policy updates and make policy recommendations that ensure fairness and equity in the provision of City resources.

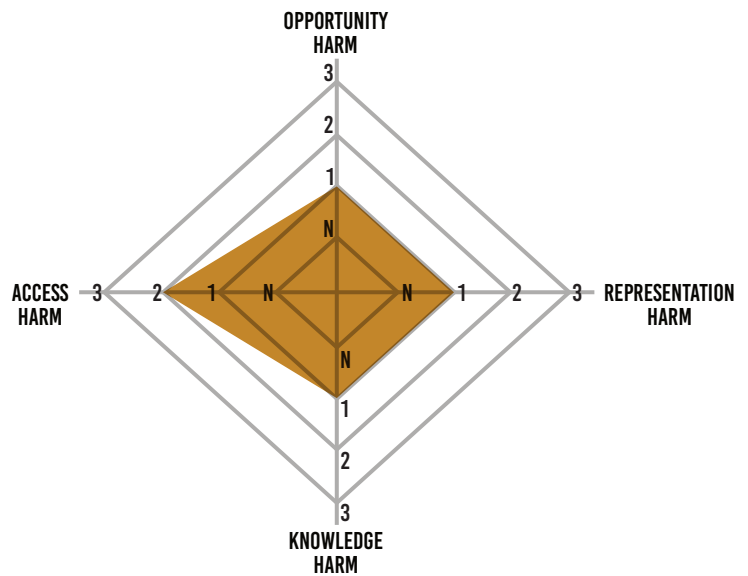
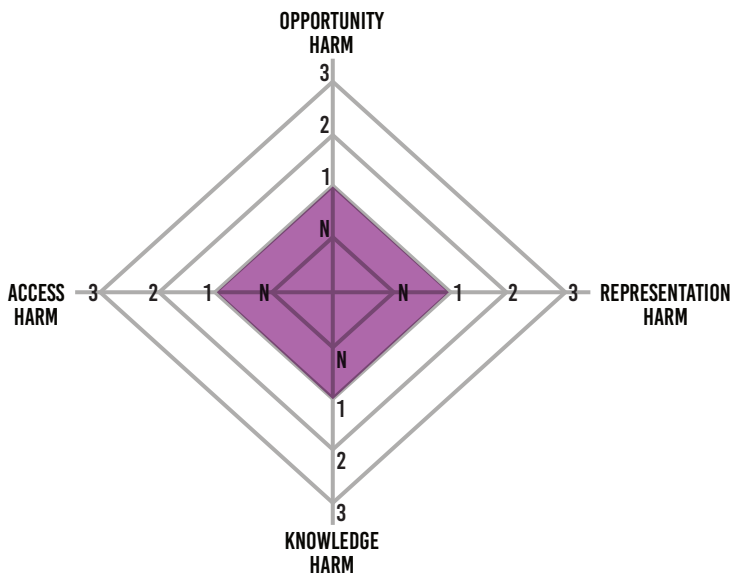


## Key Harm Indicators

- There is a lack of robust policy review with an equity lens with the City of Asheville Equity and Inclusion Office, which has only reviewed three City ordinances as part of its policy equity review team.
- City of Asheville has no policy supporting affinity groups.

■ Diversity & Inclusion Policies & Procedures (BC)

■ Diversity & Inclusion Policies & Procedures (COA)



## Equity and Inclusion Initiatives & Impact

Initiatives that address equity and inclusion help identify and mitigate unconscious biases and discriminatory practices. This promotes fair decision-making processes in hiring, promotions, and other aspects of personnel management. Equity and Inclusion Initiatives ensure that organizations comply with anti-discrimination laws and regulations. This reduces the risk of legal issues related to discriminatory practices.

### Buncombe County

The Buncombe County Equity & Human Rights Office developed a 2021-2025 Racial Equity Action Plan with strategies and metrics to address communication and engagement, quality of life, equity learning and support, equity and accountability, and equity-informed decision-making. As part of its strategic plan, an internal workforce Equity & Inclusion Workgroup was developed with representation from 30 County departments. The workgroup comprises a steering committee and seven subcommittees focused on building a sustainable equity, diversity, and inclusion culture.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the County organized fireside chats, modular lessons, and a pre-recorded curriculum on how team members can spark conversations around race. An equity impact tool has been incorporated across all departments to guide budgeting, staffing, and strategic planning.

The County also has an established Equity & Inclusion Workgroup comprised of 31 members/department representatives. The workgroup consists of a steering committee and sub-committees focused on the arts, accessibility and Language, community data analysis, professional development training, and policy development.

In September 2022, an affinity group policy was approved to support employee-led groups formed around interests, issues, and backgrounds to promote equity and human rights, foster employee engagement, strengthen workplace effectiveness, improve leadership abilities, enhance personal and professional growth, and uphold the mission, vision, and values of Buncombe County government. The Equity & Human Rights Office supports the Professionals of Color and BE You (LGBTQIA) affinity groups.

