



# Findings from 2019 Racial Equity and Social Justice Community Conversations

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## **Chapter 1. Authority, Scope, and Organization**

### **A. Authority**

Council Resolution 18-1187, FY 2019 Work Program of the Office of Legislative Oversight, adopted July 24, 2018.

### **B. Scope, Purpose, and Methodology**

This OLO report summarizes findings from the Community Conversations sponsored by the Montgomery County Council with support from the County Executive from April and August of 2019. Initiated by Council President Nancy Navarro, the Community Conversations on Racial Equity and Social Justice provided opportunities for diverse residents across the County to discuss the challenges they face in experiencing racial inequities and to offer recommendations for change.<sup>1</sup>

This report was written by Montgomery County Summer Fellows Tatiana Padilla (doctoral student at Cornell University) and Emilia Calma (graduate student at Georgetown University) under the direction of Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, OLO Senior Legislative Analyst, with editing support from OLO Administrative Specialist Kelli Robinson.

This report is presented in four parts:

- **Chapter 2, Overview of Community Conversations**, describes the three County sponsored community conversations on racial equity and social justice and the independently sponsored community conversations convened by non-profits, places of worship, other community-based organizations, and individuals.
- **Chapter 3, What Challenges to Achieving Racial Equity Does Montgomery County Face**, describes two sets of challenges to achieving racial equity in the County that emerged from community conversations - overarching and policy-specific challenges.
- **Chapter 4, Suggestions for Achieving Racial Equity in Montgomery County**, summarizes suggestions for County action from community conversation participants.
- **Chapter 5, Suggestions for Future Surveys**, offers recommendations for standardizing data collection and structuring community conversations to generate more useful data to inform action and decision making in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Montgomery County Council's Racial Equity and Social Justice efforts, please see the Creating a Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy website at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/equitymatters.html>.

### **C. Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

Several findings and recommendations for County action emerges from the community conversations convened across the County between March and July of 2019:

- Up to 1,000 stakeholders participated in County- and community-sponsored conversations to discuss racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County.
- Both **systemic racism and individual racism** were identified by community conversation participants as overarching drivers of racial and social inequities in the County.
- Community conversation participants cited four main policy areas as the biggest challenges to achieving equity in the County: **education, housing, criminal justice, and employment.**
- To advance racial equity by **addressing systemic and individual racism**, community conversation respondents offered **three suggestions for action**:
  - Sponsor more inclusive programs and community conversations to increase awareness of racial equity and social justice needs in the County;
  - Sponsor targeted opportunities to increase awareness about racial equity for youth;
  - Increase information available to the public about the County’s racial equity and social justice goals and efforts.
- To advance racial equity by **addressing policy areas** as drivers of racial and social inequities in the County, **six recommendations for County action** emerged:
  - Collect data, define goals, and align policy with data and data-driven results
  - Solicit input from communities under-represented in the Community Conversations, especially Latinx and Asian residents
  - Provide racial equity training for all County employees, including Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery County Police Department staffs
  - Require Racial Equity Impact Assessments for legislation passed by the Council and Racial Equity Action Plans for County departments
  - Improve access and outcomes for employment, housing, education, transportation and other policy areas by expanding services and resources in lower-income areas
  - Encourage the Board of Education to provide equitable services across the County to address student need and to use an inclusive curriculum that better reflects the contributions of people of color in the U.S.
- Further, OLO recommends that future community conversations convened by the County and hosted in the community rely on the **same set of prompts** and require the **collection of participant demographic data** to generate more meaningful data to inform future County actions and decision-making.

## Chapter 2. Overview of Community Conversations

The Montgomery County Council articulated its commitment to racial equity and social justice by adopting Resolution No. 18-1095 in April of 2018.<sup>2</sup> Executing this resolution requires the meaningful engagement of all communities in the County, with those most impacted by disparities and inequality at the forefront. To ensure that racial equity and social justice policies reflects the needs and priorities of those most impacted by disparities and inequalities:

- Three County-sponsored community engagement opportunities were hosted by the County between March and July of 2019 to capture residents' perspectives, ideas, and recommendations for action to reduce inequalities.<sup>3</sup>
- Each County-sponsored community conversation was co-led by Council President Nancy Navarro and County Executive Marc Elrich with a majority of individual Council members in attendance.
- The County Council with support from OLO and the Office of the County Executive developed the community engagement toolkits in English and Spanish to help facilitate discussion and racial equity and social justice and also launched the Equity Matters website, community conversation feedback forms, and surveys.<sup>4</sup>
- The Equity Matters Community Survey was also launched by OLO to collect feedback from County residents.
- Additional community conversations were hosted by individuals and organizations.

