

Illinois Racial Equity and Justice Landscape Study



Prepared for Grand Victoria Foundation, Spring 2023

GRAND VICTORIA FOUNDATION



Great Cities Institute

GREAT CITIES

Illinois Racial Equity and Racial Justice Landscape Study

Spring 2023

Project Team

Thea Crum
Katherine Faydash
Adam Slade
Timothy O. Imeokparia, PhD
Kate Albrecht, PhD
Norma Hernandez
James Sullivan

Acknowledgments

The information and findings in this report are directly informed by people across the State of Illinois who are working to advance racial equity and racial justice. They generously shared their time, knowledge, expertise, and personal experiences with the researchers on this project. Many invited their colleagues, neighbors, and friends to participate. This report would not exist without their input. We are tremendously grateful for the contributions of every one of them.

UIC Great Cities Institute (MC 107)
Teresa Córdova, PhD
Director and Professor
College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs
University of Illinois Chicago
412 South Peoria Street, Suite 400
Chicago, Illinois 60607-7067
gcities@uic.edu / greatcities.uic.edu

COVER IMAGE CREDITS: Row 1: HOMEWOOD, by rising thermals; ROCKFORD, by hajee. Row 2: CAIRO, by kevin; KANKAKEE, by rising thermals; DECATUR, by Randy von Liski; PEMBROKE, by stampny. Row 3: CHICAGO WEST SIDE, by Brian Crawford; CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE, by artist mac. Row 4: PEORIA, by Scott McCloud; CHICAGO, by Handel Tejada. Row 5: parade, by rising thermals; PULASKI, by Randy von Liski; URBANA, by Benjamin Esham; College of DuPage, by COD Newsroom. Row 6: CHICAGO, by Ann Fisher; CHICAGO, by Tadias Magazine. All photos from Flickr, Creative Commons licenses.

Contents

From Grand Victoria Foundation	4
Executive Summary	6
Project Overview	8
Conducting the Landscape Study	10
Developing a Perspective on the Landscape	12
Characterizing Racial Equity	14
Recommendations	18
Bolster Racial Equity and Racial Justice Work	19
Redefine Public Sector Involvement	21
Encourage a Focus beyond Chicagoland	23
Acknowledge the Universal Lack of Resources and the Need for Collaboration	25
Shift Grantmaker Expectations to Support Racial Equity	27
Adapt to Community Need	29

From Grand Victoria Foundation

Intentionally addressing the disparities and directing resources towards those who face the greatest challenges creates a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone can thrive. The Illinois Racial Equity & Racial Justice Landscape Study, commissioned by Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF) and executed by UIC's Great Cities Institute (GCI), embodies GVF's resolute mission to deeply understand and advance racial equity and racial justice in Illinois. Through meticulous research, the project identifies communities with 30% or more Black population and locates over 1,500 organizations within these communities. It seeks to understand their challenges and uncover opportunities to amplify the efforts of community-led organizations to achieve their desired equity and justice outcomes. The study goes beyond surface-level analysis to comprehend the complex systems and processes that perpetuate racism in its various forms, from individual to structural, and their profound impacts on Illinois' Black residents.

Rooted in the belief of "Black Abundance," the report also passionately acknowledges the richness of existing, Black-led efforts and strives to translate abstract concepts into tangible practices that drive meaningful change. The study presents strategic recommendations across multiple categories, such as bolster racial equity and racial justice work, redefine public sector involvement, and encourage collaboration and resource allocation beyond Chicagoland. This report, and other strategic deliverables like in-depth profiles of communities like East St. Louis and Pembroke Township, and a community network map lays the strategic groundwork for Grand Victoria Foundation's new approach to racial equity and racial justice - which goes live Fall 2023. We also hope it will serve as a beacon of inspiration for philanthropy, the public sector, and organizations engaged in racial justice work.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all the research participants who generously shared their insights, perspectives, and experiences throughout the Illinois Racial Equity & Racial Justice Landscape Study. Your invaluable contributions have enriched our understanding of the racial equity and racial justice landscape in Illinois and have helped shape the recommendations and findings presented in this report. Your commitment to advancing racial equity and racial justice in your communities is truly inspiring, and we are honored to have had the opportunity to learn from your wisdom and expertise.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to this critical work.