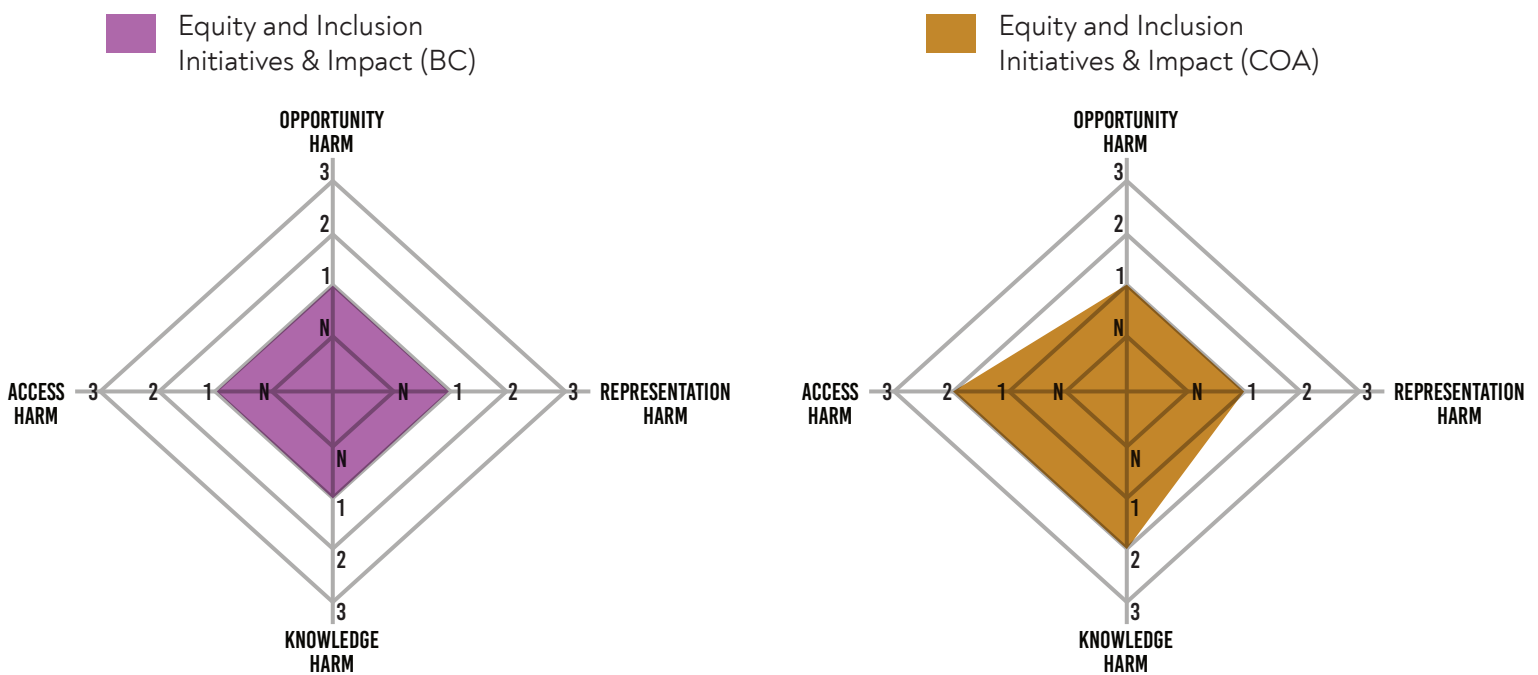
According to the County's Racial Equity Action Plan tracking system, the Equity & Human Rights Office experienced an 87% and 81% completion rate of its goals in FY2022 and FY2023. However, data updates from department liaisons were inconsistent, impacting the score's accuracy.

### City of Asheville

The City of Asheville Equity & Inclusion Office began updating its Racial Equity Plan in 2023. It was last updated in 2019. The updates will incorporate a department-based racial equity plan from each City department that folds into a larger City-wide government plan.

Additionally, the City supports the Human Relations Commission of Asheville, which was established in 2023 to promote and improve human relations and prioritize racial equity with the City government, communities, and outside agencies. They aim to encourage and ensure diversity, fairness, equity, and inclusion. Bi-monthly meetings are held to fulfill the board's mission and vision.

Since the Community Reparations Commission's inception, the equity, inclusion, and human rights offices have served as liaisons for the County and City governments.



## Key Harm Indicators

- There is great potential for harm by not supporting psychologically safe spaces for Black and African American employees through the lack of affinity groups with the City of Asheville.
- The City of Asheville lacks a completed and comprehensive racial equity plan.

## Professional Development

Racial equity training helps employees understand diversity-related concepts, including cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This increased awareness promotes empathy and fosters a more inclusive workplace culture. This is especially necessary for department heads, supervisors, and executive leaders.

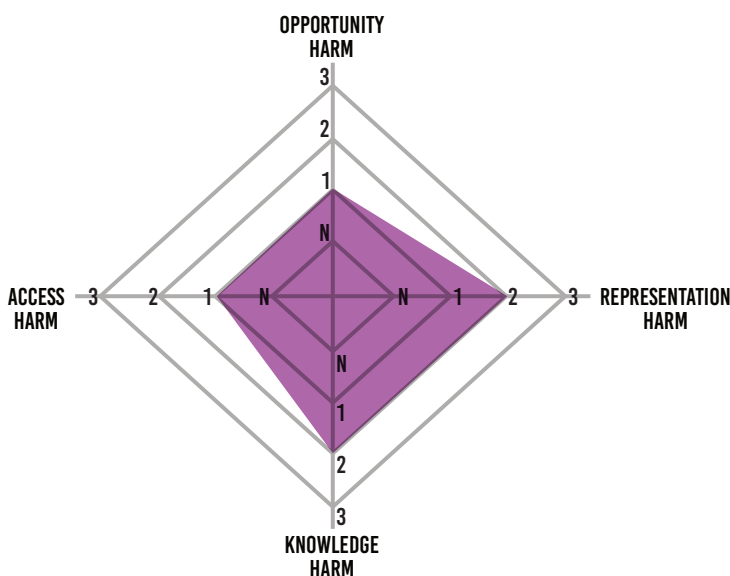
The Buncombe County Equity & Human Rights Office produces and manages a mandatory 8-hour racial equity training for department heads and supervisors. A 2-hour course on LGBTQIA+ inclusion is also offered. No mandatory racial equity training exists for County staff.

The City of Asheville Equity & Inclusion Office collaborates with Human Resources to offer racial equity training courses to the internal workforce. Department heads completed mandatory racial equity training through the Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE). However, racial equity courses are not mandatory for all staff to complete. According to the City's data analytics, only 1.6% of its 1185 employees have received racial equity training, mostly attended during 2020 and early 2021. Supervisors make up 60% of those trained.

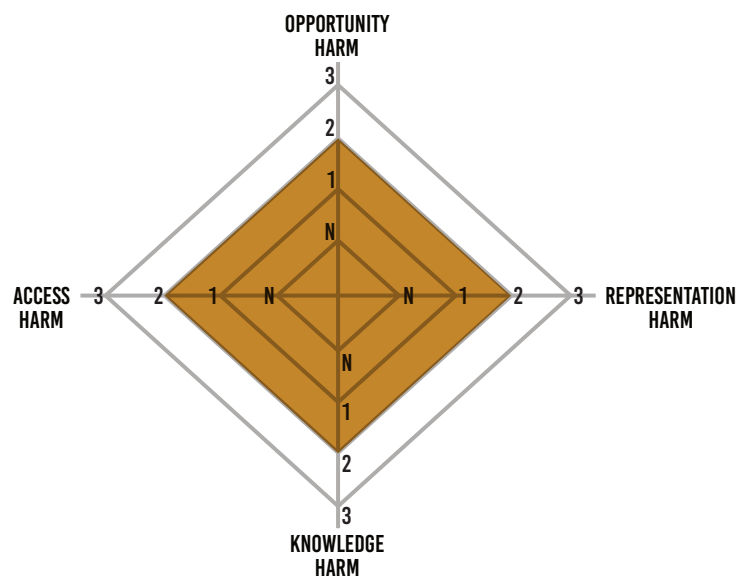
## Key Harm Indicators

Immense potential for harm exists due to the high number of staff not trained in racial equity within the County and City governments.