This chapter is presented in two parts to describe **County-sponsored community conversations** convened in Silver Spring, Germantown, and White Oak, and **independently sponsored community conversations** hosted by organizations and individuals across the County.

### A. County Sponsored Community Conversations

**Methodology:** As part of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Community Engagement Campaign, residents of Montgomery County were invited to three County sponsored community conversations held between March and July 2019. The first community conversation was held on March 13 at the Silver Spring Civic Center. The second was held on June 26 at the BlackRock Center for the Arts in Germantown. And the third event was held on July 10 at the White Oak Community Recreation Center in Silver Spring.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=169&event\\_id=7720&meta\\_id=154335](http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=169&event_id=7720&meta_id=154335)

<sup>3</sup> The Council President also co-hosted a Youth Forum focused on Equity with MCPS at Gaithersburg High School on April 8, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html>

Each community conversation was led by the County Council and County Executive. The events were open to the public and community organizations were encouraged to attend. Each event began with a 20-minute introduction that motivated the conversation, established rules of engagement, and explained the agenda for the event.

Slides, such as the following, guided the audience through a snapshot of the current racial disparities in Montgomery County. The evidence helped provide context before the room transitioned to small-group conversations.

From records collected at the events, 233 persons participated in the County-wide community conversations. However, this number undercounts the actual number of participants that attended the three forums, which totaled between 600-700 persons.

<b>Data on Disparities in Montgomery County, 2011-2015</b>					
<b>System</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Latino</b>
<b>Education</b>	High school completion	98%	92%	92%	69%
	Some college education	88%	81%	72%	45%
<b>Employment</b>	Employment rate	78%	74%	73%	77%
	Unemployment rate	4%	5%	10%	8%
<b>Housing and Income</b>	Avg. household income	\$160,000	\$131,000	\$88,000	\$88,000
	Owned home	75%	74%	44%	50%
	Residents in poverty	4%	6%	11%	12%
	Children in poverty	2%	6%	16%	14%

The gap between the number of actual participants and records collected and submitted to OLO reflects three patterns. First, participants were encouraged, but not required to complete sign-in sheets provided at each discussion table. As such, some participants did not sign-in. Second, due to time constraints, participants at some community conversations may not have the time to complete sign in sheets at their discussion tables. Third, some of the participants may not have had access to a sign-in sheet. At the kick off community conversation in Silver Spring where there was standing room only, at least half of the approximately 400 persons in attendance participated in conversations without the benefit of tables or sign-in sheets because attendance far exceeded the venue’s table and seating capacity.

Finally, in addition to non-responses, it is also important to note that almost half (44.6%) of participants in the three community-wide conversations that signed-in did not disclose their race or ethnicity. Thus, while participant data compiled in Table 1 on the next page includes these individuals in aggregated counts, claims or inferences regarding the race or ethnicity of the 104 individuals that chose not to disclose their race or ethnicity cannot be made.

**Table 1: Demographics of County-Hosted Community Conversation Participants**

	Montgomery County Population*	Community Conversations	Community Conversations	White Oak July 10th	Germantown June 26th	Silver Spring March 13th
<b>Total Recorded Participants</b>	100%	100%	233	92	68	73
Total Participants that <u>Disclosed</u> Race		55.4%	129	67	24	38
Total Participants that <u>Undisclosed</u> Race**		44.6%	104	25	44	35
White	45.9%	31.8%	41	21	2	18
Asian	14.5%	3.9%	5	5	0	0
Black	17.3%	35.7%	46	29	4	13
Latino	18.6%	26.4%	34	9	18	7
Other***	3.6%	2.3%	3	3	0	0

\*Source: Montgomery Planning Demographic Profile of County 2016, <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MC-Council-Districts-Demographic-Profile-2016.pdf>;

\*\*Participant declined to comment; Race/ethnicity not recorded; \*\*\*Participant self identified as "Other" and not White, Asian, Black or Latino;

Because Montgomery County proudly identifies itself as home to people of many nationalities, races and ethnicities, the County prioritized reaching out to and including diverse communities as part of its community conversations. These efforts were effective at ensuring African American participation: compared to representing 17% of the County’s population, Black people accounted for nearly 36% of conversation participants.