Sharon Bush

President
Grand Victoria Foundation

This page has been left intentionally blank

Executive Summary

Purpose

In June 2022, Grand Victoria Foundation commissioned the Great Cities Institute (GCI) to conduct a landscape study to deepen understanding in the philanthropic and public sectors about:

- The location and the social, economic, and political context and conditions of Black population centers in Illinois
- Existing racial equity and racial justice efforts across the state including the organizations and leaders working on racial equity and racial justice and the relationships between and among them
- Specific recommendations about how to advance racial equity and racial justice statewide and support Black-led and Black-centered work

Research Design

GCI carried out an 8-step mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data about Black population centers in Illinois and the state's racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations. As shown in the project roadmap on page 9, GCI designed all aspects of this research to be adaptive, meaning each step would inform, influence, and enhance all other aspects of the project and permit researchers to groundtruth findings in advance of developing final recommendations. The results include information from 81 "Black population centers" – places in Illinois with a Black population greater than 30% – and 1,572 organizations of various sizes that are part of the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work in Illinois, including 570 that are Black-led, Black-centered, or Black-serving, 143 that build community power directly through organizing and 165 that work at the grassroots level. Appendix A presents the research methodology in full.

Perspective and Analysis

To understand racial equity and racial justice in Illinois, it is essential to approach any analysis intentionally and with appreciation for the work already being done. Racial equity and racial justice work looks different across Illinois. Local history, economic conditions, leadership, and governance all play a role in determining community needs and individuals' and organizations' work to achieve racial equity and racial justice.

Communities encounter several forms of racism: individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural. Throughout this project, understanding and addressing the complex systems and processes that result from racism—and the reverberating effects those can have on their economy, mobility, careers, and more—has been only part of the story. Another part has been understanding and acknowledging the existing good work, assets and types of resources, organizing, milestones and successes, joys and concerns, and community-determined desires for a collective future. This acknowledgment of the richness of existing Black-led efforts and the opportunity to support those efforts in a way that leads to freedom and joy for all is what Grand Victoria Foundation defines as “Black Abundance.”

With this understanding, GCI asked research participants to define or describe their racial equity and Black-centered work themselves rather than starting from a standard definition. We analyzed the definitions and descriptions provided by research participants for themes and identified systems change, community survival and support, workplace operations and culture, storytelling and truth telling, coalition building and activism, and civic engagement as the primary categories of racial equity work. We also asked survey respondents and interviewees to tell us how and why their work is Black-centered. Our analysis of the landscape provides detail on this input from individuals and organizations on pages 14-16 of this report and it was used to inform development of the findings and recommendations.

Findings and Recommendations

Following our analysis of the racial equity and racial justice landscape, GCI concludes this report by offering findings and recommendations for understanding and supporting racial equity and justice work in Illinois. Recommendations fall into six categories. Detailed findings and recommendations can be found on pages 18-29. A select recommendation from each category is shared below.

Bolster Racial Equity and Racial Justice Work

Allow racial equity and racial justice organizations space to reflect and learn from the work they do to refine their approaches internally as an organization and externally with their communities and with other racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations.

Redefine Public Sector Involvement

Encourage government to engage with racial equity and racial justice community groups to provide clarity on which policy and budget decisions they can meaningfully participate in and to repair broken trust and build common understanding.

Encourage a Focus beyond Chicagoland

Use and regularly update the data in this report to inform the public and community organizations about Black population centers outside of Chicago and across Illinois.

Acknowledge the Universal Lack of Resources and the Need for Collaboration

Develop a larger “investing in a racial equity and racial justice ecosystem” strategy that seeks to connect racial equity and racial justice organizations seeking common outcomes to work together in new ways.

Shift Grantmaker Expectations to Support Racial Equity

Encourage longer-term investments with more flexibility and adaptability to realities defined by racial equity and racial justice organizations.

Adapt to Community Need

Adopt innovative shared decision-making and co-creation models with Black communities and other communities of color to transform not just grantmaking organizations and institutions but also Black communities and the nonprofit ecosystem broadly.

We are pleased to share this document, which reflects our understanding of the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work in Illinois. We hope it—along with participant quotes from the interviews and focus groups—can contribute to translating what can seem like abstract concepts into specific practices that drive racial equity and racial justice work.

Project Overview

In June 2022, the Great Cities Institute was commissioned by Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF) to undertake a landscape study of racial equity and racial justice work across Illinois. Landscape studies are important tools for identifying current conditions and highlighting areas of opportunity. In this case, our research team heard directly from people involved in this work to ensure that this study accurately incorporates their voice and expertise.

The overarching goal of this project was to deepen understanding in the philanthropic and public sectors about the location of Black population centers, existing racial equity and racial justice efforts across the state, and to identify concrete recommendations about how to advance racial equity and racial justice statewide and support Black-led and Black-centered work. To achieve that, we researched the existing network of organizations and leaders working in racial equity and racial justice and the relationships among them. We also were interested in learning about places in Illinois where Black people live, work, and play and the organizations that are located in those places. To demonstrate how to understand Black communities more deeply, we developed comprehensive profiles on Pembroke Township and East St. Louis that include history and demographic information, as well as details about active community organizations and leadership. To create these profiles, we visited both locations and met with local leaders. We discussed their experiences, the challenges they face in their work, their hopes for their community, and ways they would like others to see and understand their community.