Professional Development (BC)



Professional Development (COA)



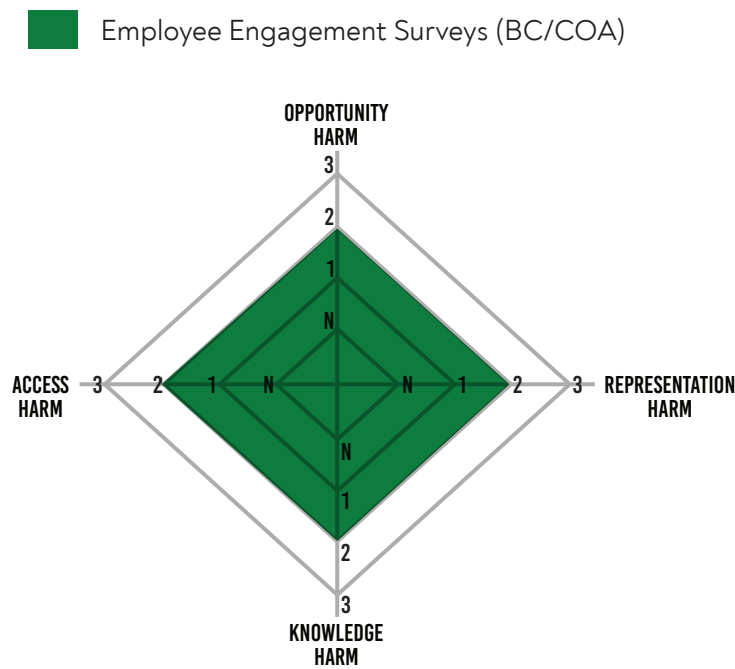
## Employee Equity Engagement Survey

Engagement surveys allow equity officers to collect valuable feedback directly from employees. This feedback provides insights into their perceptions, satisfaction levels, and overall organizational experience. Through survey responses, equity officers and human resource departments can identify areas where the organization excels and areas that need improvement. This data guides targeted initiatives to enhance the work environment.

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville governments have not assessed the organizational culture through a comprehensive survey of their internal workforce for more than five years.

### Key Harm Indicators

- High potential for harm exists due to latent or covert harm that goes unreported, unnoticed, or unaddressed, specifically regarding racial equity. The organizational culture may be greatly impacted when leaders do not receive consistent employee feedback through focus groups, comprehensive surveys, and pulse surveys.



## Equity, Inclusion, & Human Rights Recommendations

### **Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville**

1. Develop a robust suite of equity courses through an LMS system.
2. Collaborate with Human Resources or external firm to conduct a racial equity engagement survey and analysis.
3. Collaborate with human resources to conduct an in-depth review of employee demographics and key employee metrics.
4. Develop a plan for internal workforce-wide training.
5. Conduct a full organizational policy equity review.

### **City of Asheville Recommendations**

6. Finalize the development of the comprehensive Racial Equity Action Plan.
7. Develop a pathway for equity and inclusion training for all city leaders.
8. Develop policy and support for a DEI employee resource group and affinity groups.
9. Utilize a DEI project management and tracking software such as ClearPoint Strategy to track progress. ClearPoint Strategy is currently used by the Buncombe County Equity and Human Rights Office.

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## Criminal Justice Recommendations

### Mutual County & City Recommendations

#### Data Collection

1. Implement a comprehensive data collection system that captures details of all law enforcement interactions with the public, including demographic information, to better understand and address racial disparities.
2. Utilize data analytics to regularly assess and identify patterns of racial bias in traffic stops, searches, arrests, and use of force incidents.
3. Publicly report the findings to promote transparency and accountability.

#### Training

4. Implement Skills Assessments in the Form of Measurable Scenario-Based Recorded Training and Pre-and-Post Testing. A 2023 Washington State University Study cites several examples that illustrate the positive impact of scenario-based measurable training when addressing the use of implicit bias during the act of policing.

#### Recruitment

5. Develop a school-to-squad bridge program with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to increase the overall agency's cultural competence in understanding the historical context, globalized incident-related nuances, and sensitivity status of their Black/African American community. In 2021, the Cayce Police Department, located in Cayce, South Carolina, established a school-to-squad bridge program with an HBCU institution known as Benedict College. A brief synopsis of the bridge development can be viewed [here](#).
6. Take advantage of EPIC Recruiting services: candidate engagement, media relations, community outreach, and social media management. This will improve communication, reduce misunderstandings, and increase empathy during interactions between law enforcement and community members.

### Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

#### Recruitment

7. Revise recruitment strategies to proactively include a more diverse applicant pool, specifically targeting the recruitment of Black detention officers.
8. Engage in community outreach programs in predominantly Black neighborhoods to build relationships and interest in law enforcement careers.
9. Implement a mentorship program for potential recruits from underrepresented communities to guide them through the application and training.

#### Community Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms

10. Implement community feedback mechanisms such as surveys, town hall meetings, and forums, particularly in minority communities to improve your data collection process and demonstrate a better connection to the use of the data.

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## Asheville Police Department

### Training

11. Utilize volunteer citizens to participate in scenario-based training to encourage peer and citizen review and ensure transparent evaluation of simulation versus classroom-based implicit bias training. Additional information can be found at the United States DOJ/Office of Justice Programs.

### Policy

12. Implement a comprehensive School Resource Officer disability policy that promotes inclusivity and Meets all Federal Guidelines

### Recruitment

13. Increase the number of criminal investigators and uniformed patrol division officers to reflect the City's African American population percentage. Here is a list of County and Municipal law enforcement agencies that have successfully accomplished the suggested recommendation of matching their employee demographics to the diversity of the community it serves:
  - Richmond County Sheriff's Department
  - Albany Police Department
  - Austin Police Department and the University of Texas Police Department

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## Economic Development Recommendations

### Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

- 1. Support the establishment of a Buncombe County Black Chamber of Commerce.** The National Black Chamber of Commerce is "the largest Black business association in the world and is dedicated to economically empowering and sustaining African American communities through entrepreneurship and capitalistic activity in the United States". This organization can help reduce the readiness gap between the County needs and vendor readiness. A Black Chamber of Commerce would directly contribute to economic empowerment of Black entrepreneurs by providing them with business resources, training, and networking opportunities. It provides increased visibility and advocacy for black-owned businesses. The Black Chamber of Commerce can advocate for policies and initiatives as a collective body that supports the interests of Black-owned businesses, ensuring their needs and concerns are represented at the local government level. Connecting the local Black Chamber with the National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC) amplifies the voices of Black business owners and provides a platform of national visibility of local businesses. The NBCC offers additional support to Black entrepreneurs on a larger scale and offers resources and best practices that can be utilized at the local level.
- 2. Increase Support for Start-Up Firms.** Create additional opportunities for firms in the Start-Up phase. Resources appear to be primarily focused on established businesses.
- 3. Increase Third-Party Partnership Accountability.** The County and City should pay heightened attention to the opportunity, representation, access, and community knowledge of programs earmarked as initiatives that positively reflect the County and City's commitment to economic development supported by a third-party company or organization. For example, the City highlights programs such as NEXT AVL, IHP, Mountain BizWorks, and the Asheville Chamber of Commerce. Third-party organizations should be required to share representative data related to objectives and outcomes.
- 4. Enhance reporting through standardization.** Develop a comprehensive data dictionary that defines all data elements, metrics, and naming conventions to be used across reports. This should include a clear definition of terms, acceptable values (e.g., for gender, use a standardized set of terms like "Female", "Male", "Non-Binary", etc.), and formatting guidelines (e.g. date formats should follow a standard convention). Ensure all reports Include a standard set of core data elements to avoid gaps in data collection. For example, the Next AVL applicant data included one report that identified gender as "Woman/Man" and another year's report identified gender as "Female/Male."

### Procurement

- 5. Develop an Industry & Utilization (IU) Dashboard that captures City and County procurement dollars spent over a selected period.**
  - The IU Dashboard is a user-friendly reference for entrepreneurs seeking to know where the local city and county government purchase goods and services. Indicate dollars spent on goods and services using standardized commodity codes.
  - Develop a vendor management process and create reporting that tracks and monitors progress towards the Minority Business Plan and Asheville Business Inclusion participation goals and outreach efforts. Ensure reporting includes visibility of subcontracting metrics that are established for prime contractors.

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6. **Ensure that vendor SMWBE classifications are consistent with the state guidelines.**
7. **Conduct a Request for Vendors (RFV) proposal process to develop an active vendor registry.**
  - Develop and maintain an active vendor registry through the creation of a vendor list based on a specific scope of work through an RFP process for each category of procurement.
  - Host consistent networking events to connect vendors with government departmental staff; not just procurement individuals because staff are able to self-source for lower dollar amounts.
8. **Establish metrics to track the business readiness gap for procurement opportunities.**
  - Monitor and address the business readiness gap for minority businesses.
  - Allocate increased grant funding to address readiness issues (additional workshops on how to submit proposals for government opportunities; workshops on how to obtain various certifications and the purpose of acquiring those certifications).
9. **Increase Reporting on Minority Representation.**
  - Increase reporting to assess minority representation per policy-stated metrics.
  - Evaluate the sourcing platform and process used for purchase order suppliers to determine how those vendors are being identified. Evaluate effectiveness in identifying vendors.
10. **Implement a standardized and electronic vendor selection process.** Implement a standardized and electronic vendor selection process characterized by uniform procedures, consistent forms, and clear steps to minimize deviations. This approach aims to reduce bias, align with the county's Minority Business Plan and the city's Asheville Business Inclusion (ABI) policies, and ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of vendors in government procurement processes.
11. **Enhance Grant Evaluation Transparency.** It is recommended that the City of Asheville and Buncombe County establish explicit and transparent criteria for evaluating grants. Furthermore, the city should adopt a practice of publicly disclosing detailed scoring and evaluation sheets, allowing stakeholders and the community to understand the assessment process thoroughly.

## Access to Capital

12. **Provide Disaggregated Demographic and Outcome Data.** Provide detailed demographic and outcome data concerning applicants and awardees to offer a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact. Offer transparency on how loan interest from this funding is utilized, ensuring accountability and clarity in financial management.
13. **Conduct Independent Audit of MCCF Processes.** Conduct an independent audit of MCCF processes, operations, controls, and reporting to ensure documented controls are implemented effectively, data accuracy is validated, and transparency is maintained. Use audit recommendations to refine and enhance MCCF operations, ensuring the fund adapts to changing economic landscapes and remains a vital community resource.

## Non-Profit and Grant Support

14. **Promote equal funding distribution across strategic initiatives:** Consider trying to equally provide funding to all of the strategic initiatives to reduce the likelihood of some funding categories routinely receiving more funding than other strategic priorities.
15. **Enhance reporting on the allocation of funds.** Provide more robust reporting around the

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allocation of funds to each of the funding priorities (education, economic development, housing, justice, etc.) This visibility will help ensure that there is a clear line of sight into how grant funding is allocated.

16. **Require recipients to provide outcome and results data.** Require funding recipients to provide outcome and results data to ensure that funding is impacting target populations. Collect, analyze, and report on these metrics on a consistent basis.
17. **Separate grant guidelines and grant applications into separate downloadable files.** The grant guidelines on the grant information pages have questions that are listed in the document but it may be confusing to differentiate whether or not the grant questions are the application. These two things would be better as separate documents to provide grant applicants clarity in the process.
18. **Allocate a percentage of Grant Funding to For-Profit Organizations.** By extending grant opportunities to for-profit entities, the City and County can foster economic growth, innovation, and job creation within the community. This strategic allocation aims to provide vital resources to businesses, empowering them to pursue sustainable development initiatives and contribute to the overall prosperity of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville.

## Buncombe County Recommendations

19. **Increase African American participation in Mentorship Programs.** Increase African American student participation in professional mentorship programs like Next AVL and Inclusive Hiring Partners. We encourage the Asheville Chamber of Commerce to connect with Black student-led organizations to increase representation of Black students.

## Website Enhancement

20. **Update information on grant information pages to reflect the grant timeframe accurately.** For grant programs not offered annually, ensure website updates to inform visitors of the application timeframe and the next grant awarding period. This will ensure visitors are aware that the site information is current and help set expectations for the next grant cycle.
21. **Update Information on the website about upcoming events.** Regularly update the website with information on upcoming events to enable participants to plan effectively and showcase past events for reference and transparency.

## Contracting and Procurement

22. **Conduct a Disparity Study for Inclusive Procurement Practices in Buncombe County.** Governmental entities across the country authorize disparity studies in response to the City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co., 488 U.S. 469 (1989) and subsequent cases to determine whether there is a compelling interest for the creation or continuation of remedial procurement programs, based upon race, gender, and ethnicity.

## Non-Profit and Grant Support

23. **Update Grant Timeline and Process Regularly.** Grant timeline and process should be updated regularly for each fiscal year offered. The website currently has the timeline listed in the Isaac Coleman Grant Guidelines as the grant opening on December 19, 2022.