These efforts were also effective at garnering Latino representation: Latinos accounted for 26% of the County-sponsored community conversation participants compared to representing 19% of the County’s population. The use of interpreters and materials translated into Spanish likely helped to boost Latino participation at the County-wide sessions.

Overall, White people accounted for a third of the County-sponsored community conversation participants compared to representing 46% of all residents while people of color (Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, and Multi-racial people) accounted for a two-thirds of community conversation participants compared to 54% of Montgomery County’s population. Yet, Asians were under-represented in the community conversations, accounting for 4% of County-sponsored community conversation participants compared to 15% of all County residents.

**B. Independently Sponsored Community Conversations**

**Methodology:** As part of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Community Engagement Campaign, residents of Montgomery County were encouraged to sponsor community conversations utilizing the Community Conversation Toolkit published by the Montgomery County Council with support from OLO. The toolkit provided some guidance and suggestions on a proposed format for the outside forums. However, each group had the flexibility to adjust the protocol to meet the needs of their community.

The Community Conversation Toolkit recommended that organizations and individuals host independent community conversations among County stakeholders. Following a similar structure to the County sponsored community conversations, hosts were encouraged to have moderators, scribes, timekeepers and community participants. Additionally, hosts were responsible for the logistics of the event and inviting participants.

Table 2 below lists 24 community organizations that hosted community conversations between April and July of 2019. Table 3 on the following page describes the demographics of 387 participants at these sessions.

**Table 2: Organizations that Convened Community Conversations**

<i>1977-II Action Group</i>	<i>Manna Food Center</i>
<i>Beth Chai Jewish Humanist Congregation</i>	<i>Maplewood and Wyngate Villages Steering Committee Members</i>
<i>Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition</i>	<i>Next Up Collaborative</i>
<i>Coming to the Table Montgomery County</i>	<i>Patuxent River Chapter of The Links, Inc.</i>
<i>Community Bridges</i>	<i>Primary Care Coalition</i>
<i>East County Opportunity Zone</i>	<i>Racial Justice NOW!</i>
<i>Elms Neighborhood</i>	<i>Sandy Spring Museum Group</i>
<i>Grace Episcopal Church – Silver Spring</i>	<i>St. Matthew Presbyterian Church</i>
<i>Gillian Silver</i>	<i>The Beauty Startup</i>
<i>Interfaith Works Equity Conference</i>	<i>TRUTH and Company</i>
<i>Kingdom Fellowship AME Church</i>	<i>Womens Democratic Club and Zolas Friends</i>
<i>Latino Public Safety Workgroup</i>	<i>Zeta Phi Beta Sorority – Eta Phi Zeta Chapter</i>

**Table 3: Demographics of Independent Community Conversation Participants**

	Montgomery County Population*	Community Conversations	Community Conversations
<b>Total Recorded Participants</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>387</b>
Total Participants that <i>Disclosed</i> Race		53.5%	207
Total Participants that <i>Undisclosed</i> Race**		46.5%	180
White	45.9%	34.8%	72
Asian	14.5%	4.8%	10
Black	17.3%	50.7%	105
Latino	18.6%	9.7%	20
Other***	3.6%	0.0%	0

\*Source: Montgomery Planning Demographic Profile of County 2016

\*\*Participant declined to comment; Race/ethnicity not recorded

\*\*\*Participant self-identified as "Other" and not White, Asian, Black or Latino

The independent community conversations yielded a diverse pool of participants. Among those indicating their racial and ethnic background, about half of all participants were Black, a little more than a third were White, 10% were Latino, and 5% were Asian.

Of note, during the independent community conversations, moderators were responsible for keeping the conversation moving and staying on topic, while ensuring everyone got the chance to speak. Moderators asked participants to comment on the following questions:

1. Why does racial and ethnic equity matter to you?
2. As a resident, how are you impacted by inequalities by race and ethnicity in your daily life? How are members of your family and/or community impacted?
3. What do you see as the top three challenges to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County? Why?
4. What are some of the changes that could be made to reduce inequality in Montgomery County?
5. What are some of the barriers to advancing racial equity and social justice in the County? What suggestions can you offer for addressing these roadblocks/concerns?
6. Is your organization/group addressing racial and ethnic inequality? If so, how? If not, what activities, if any are envisioned? How could the County be of assistance to your group towards this end?
7. What would Montgomery County look like if we eliminated inequalities by race and ethnicity?

While the scribes captured the highlights, timekeepers assisted by keeping track of time and giving time signals.