24. **Implement “Closed Loop” Process for Grant Programs.** All grant programs should require a “Closed Loop” process for recipient organizations to provide metrics and tracking data on use of funding and outcomes related to the funds provided. This data will help determine if the community’s needs are being met and if funding allocated toward key economic development initiatives is receiving the expected results.

## Workforce Development

25. **Actively Promote the NextAVL program to Students of Color.**
- While NextAVL is a voluntary program, a concerted effort should be taken to promote the program to students of color on the college and university campuses (i.e., partnering with Black Student Associations, sorority and fraternities, and civic organizations) to increase visibility of the program on university campuses. This in turn helps the unemployment rate for students who remain in the area seeking work opportunities.
  - Provide additional information about the Next AVL program on the website, such as the program duration, necessary commitments for program completion, and the outcomes that participants can expect. This information does not appear to be available on the website.
26. **Enhance IHP reporting**
- Develop tracking to follow progress of candidate referrals through IHP program. Provide increased education and training regarding the benefits of the IHP program. Residents do not appear to be drawing the correlation between participation in this program and tangible outcomes that resonate with their situation.
  - Increase awareness of benefits and outcomes participants should expect from participating in the IHP program.
  - Track demographics regarding candidates and participants of the program to provide meaningful metrics on what population of residents are using and benefiting from the program.
  - Collect additional data from referral candidates on why they are not interested in the program. This data will help provide insight into whether additional education is necessary regarding the program if residents do not experience the expected value from the program.
27. **Collect Data on Economic Development Incentive Program Skills Requirement**
- Economic Development Incentive Program - collect data regarding skill set needed for the expected new jobs as a result of the economic incentive and adequately prepare the workforce through partnership with area organizations offering workforce development initiatives.
  - Ensure the collection of critical data from companies receiving incentives regarding workforce job readiness, demographics of applicants, and employees hired, along with other associated metrics to show success and adherence to incentive agreements.
28. **Demographic Data Collection within Economic Development Programs.** Implement a system for collecting demographic data within economic development programs, such as the Economic Development Incentive Program, to address disparities in employment outcomes effectively. This strategic integration of data collection will provide valuable insights into the impact of these programs on different demographic groups and facilitate targeted efforts to promote inclusivity and equity.

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## City of Asheville Recommendations

### Workforce Development

29. **Enhance Data Tracking.** Implement a comprehensive data tracking system to capture key demographic data elements for CAYLA program participants, including race and ethnicity. This will enable accurate assessment of the program's impact on the development of the workforce, particularly within the African American community.
30. **Establish Performance Metrics.** Develop clear performance metrics and tracking mechanisms to assess the CAYLA program participants' performance against program standards during their internships. This will ensure accountability and help measure the effectiveness of the program in providing valuable hands-on experience.
31. **Expand Workforce Development Programs.** Create workforce development programs specifically tailored for adults aged 18 and older from the African American community. These programs should focus on preparing, enhancing, and developing skills necessary for career advancement and sustainability within the Asheville workforce.

### Government Contracting and Procurement

32. **Align SMWBE classification with the state guidelines.**
  - The ABI vendor outreach list classification of business enterprises does not align with state certification classification of BBE's and WBE's which could hinder accurate outreach practices between prime contractors and subcontractors. It was explained that the Asheville Business Inclusion office allows their vendors to register as a BBE and a WBE which does not distinctly separate White Women-Owned Business Enterprises from minority or Black Business Enterprises. Having both classifications does not provide Black Business Enterprises, who are also Women Business Enterprises, an advantage for being both MBE and a WBE so the combined classification is not necessary. Align SMWBE classification within the ABI list with the state and minimize discrepancies in outreach.
33. **Implement a comprehensive staff training program aimed at fostering a culture of inclusion in the administration of City contracts and expenditures.**
  - Per ABI Policy: The intent of staff training is to create a culture of inclusion with respect to administration of City contracts and expenditures. The Asheville Business Inclusion Manager, with the assistance of the appropriate City departments, shall conduct seminars, workshops, and roundtable discussions to acquaint small businesses with City contracting activities and opportunities. Topics shall include, but not be limited to, the process used by the City in preparing bids and quotes, and information on accessing small business assistance programs. Additional classes may be provided with the assistance of the appropriate department on a project-by-project basis through structured seminars, classes, and individual assistance provided to minority and women businesses requesting this type of support. (Should be for Buncombe also).

### Website Enhancements

34. **Enhancing Accessibility and Clarity of Business Resources on the Economic Development COA Website**
  - Revise the website layout by creating a dedicated tab for the Business Resource Library on the Economic Development COA Website. Rename the link to accurately represent the



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library's purpose as a comprehensive resource hub tailored specifically for small businesses within the COA community.

- 35. Enhance the website's user experience for small business owners by improving the consistency of resource names and incorporating more visuals and explanations for each link.**
- This will help to address the limited focus on startups by ensuring the available resources cater to the needs of both existing businesses and startups.
  - Create dedicated menu tabs for Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships and Grants programs on the Economic Development COA website.
  - Relocate the CAYLA program under the Workforce Development tab to better align with the nature of its offerings.
  - Add descriptive paragraphs to the dedicated workforce development resource page on the COA website to provide clear information about the purpose of the page and each linked program.

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## Education Recommendations

### Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

- 1. Use one assessment tool for early childhood growth and development.**
  - Use one assessment tool for early childhood growth and development across all agencies, grantees, schools. The tool should measure social emotional, mathematics, language and literacy, cognitive development, and physical development. This recommendation allows for standardization across Asheville and Buncombe early childhood programs and aligns with North Carolina Early Learning Inventory (NCELI).
  - This allows for progress monitoring, best practices, universal tracking of outcomes, and a unified approach to goal setting, conversation about student outcomes and accountability of the use of grant funds. Grant decisions should be based on data outcomes from a universal assessment tool.
- 2. Hire or contract education subject matter experts.**
  - Subject matter experts will help disaggregate data coming from grantees and review the methodology and determine the capacity of grantees to implement program features.
  - Subject matter experts can also determine which grant applicants are best suited to meet community and student needs by giving insight(s) on pedagogy, current research, best practices, and educational trends as per the grant.
  - Subject matter experts can also audit and progress monitor throughout the grant implementation cycle to ensure program goals are being met.
- 3. Survey grant applicants and/or collect data on the racial makeup of company/center staff members, board of directors, executive directors/company leadership, and populations served.** This data should be tracked longitudinally.
- 4. As a result of the academic achievement data for both Buncombe County and Asheville, Buncombe County should engage in a full-scale equity audit to assess academic achievement outcomes for students in grades k-12.** This would allow for a broader and deeper dive into practices that harm African American children.
- 5. Assess and ensure School Resource Officers undergo racial equity training** in response to the disproportionate rates of Black students disciplinary contact and police referrals.