### Chapter 3. What Challenges to Achieving Racial Equity Does Montgomery County Face?

This chapter summarizes responses to questions aimed at exploring the challenges to achieving racial equity in Montgomery County. Common questions posed during the County-sponsored and community-sponsored conversations included:

- What are the three top challenges to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County?
- What barriers to addressing racial equity and social justice did your group identify?
- What strategies for addressing barriers did your group identify?

This summary of conversation responses relies on an organic categorization system that allows patterns and grouping to emerge from the data. This methodology is utilized in efforts to prevent researcher bias when summarizing and aggregating raw data. Clear patterns emerged from asking individuals to identify challenges to achieving racial equity. Montgomery County residents believe that systemic racism and individual racism are drivers of racial inequalities.

Collectively, 305 participants recalled experiences, explained patterns and shared instances where their own, or a loved one's, race and/or ethnicity played a central role in the opportunities afforded to them and their outcomes.

This chapter is presented in two parts to describe challenges to achieving racial equity in Montgomery County from community conversations as follows:

- **Overarching Challenges to Achieving Racial Equity and Social Justice** describes systemic and individual racism as drivers of inequities as identified by community conversations.
- **Policy Challenges to Achieving Racial Equity and Social Justice** describes specific policy areas identified by community conversation participants that foster racial inequities.

#### A. Overarching Challenges to Achieving Racial Equity and Social Justice

**Systemic Racism.** Community conversation participants consistently identified systemic racism as a driver of racial and social inequities in Montgomery County. Systemic racism, also known as institutional racism, is the macro-level “systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are White and the exclusion of people of color.”<sup>5</sup> Many researchers recognize that today's policies and institutions are built on the United States' long history of racially distributed resources and hierarchical system.<sup>6</sup> They note that even with well-intentioned people, present-day racism is kept in place through those policies and institutions.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/institutionalracism.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

While systemic racism can manifest itself *explicitly* through racist laws, policies and restrictions—most systemic racism is implicit. Implicit *biases* manifest within and across institutions in everyday small decisions that aggregate to advantage White people over people of Color. The Government Alliance of Race and Equity (GARE) encourages localities to focus on structural transformation to reduce implicit bias because underlying systems are the force driving racial inequities<sup>7</sup>.

When community conversation participants were asked, **“From your group’s perspective, what are the three top challenges to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County?”** systemic racism was mentioned 80 times. Below is a summary of the topics that emerged and are broadly categorized as systemic racism.

Systemic Racism	
17	Issues of information: a big need for reliable, publically available county data; Biased facilitators of information and misinformation due to language barriers; Colored folks are not getting informed of programs and resources
14	Unequal opportunity to resources; unequal access to resources; unequal funding/fundraising of resources
13	Lack of consequences/subsequent action/education about racism/ addressing and apologizing/government admitting mistakes regarding racism
10	Access to transportation; segregation in modes of transportation (the rich/middle classes drive while the poor ride buses)
9	Need for increased representation in government and political engagement of colored folks
7	Access and affordability of healthcare
5	Businesses unequal access to affordable retail space and loans; racial profiling in lending and renting
4	Access to quality childcare; not enough available early education for children of color
1	Churches are segregated, lack diversity and need to be more inclusive
<b>80</b>	<b>Total times mentioned</b>

Additionally, community conversation participants identified implicit structural racism in unequal access to resources as a pressing challenge to racial equity. Access to resources was also a central theme that was discussed. Participants recognized access at the root of unequal distribution of resources in the County and discussed two mechanisms that foster unequal access to resources among people of color in the County as compared to their White peers:

- The first is the **lack of information** due to poor distribution of information, poor choice of mediums and language barriers. For example, one resident shared, “many people of color do not know of the availability of first-time homebuyers’ programs.”
- The second mechanism is **misinformation**. Participants explained that “biased facilitators of information” and “information gatekeepers” disproportionately increased misinformation in communities that needed to rely on them for language translation.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/1-052018-GARE-Comms-Guide-v1-1.pdf>

Unequal access, either through no information or wrong information, results in unequal opportunity, unequal funding of programs, and the underutilization of programs. Additionally, participants felt that racial equity begins with local government making equity-related data broadly available.

Community conversation participants also identified implicit structural racism in **government accountability** as a top challenge to addressing racial equity. Participants explained that publication decisions by government officials and entities do not “admit, address and apologize for mistakes” that perpetuate racism. Participants also expressed frustration with the “lack of consequences” and “lack of action” regarding institutional racism in government. Participants exposed the need to “educate about racism,” “connect systemic consequences to individual outcomes,” and normalize conversations about race, racial equity, and racial injustice.

**Individual Racism.** While structural racism emerged to the forefront as the central driver of racial and social inequities in the County, community members also identified racism that occurs between individuals—individual racism – as a major driver. They distinguished explicit individual racism that occurs through racially motivated discrimination from implicit institutional racism that occurs through subconscious bias that lead to the differential treatment of individuals due to their race.<sup>8</sup> In turn, community conversation participants identified implicit individual racism as a major challenge to addressing racial equity.

When community conversation participants were asked, **“From your group’s perspective, what are the three top challenges to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County?”** individual racism was mentioned 50 times. Below is a summary of the topics that emerged and are broadly categorized as individual racism.

Individual Racism	
20	Lack of exposure: "ignorance is the biggest barrier to racial equity because when people don't have exposure to other cultures, races, ethnicities, etc."; people are unaware of poverty in Montgomery County in certain areas; it is difficult to bring people who do not share similarities; lack of awareness
16	Implicit individual racism: need for a fundamental cultural change; too much focus on diversity, but it does not mean post-racism; cultural insensitivity; "white clients who are very poor and receiving public assistance often tell her that there is no racism that favors White people even though they are poor too"
9	Explicit individual racism: Spread of hate via Social Media; Deficit thinking, assuming that a non-white will not be as good must change; Colored folks should not see these as something to fear or be scared of; being pulled over or getting pulled aside for “driving while black”; stereotyping for example parishioners act differently towards individuals who come to pantry or get assistance from church
5	Competition: "Fear of losing privilege or access to resources if they allow others to join in", "White folks need to stop being afraid of what they will lose"
<b>50</b>	<b>Total times mentioned</b>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/institutionalracism.pdf>

Time and time again, community conversation participants explained the cyclical perpetuation of implicit individual racism that results from the **lack of exposure to people different than themselves**. Ignorance, lack of exposure, lack of awareness were terms used interchangeably to describe that, “it is difficult to bring people together who do not share similarities ... people who do not have exposure to other cultures, races, or ethnicities.” This climate of distance presents unique challenges to achieving racial equity in Montgomery County.

Some community conversation participants recognized implicit individual racism that results from **unequal access to resources** as a challenge to addressing racial equity. Implicit individual racism can manifest as fear that addressing racial inequality would lower opportunities for others and increase competition for resources. Participants also discussed the need for a cultural change that addresses “cultural insensitivity” and alters the mistaken mindset that “diversity means post-racism.”

## **B. Policy Challenges to Achieving Racial Equity and Social Equity**

From the aforementioned questions, critical policy-level challenges were also identified as barriers to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. Community conversation participants believe that education, housing, the criminal justice system, and employment are the biggest challenges to improving racial disparities within the County. These four policy areas were most commonly discussed by participants followed by:

- Lack of information or misinformation due to language barriers
- Insufficient public transportation options
- Health care affordability
- Childcare and early childhood education
- Fear of deportation.

The remaining of this section focuses on the four major policy area challenges identified in greater detail.

**Education.** Education was mentioned 62 times as a challenge to achieving racial equity in Montgomery County. With regard to education, the most pressing issue expressed among community conversation participants was a **lack of equity in educational opportunities**. At the macro-level, respondents discussed the racial segregation between schools and its implications for the school environment. Differential monetary investment across public schools was also cited as a source of racial and social inequality within Montgomery County Public Schools.

Education	
15	Resources: lack of equity in school resources, technology, library/media center, art/music/enrichment, availability of advanced classes and varied electives, etc.; Stark differences in homework expectations, PTA involvement, and teachers (the low-impact school had many substitutes).
15	Schools: segregation; unequal treatment of colored children; parents of colored children unable to advocate from fear of retaliation from teachers/exuberating unequal treatment; racial implications in the school environment;
12	Opportunity gap across racial lines; framing achievement gap as opportunity and instruction, not deficit of the student
12	Curriculum: history education include truth about history of the US; history such as the Jim Crow laws, clarifying slaves were not slaves they were individuals (educated, skilled) that were enslaved and sold, stop fearing American history, teach newly arrived children this history as well so they better understand the dynamics of culture; different school experiences.
4	Need early education, universal pre-k and summer programs
4	Higher education: access, affordability; poor job outcomes discourages young people from pursuing higher education
<b>62</b>	<b>Total times mentioned</b>

Community conversation participants cited specific differences in resources allocations by race, ethnicity, and income as sources of educational inequities as well. They perceived an unequal distribution of “technology, libraries, media centers, art/music/enrichment programs, advanced classes and varied electives” across MCPS schools. Participants also mentioned the differing levels of “PTA involvement and consistency of teachers (as opposed to substitutes)”.