### Buncombe County

- 6. Pursue legislative changes at the state level for more jurisdiction over school districts.** Such laws should demand that funding appropriated by Buncombe County are measurable and beneficial to populations in need. As it stands now, Buncombe County is the primary funding source, but there is no accountability from school boards for the monies received. Accountability measures will ensure alignment between Buncombe County, Buncombe County Schools, and Asheville City Schools.
- 7. Update grant reporting forms to link with EC Fund strategies more accurately.** Update grant reporting forms to indicate the Early Childhood Fund strategy guiding the grantee. Request grantees report their progress and outcomes with both quantitative and qualitative information that robustly connects to the County's EC Fund strategy.

### City of Asheville

- 8. Develop more clearly defined Strategic Planning Fund impact goals for Early Childhood and K-12, Vocational and Higher Education categories.** The broader the goal the more challenging to measure. The literacy and language goals are direct and both quantitative and qualitative data can provide input on program effectiveness.

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## Health & Wellness Recommendations

### Buncombe County Health

#### 1. Develop more robust data-driven practices

- Acquire more data from community partner programs to include racial demographics, clients served, location, service availability, staffing quotas, and more to develop key metrics for partnering in addition to other data-driven decisions.

#### 2. Transportation services for expectant Black mothers

- Buncombe County should establish a dedicated transportation service to address Black maternal health disparities. This service should provide safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options for expectant Black mothers, ensuring access to prenatal appointments, birthing classes, and hospitals.
- [The Dunklin County Health Department](#) provides a similar service.
- This service may be offered through local partnerships. Organizations such as Ride in Bliss offer maternity transportation service.

#### 3. Develop culturally competent healthcare teams

- For Buncombe County to effectively serve its African American and minority residents, we urge the County to prioritize ongoing and comprehensive cultural competence training for healthcare providers. Such training enhances the quality of care and contributes significantly to reducing healthcare disparities and advancing health equity. By embracing this approach, Buncombe County can set a standard for culturally sensitive and inclusive healthcare, ensuring that all community members receive the respectful and effective care they deserve.

#### 4. Social Media Engagement

- To improve the dissemination of health information and increase community engagement, it is recommended that Buncombe County create a separate social media page dedicated explicitly to its Public Health department. This separate space would allow for focused communication on health-related topics, ensuring that vital information is accessible to the community without overshadowing other county updates or unrelated content. Examples include:
  - <https://www.instagram.com/kcpubhealth>
  - <https://www.instagram.com/lakecohealth>

#### 5. Add public health updates to BCAlerts From CodeRED

- Include public health notifications in BCAlerts via CodeRED to ensure timely dissemination of crucial health-related information to the community.

#### 6. Partnership Funding Transparency

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- To improve transparency and accountability, we recommend implementing visible reporting or grant-tracking mechanisms detailing the county's contributions to partnerships addressing community health needs. This will enhance trust among stakeholders by providing clear insight into the county's financial, resource, and logistical support for each initiative, similar to the information posted for other County and City grant recipients.

## **7. Increase community health workers**

- Increasing the number of community health workers (CHWs) in Asheville, particularly focusing on areas of concern, is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable healthcare environment for Black residents. Research shows that having Black healthcare providers and staff increases health outcomes for Black people due to increased visibility, trust, and cultural competence. By leveraging the unique position of CHWs within the community, they can serve as trusted intermediaries who understand the cultural and social nuances of Black residents, thereby bridging the communication gap and promoting preventative care and help-seeking behaviors.

## **Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville**

## **8. Enhancing event outreach practices to the Black community through non-digital channels**

- To effectively reach the Black community and residents with limited digital access, it is recommended to utilize non-digital outlets for marketing and advertising events alongside current methods through digital outlets. This may include strategies such as distributing flyers in community centers, churches, local businesses, and schools and advertising through traditional media channels like radio, newspapers, and community bulletin boards. By diversifying advertising methods, we can ensure that important event information reaches all community members, including those without digital access.

## **9. Establish a comprehensive directory showcasing Black therapists, doctors, and nurse practitioners in Asheville**

- This directory aims to increase the visibility and accessibility of Black medical providers to the community. Research from the Association of American Medical Colleges underscores the importance of representation in healthcare, indicating correlations between Black healthcare providers and improved health outcomes, including reduced infant mortality rates, greater patient adherence to healthcare guidelines, higher patient satisfaction, and better patient understanding of health risks. Additionally, studies like the GMU study of infant mortality highlight the significant impact of Black physicians on reducing health disparities among Black patients.

## **Food Security Recommendations**

## **10. Indoor Winter Markets**

- To ensure year-round access to fresh produce and support local farmers and artisans, the City of Asheville should consider opening additional indoor Winter Markets, with a specific focus on locating them within Black communities in the city and county.

## 11. Healthy Corner Store Initiative

- Buncombe County and the City of Asheville are recommended to initiate a Healthy Corner Store Program. This endeavor aims to introduce affordable, healthy food options in local communities to combat food deserts and enhance access to nutritious foods in underserved areas.

## Parks and Recreation Recommendations

## 12. Marketing Language and Cultural Access Plan

- To effectively engage and serve the diverse communities within the city, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive Marketing Language and Cultural Access Plan. This plan should prioritize the creation of marketing materials and communication strategies that are not only linguistically accessible but also culturally resonant with the various demographic groups represented in the community.

## 13. Improve data collection

- Improved data collection and visibility regarding program demographics and community involvement are crucial to enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of city programs and services. This enhancement will provide valuable insights into the reach and impact of initiatives, allowing for better-informed decision-making and more targeted resource allocation to address community needs effectively.

## 14. Health and fitness challenges

- It is recommended that a city-wide health and fitness challenge be launched to promote health, wellness, and community engagement across the city. This initiative would encourage residents of all ages and fitness levels to participate in activities that foster physical health, mental well-being, and social connectivity.

## Housing Recommendations

### Eviction and Foreclosures

1. The county should approach the courts to update forms to separate data from housing from businesses versus and include racial demographic information.
2. Capture demographic data on landlord, tenant, and homeowner during evictions and foreclosures.

### Code Enforcement

3. Code enforcement citations should be tracked by HOH race.
4. Review developmental ordinances to determine if Black populations are disproportionately and harmfully impacted by their enforcement.

### Affordable Housing Plan

5. Revise the County's affordable housing strategy in light of changing housing needs to support Black population needs across all age groups and economic levels.
6. Identify funding sources and allocate budget in order to sustain and expand rates of Black homeownership over the next three years
7. Create targeted funding and develop a budget to address specific affordable housing needs for Black population over the next three years; ensuring geographic regions and specific populations receive the appropriate housing intervention.
8. Develop timeline and goals for collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as community partners, to create affordable housing for Black populations and eliminate barriers to fair housing.

### Social Determinants of Health

9. Embed the social determinants of health as a guideline when building additional housing or lowering income standards to ensure consideration of all other factors that impact housing affordability. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the social determinants of health (SDOH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.

### Rental Housing

10. Require landlords to provide disclosures about fair housing and the non-discrimination ordinance to their residents.
11. Develop timeline and goals for collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as community partners, to create affordable housing for BIPOC populations and eliminate barriers to fair housing.
12. Create a developer map to track upcoming and planned construction.
13. Limit number of developers granted permits to build in legacy neighborhoods unless building housing for low income or extremely low-income tenants/owners
14. Create targeted funding and develop a budget to address specific affordable housing needs

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for Black populations over the next three years; ensuring geographic regions and specific populations receive the appropriate housing intervention.

15. Implement suggestion of 500 extra units built /created per year for the next 20 years.
16. Fee rebate program for developments that comply with price limits have not been implemented.

## Internal Workforce Recommendations

### Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

#### 1. Interview Panels

- Move from an interview panel process to a search and screen committee approach. Typically used in college and university hiring processes, a search and screen committee provides a noticeable veil between the hiring manager and the candidates. In this approach, the hiring manager assembles the committee and identifies a committee chair. Committee members usually range from three to five, depending on the position. Together, they screen applicants, identify interviewees, and set interview appointments. The hiring manager and committee work together to determine the appropriate number of interviews for the position. We recommend this starts at positions with a supervisory role.
- Transitioning from an interview panel process to a search and screen committee approach is common, particularly in college and university hiring practices. This method introduces a noticeable separation between the hiring manager and the candidates. Under this approach, the hiring manager forms the committee and appoints a chair. Typically consisting of three to five members, depending on the position, the committee collectively screens applicants, selects interviewees, and schedules interviews. The hiring manager and committee collaborate to determine the appropriate number of interviews for each position. CDG recommends this start at positions with a supervisory role.
- Implementing policies and procedures that clearly delineate this revised hiring manager and interview panel process can benefit the County and City. The selection of members for search and screen committees should prioritize diversity, encompassing factors beyond race and gender. Considerations should include tenure, areas of expertise, abilities, and representation across different generations and age groups.

#### 2. Adopt A Rationale for No Diverse Finalist Policy

- Typically, the search and screening procedure culminates in the committee recommending three finalists to the hiring manager for the position. If there are no diverse candidates among the finalists, including women or individuals from historically marginalized groups like Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), the committee chair is required to provide a justification to Human Resources.

#### 3. Recruitment Stream Audit

- Ensuring equity in the job recruitment process is essential for guiding fair practices by the hiring manager and the search and screen committee. CDG suggests that the County and City audit their recruitment process to assess the demographic composition of applicant pools, the volume of rejected applicants, and the effectiveness of recruitment channels. The objective is to identify any patterns or trends that could impede qualified candidates from progressing through the hiring process equitably.

#### 4. Data Reporting of Key HR Metrics

- CDG advises that HR establish a culture of data reporting focusing on key metrics to



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monitor personnel trends. These metrics should encompass comparisons between external hires and internal promotions and the class and compensation structure categorized by race. Additionally, data should capture accommodations provided to staff and grievances across all employee levels, including upper management and executive leaders.

GARTNER's DEI Metrics Inventory offers a comprehensive list of relevant workforce and HR metrics that can guide this initiative.

5. **Conduct an employee engagement survey**
6. **Blind Resumé**
  - Identify the benefits of a blind resumé process and consider adopting it within your recruitment process.
7. **Professional Development**
  - Develop a concrete racial equity certification program for the internal workforce comprised of internal and external development opportunities. Ensure the professional development engagements directly benefit advancement with an incentive plan for course completion. This should include mandatory and non-mandatory development.

## Buncombe County Recommendations

8. **Training Incentive Plan**
  - Develop an incentive plan for course completion for BC Lead and BC Skill-Up.

## City of Asheville Recommendations

9. **DEI training or Managers**
  - More managerial level should be trained. Establish mandatory DEI training for managers.
10. **Women's Leadership Program**
  - Develop a women's leadership program with an incentivized plan and clear path for advancement.
11. **360 Evaluations**
  - Engage in 360 evaluations that is scaled throughout the organization, beginning senior leaders.
12. **Conduct compensation review**
13. **Conduct comprehensive HR policy and procedure review**

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## Equity, Inclusion, & Human Rights Recommendations

### **Mutual Recommendations for Buncombe County and the City of Asheville**

1. Develop a robust suite of equity courses on through an LMS system.
2. Collaborate with Human Resources or external firm to conduct a racial equity engagement survey.
3. Collaborate with human resources to conduct an in-depth review of employee demographics and key employee metrics.
4. Develop a plan for internal workforce-wide training.
5. Conduct a full organizational policy equity review.

### **City of Asheville Recommendations**

6. Finalize the development of the comprehensive Equity and Inclusion plan
7. Develop a pathway for equity and inclusion training for all city leaders.
8. Develop policy and support for a DEI employee resource group and affinity groups.
9. Utilize a DEI project management and tracking software such as ClearStrategy to track progress.

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## Data Collection Artifacts

<b>Criminal Justice</b>	
<b>Buncombe County</b>	<b>City of Asheville</b>
BCSO Policy and Procedures BCSO Arrestee by Race BCSO Traffic Stop & Searches by Race BCSO Officer Turnover Rate by Race Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) Community Diversion Recidivism Analysis Jail Management System Reports Vera Institute of Justice Study	Policy and Procedure Data Equity Dashboard Race and Cultural Diversity Training Materials 2021 Nondiscrimination ordinance Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) Materials Integrating Communication, Assessment and Tactics (ICAT) Training Materials