Participants also expressed micro-level (individual level) issues of unequal treatment for children of color. One participants who was an MCPS parent shared that they observed, “stark differences in homework expectations” between their children of different races. Some parents of children of color further expressed feeling unable to advocate for their children due to fear of retaliation from teachers and exuberating unequal treatment.

**Housing.** Housing was mentioned 41 times as a challenge to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County, primarily due to housing **segregation**.

Housing	
21	Affordability
14	Segregation; unequal access to housing market from word-of-mouth sales; segregated housing due to income but also lingering effects of discrimination & redlining
5	Access to public transportation, green areas, recreation opportunities, snow removal, pot holes in lower income neighborhoods or neighborhoods in the East County vs. higher income neighborhoods.
1	Implications of gentrification
<b>41</b>	<b>Total times mentioned</b>

Respondents identified three mechanisms through which housing segregation continues to exist today and perpetuates unequal access to resources, quality education and exposure to environmental hazards. The most mentioned mechanism was housing **affordability**. Housing affordability is seen as the root cause of the ongoing racial and income segregation in Montgomery County. Secondly, respondents identified **unequal access to the housing market** due to word-of-mouth sales. Lastly, residents believe the County is still dealing with the lingering effects of discrimination and practices of **redlining**.

**Criminal Justice Systems.** The criminal justice system was mentioned 30 times as a challenge to achieving racial equity in Montgomery County. Community conversation respondents most commonly identified structural racism in **police, policing, and the criminal justice system** as a challenge to addressing racial equity.

Criminal Justice	
17	Criminal justice system: Integration post interaction with CJS; bias and overrepresentation; unequal treatment "when people of certain racial backgrounds commit a crime there is less investigation into that whereas others might be almost presumed to be guilty by the justice system"
13	Racial profiling by police; education for police; lack of connecting systemic consequences to individual outcomes;
30	<b>Total times mentioned</b>

The most pressing issue that community conversation participants expressed as a challenge to racial equity was the **over representation of people of color** in the criminal justice system. Many participants attribute the over representation of people of color in the criminal justice system to the pervasiveness of implicit bias through racial profiling and recalled examples of unequal treatment in the criminal justice system. For example, some community members shared their belief that the quality of criminal investigations differs by the race and ethnicities of the parties involved. They noted that "when people of certain racial backgrounds commit a crime there is less investigation" and that assumptions of guilt or innocence are pre-prescribed where "other (races) are almost presumed to be guilty by the justice system."

Furthermore, due to the over-representation of people of color in the criminal justice system, communities of color also disproportionately experience the negative effects of criminal justice involvement. Respondents explained that racial equity was out of reach until true reintegration was possible and a "criminal history no longer deterred future employment opportunities." Community members collectively believed that "education for police" would serve as an important tool for improving racial equity and reducing the over-representation of people of color in the criminal justice system.

**Employment.** Finally, employment was mentioned 18 times as a challenge to achieving racial equity in Montgomery County. In regard to employment, the most pressing issue expressed as a challenge to achieving racial equity among conversation participants was **unequal employment opportunities**.

Employment	
12	Segregation in workplaces; criminal history deterring employment opportunities; equal employment opportunities, iniquity in hiring/interviewing/call backs; going beyond government and into corporate practices
6	Dwindling of good jobs
<b>18</b>	<b>Total times mentioned</b>

Community conversation participants noted the perpetuation of unequal employment opportunities through “unequal call backs, interviewing and hiring.” Aggregated, these practices lead to increased segregation in workplaces across Montgomery County. Acknowledging the efforts made by the County Council to improve equitable employment opportunities, residents urged the need to “go beyond the public sector and into corporate practices.”

## **Chapter 4. Suggestions for Achieving Racial Equity in Montgomery County**

This chapter summarizes suggestions for County action that emerged from the community conversations. It is presented in two parts to describe suggestions from community members for County action to address (a) systemic and individual racism and (b) major policy areas identified as fostering racial and social inequities in the County.

### **A. Suggestions for Addressing Systemic and Individual Racism**

Community conversation participants offered three suggestions for the County to reverse the impact of systemic and individual racism on racial and social inequities in Montgomery County.