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## Economic Development

Buncombe County	
<p>Economic Development Policy Strategic Plan Project Awards Grant Guidelines IHP Program Dashboards MCCF Services &amp; Duties Agreement MCCF Underwriting Guidelines One Buncombe Data and Awards Roster Scoring Metrics for Review Team</p> <p>Mountain Community Capital Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCCF Services &amp; Duties Agreement</li> <li>▪ MCCF Underwriting Guidelines</li> <li>▪ Operating Committee Rules of Procedures</li> <li>▪ MCCF Quarterly report 6.30.23</li> <li>▪ Mountain BizWorks - written responses to questions</li> <li>▪ Community Investment Grants</li> <li>▪ Grant Awards for FY2021-FY2024</li> <li>▪ Grant Applications for FY2021-FY2024</li> </ul> <p>Community Investment Grant data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Grant Applications FY2021-2024</li> <li>▪ Grant Awards FY2021-2024</li> <li>▪ Grant Guidelines for Early Childhood Grants, Isaac Coleman, Tipping Point, and Strategic Partnership Grant Programs for each FY.</li> <li>▪ One Buncombe Grant Program (assess as part of Workforce Development metric)</li> <li>▪ Covid Recovery Funding                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ○ CSLFRF Project Awards - No dates</li> <li>○ ○ CSLFRF RFP Scores</li> <li>○ ○ RFP proposal</li> <li>○ ○ Review Team Scoring Metric</li> <li>○ ○ Recovery Funding Workshop Presentation</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Community Investment Grant data Strategic Partnership Data Inclusive Hiring Partners Dashboards (2021-2023) Inclusive Hiring Partners Interest Form Data Next AVL Applicants Economic Development Coalition Incentives Project Applicants</p>	<p>Economic Development Policy Strategic Plan Project Awards Grant Guidelines IHP Program Dashboards MCCF Services &amp; Duties Agreement MCCF Underwriting Guidelines One Buncombe Data and Awards Roster Scoring Metrics for Review Team</p> <p>Mountain Community Capital Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCCF Services &amp; Duties Agreement</li> <li>▪ MCCF Underwriting Guidelines</li> <li>▪ Operating Committee Rules of Procedures</li> <li>▪ MCCF Quarterly report 6.30.23</li> <li>▪ Mountain BizWorks - written responses to questions</li> <li>▪ Community Investment Grants</li> <li>▪ Grant Awards for FY2021-FY2024</li> <li>▪ Grant Applications for FY2021-FY2024</li> </ul> <p>Economic Development, Finance, Strategic Partnerships departments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Current Contracts Policy</li> <li>▪ Minority Business Plan</li> <li>▪ Supplier Information Packet</li> <li>▪ Procurement policy, current, draft and revised copy</li> <li>▪ Minority Business Plan</li> <li>▪ Supplier Information Packet</li> <li>▪ Policy on Prequalification of Bidders for Construction or Repair Projects</li> </ul> <p>Contract data from 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2023. List of Bidders for FY 2022 and 2023 Purchase Orders from 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2023</p>

# DRAFT

## Economic Development

<p><b>City of Asheville</b></p> <p>Asheville Business Inclusion Policy          Economic Development Policy          ABI 3 Year Contract List          Grant Guidelines          Files with RFP/RFQ/RFI Submission and related contract information          Project Awards          Asheville Business Inclusion MWBE Vendor List          Website links</p> <p>Economic Development Incentive Policy          Website Links to Economic Development Partner Organizations          ABI Inclusion Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ABI Policy</li> <li>▪ ABI Vendor Outreach List</li> <li>▪ ABI 3-Year Contract List</li> </ul>
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## Education

Buncombe County	City of Asheville
<p>ECE Data Presentation            Fall 2022 NCELI-mClass Results            Resolution for Non-Profit Funding            Resolution for ECE Fund 10-30-2018            State of Childcare            ECE Grant Awards 2021-2024            ECE Grant Guidelines, Contracts, and Reports            Education Funding 23-24            Isaac Coleman Grants, Guidelines, and Recommendations            Buncombe County Discovery Summary            Non-profit Assessment Survey (CDG)</p>	<p>Strategic Partnership Grant Applications            Grant Budgets            Grantee Board Documents and Non-Profit Status            Grantee Letters of Support            Strategic Partnership Grant Materials            Non-profit Assessment Survey (CDG)</p>

# DRAFT

## Health & Wellness

Buncombe County	City of Asheville
State of the County Health Report 2021 Community Health Improvement Plan Food Security Reparations Recommendations Project Description Buncombe County Health and Human Services Reports Asheville Buncombe Food Security Reparations Coalition v	Reparations Report (Phase 1) Title V Program Update Policy review team Asheville Data Resource Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Agenda U.S. Census Report

## Housing

Buncombe County	City of Asheville
Department of Community Development Tax Assessor's Office Buncombe County Foreclosures 1998-2022 Housing Needs Assessment- Western North Carolina Non-Discrimination Ordinance Tracking	Department of Development Services Evictions filed in NC Small Claims Court Housing Trust Fund Project History Land Use Incentive Grant Summary Planning and Urban Design Dept. Community and Economic Development Department City of Asheville Missing Middle Housing Study City of Asheville Housing Needs Assessment Living Asheville: Comprehensive Plan Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice report

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## Internal Workforce

Buncombe County	City of Asheville
<p>Policy Review: Personnel Ordinance, Grievance Policy and Procedure, Affinity Groups Policy, Employee Pay Policy, and Flexible Workplace Policy</p> <p>Substantial equivalency model (Work experience and Education requirements)</p> <p>Interview panel process</p> <p>Policy Writers Committee</p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>Stay surveys</p> <p>Workforce demographics</p>	<p>Policy Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruitment and Selection Policy</li> <li>▪ Equal Employment Opportunity</li> <li>▪ Ethics</li> <li>▪ Workplace Harassment</li> <li>▪ Personnel</li> <li>▪ Flexible Work Arrangements.</li> </ul> <p>Interview panel process</p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>Workforce demographics</p>

## Equity, Inclusion, & Human Rights Offices

Buncombe County	City of Asheville
<p>2021-2025 Racial Equity Action Plan</p> <p>2021 Nondiscrimination ordinance</p> <p>2022 Affinity Group Policy</p> <p>Staff Equity &amp; Inclusion Workgroup</p> <p>Mandatory 8-hour racial equity training</p>	<p>Equity Dashboard</p> <p>Racial equity training courses</p> <p>Policy Equity Analysis Team</p> <p>2021 Nondiscrimination ordinance</p> <p>City Council Equity &amp; Engagement Committee</p> <p>Human Relations Commission</p> <p>2019 Racial Equity Plan</p>

An aerial photograph of a large-scale construction project. A massive, dark concrete structure, possibly a dam or a large bridge pier, dominates the center of the frame. The structure is surrounded by a network of roads, construction equipment, and various site infrastructure. The background shows a hilly landscape with some trees and a clear sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of large-scale engineering and infrastructure development.

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