#### **1. *Expand inclusive programming and community conversations to increase awareness of racial equity and social justice issues in the County.***

Appearing in the responses 30 times, many community conversation respondents reported wanting more community conversations and listening circles. Overall, participants desire increased awareness of racial equity, including increased awareness of poverty and disparities in the County. This could include inclusive programming, information in a variety of languages, and large-scale multicultural events. This could also include encouraging communities to talk to each other. Some suggestions that appeared included convening book clubs and hosting dialogues within and between communities.

Respondents mentioned frequently that people need to accept the fact that there are disparities by race and ethnicity in the County and that some communities fare better or worse compared to others. They noted that this would require an honest conversation about this County's history – a conversation that several respondents felt many residents were not necessarily prepared to have.

#### **2. *Sponsor targeted opportunities to increase awareness about racial equity and social justice for youth***

Many respondents felt that the best way forward to advancing racial equity and social justice would be to change the narrative of what is taught to children to better reflect this country's history of disenfranchisement and racist policies. Changing school curriculums was mentioned frequently, in addition to creating school programs that increase awareness of racial equity and encourage advocacy. Community conversation participants wished for programming to teach children at a young age (elementary school) that being bigoted can have negative effects on society. They believed that creating this awareness of issues at an early age would foster advocacy and change the hearts and minds of County residents.

In addition, community conversation participants recommended the County make additional investments in under-privileged youth including affordable childcare, early education or universal pre-kindergarten, and free summer programs for children and youth.

Within existing public schools, many community conversation participants requested that discrepancies in school funding be addressed, with a general grievance that schools enrolling more affluent children have more resources than schools serving lower-income children. Some mentioned the need to redraw school boundaries to improve racial and socio-economic integration and the need to increasing the diversity of teachers in schools to improve learning opportunities for children of color. Participants frequently mentioned training all MCPS teachers on cultural competency, implicit bias, and racial equity as a suggestion for action.

**3. *Increase information about Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice efforts and goals***

Many participants expressed a desire for better public information, including a history of inequitable policies in Montgomery County and a formal statement of racial equity goals and milestones. Participants wished that instead of just talking about diversity, that Montgomery County increased opportunities for all residents. Requests were made for better journalism so that less information could come from social media, and that information be made available in multiple languages. This would include more information describing disparities in the County.

Many community conversation participants expressed an interest in the County developing a mission statement with core values and goals for achieving racial equity and social justice locally. This would require defining goals and milestones for success, as well as collecting and distributing the results of data.

**B. *Suggestions for Addressing Policy Barriers to Equity***

Community conversation participants offered six sets of suggestions that service as recommendations for County action to offset barriers in public education, criminal justice, housing, and employment systems that foster racial and social inequities in the County.<sup>9</sup>

**1. *Collect data, define goals, and align policy with data and data-driven results***

Along with stating goals and milestones that the County would like to achieve on racial equity, participants of the community conversations frequently mentioned the need for sufficient funding, data collection, and action planning to track the County's progress at reducing racial and social inequities. They also noted the importance of aligning desired outcomes to the County's budget to maximize progress in achieving racial equity and social justice goals.

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<sup>9</sup> Other recommendations for County action offered during community conversations include coordinating resources between departments, expanding voter education and enfranchisement, developing appropriate and effective consequences for racism, providing free college education, expanding inclusionary zoning, making permitting easier, and increasing the minimum wage in the County.

Robust data systems can be used to assess progress and determine future steps. OLO Report 2019-7, ***Racial Equity Profile, Montgomery County***, provides data to benchmark current racial and social disparities in the County.<sup>10</sup>

## ***2. Solicit input from communities not present in the Community Conversations***

Many participants addressed the fact that not all communities were present for the Community Conversations. Some suggestions that were made included collecting information at workplaces and within communities. Emphasis was placed on going to the under-represented communities to solicit feedback rather than requiring such communities to come to County-sponsored conversations or the Council.

## ***3. Require racial equity training for all County employees, including MCPS and Police personnel***

Requiring racial equity training for community leaders and County staff was a recommendation offered by many community conversation participants. Additionally, participants recommended racial equity and cultural sensitivity training for MCPS employees and public safety personnel. More specifically, conversation participants recommended training in de-escalation best practices for the police to enhance community policing (e.g. less use of guns and shields). Better relationships with communities and residents of color via increased cultural sensitivity and diminished use of deadly force is also desired. There were also many responses calling for increased police accountability and transparency, with the added suggestion of a Civilian Oversight Board.<sup>11</sup>

## ***4. Require use of Racial Equity Impact Assessments for legislation proposed by the Council and require the use of Racial Equity Action Plans for County Departments***

OLO Report 2018-18, ***Racial Equity in Government Decision-Making: Lessons from the Field***,<sup>12</sup> describes two racial equity tools that were endorsed among several community conversation participants. First, Racial Equity Impact Assessments (REIAs) are “formal documents designed to evaluate the current or predicted impact of policies, programs, and budget decisions on racial disparities (also known as racial impact statements and sometimes referred to as racial equity tools).” Second, Racial Equity Action Plans (REAPs) are “formal documents created by specific departments with timelines for implementation and accountability aimed at advancing racial equity by reducing disparities.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/RevisedOLO2019-7.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> On June 18, 2019, Bill 14-19 was introduced to form a Policing Advising Commission  
[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2019/20190709/20190709\\_9.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2019/20190709/20190709_9.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [https://montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2018%20Reports/OLOReport2018\\_8.pdf](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2018%20Reports/OLOReport2018_8.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Several community conversation participants recommended the County use these tools to assess the effects and impacts of future legislation on racial and social inequities in the County and reduce the influence of institutional racism in County outcomes.

***5. Improve access and outcomes for employment, housing, education, criminal justice, transportation, and other policy areas***

There were many calls from participants to evaluate and try to correct disparities in access to resources. Resources frequently mentioned include access to jobs, credit, rental property, education, transportation, parks and recreation, and business development (e.g. access to capital for businesses owned by people of color). Options for expanding access discussed could include recommending the County offer job fairs in the same locations where job training is delivered, evaluating hiring and rental practices in the County to uncover and address discrimination, and offering more community conversation opportunities for populations unable to participate in County-sponsored forums.

***6. Encourage the Board of Education to provide equitable services across the County and to use an inclusive curriculum that better reflects the contributions of Peoples of Color in the U.S.***

There were also many calls from community conversation participants to expand equity and access within Montgomery County Public Schools by encouraging the Board of Education to provide additional resources to high-poverty schools and to hire more teachers of color. Community conversation participants also stressed the need for the school system to better educate all students about the country's and Montgomery County's history of institutional racism, the cumulative effects of systemic and individual racism on opportunities and outcomes today, and the historical contributions of communities of color in the U.S.

## Chapter 5. Suggestions for Future Surveys

This chapter offers OLO suggestions for standardizing data collection and structuring community conversations to generate more useful information to inform action and decision making in the future. These suggestions may be of use to the County's future Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice as they host future racial equity and social justice conversations.<sup>14</sup>

For future surveys, OLO suggests that the County standardize its data collection and collect demographic information on participants. Toward this end, the County should ask the same questions to all participants. Of note, the set of three questions asked in the County sponsored conversations were not the same as the questions posed in private community conversations.

Additionally, OLO recommends the collection of more participant demographic information to understand which groups are represented in community meetings. This should include information on age, gender, race and zip code. The moderator and the scribe should also give demographic information and ensure that demographic information is actually collected.

To remove any biases in soliciting information from community members about what policy areas should be prioritized in County decision-making, future County sponsored community conversation should also consider excluding data presentations featuring education, income, and housing disparities. While data can be useful for forming policy, providing this information before the discussion could have affected participant's responses as they were primed. These three categories were the most frequently mentioned as challenges to achieving equity during the community conversations (along with the criminal justice system), but there is no way to know whether the responses would have been the same without the initial information shared.

Lastly, OLO suggests that County sponsored community conversations spend more time soliciting from participants information about the issues they see in Montgomery County, as well as potential solutions. More specifically, OLO recommends that the County limit data collection to the following questions in the future:

- *From your group's perspective, what are the three top challenges to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County?*
- *What barriers to addressing racial equity and social justice did your group identify? What strategies for addressing barriers did your group identify?*
- *What changes to practices, programs and/or policies did your group recommend to address inequities in the County?*
- *What outcomes would you like to see in the County?*
- *What efforts has your group/organization undertaken to advance racial equity and social justice as a priority? What activities, if any, are envisioned?*
- *Is there anything else that you would like to share about your community conversation?*

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<sup>14</sup> Proposed by the Montgomery County Council on September 17, 2019:

[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2019/20190917/20190917\\_5C.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2019/20190917/20190917_5C.pdf)