This report and the recommendations found here represent the culmination of this research. At multiple steps in this process, we groundtruthed our preliminary findings and the information we had gathered with participants. They provided additional insight that helped to shape the definition of a community as a Black population center; the definitions of racial equity work and what it means to be Black-centered; specific organizational relationships in communities and regions; and the types of demographic data collected on communities that appear in community profiles. The process and recommendations that follow incorporate research findings as well as community input from racial equity and racial justice leaders who contributed directly to our understanding for developing these recommendations.

We are pleased to share this document, which reflects our understanding of Black communities and the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work in Illinois. We hope that it can contribute to translating what can seem like abstract concepts into specific practices that further drive racial equity and racial justice work.

Limitations

The sections that follow present our research analysis, findings, and recommendations. It is important to recognize the various limitations of these findings, including time constraints and a larger share of responses from the Chicago area (especially to the survey) than from other parts of the state. In addition, for several reasons, it was not possible to meet with all organizations and individuals working in this field. Moreover, aspects of this research that could have greatly benefited from analysis of public data on voting and civic engagement were hampered by the lack of reliable data about these topics. Limitations of private data in these same areas include that it can be cost prohibitive, incomplete, and the depth of information is determined on the basis of who collects and allows access to it.

Given these limitations, the findings are not exhaustive. Even so, because of the depth of research and information, the wide geography and experiences we were able to reach and learn from, and our commitment to directly reflecting input from the people who contributed to this research, our findings and recommendations can help inform and support decision-making around advancing and accomplishing racial equity and racial justice within and across Illinois.

Project Roadmap

The eight steps of the landscape study, from start to finish. Steps in which we groundtruthed our findings to date with participants are marked by an asterisk.



Conducting the Landscape Study

The landscape study had three primary goals:

- To identify the location and the social, economic, and political context and conditions of Black population centers in Illinois.
- To better understand the existing network of organizations and leaders working on racial equity and racial justice and the relationships between and among them.
- To create analysis and recommendations about how to advance racial equity and racial justice statewide and support Black-led and Black-centered work.

GCI designed a landscape study methodology centered on a mixed-methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative data and information. To achieve the first goal, GCI worked to determine “Black population centers.” We used Census data to determine 81 places in Illinois—municipalities in whole or part and unincorporated areas—that have a Black population greater than 30%. Knowing where these places are, and the organizations doing work there, can provide much-needed information about not just the community but what people there are thinking about, worried about, working and hoping for, and dreaming about.

To achieve the second goal, quantitative data on organizations was collected from GuideStar, a survey distributed to known stakeholders, and internet research into stakeholders in the racial equity and racial justice landscape. Qualitative data and information included survey questions, interviews, and focus group conversations.

To align with the third goal, we designed all aspects of this research to be adaptive, meaning each step would inform, influence, and enhance all other aspects of the project to build and shape a broader and ultimately better understanding of both (a) Black population centers across Illinois and (b) racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations. For detailed information about our methodology, see Appendix A.

Black Population Centers in Illinois

Northeastern	Glenwood	Other Counties	Central	Royal Lakes
Cook County	Harvey	Crete	Champaign*	Sauget*
Bellwood	Hazel Crest	Fairmont	Danville*	Shiloh*
Berkeley	Hillside	Hopkins Park ^{§§}	Decatur*	Washington Park
Blue Island	Homewood	Joliet*	DeKalb*	Venice
Broadview	Justice*	Kankakee*	Normal*	Southern
Burnham	Lansing	North Chicago*	Peoria*	Cairo
Calumet City	Lynwood	Pembroke Township ^{§§}	Rantoul*	Carbondale*
Calumet Park	Markham	Plum Valley	Springfield*	Mound City
Chicago Heights	Matteson	Preston Heights	Urbana*	Mounds
Chicago, North Side	Maywood	Sun River Terrace	East St. Louis Area	Mt. Vernon*
Chicago, South Side	Olympia Fields	Waukegan*	Alton*	Pulaski
Chicago, West Side	Park Forest	Willow Brook [§]	Belleville	Unity
Country Club Hills	Phoenix	Zion	Brooklyn	
Dixmoor	Richton Park	Northern	Cahokia Heights	
Dolton	Riverdale	Freeport*	East St. Louis	
East Hazel Crest	Robbins	Rock Island*	Fairview Heights	
Flossmoor	Sauk Village	Rockford*	Madison	
Ford Heights	South Holland			
Forest Park	University Park			

*At least one Census tract in this place has greater than 30% Black/African American population. [§]Refers to Willow Brook Estates a Census-designated place in Will County on the Indiana border. ^{§§}Pembroke Township contains Hopkins Park.

The Statewide Landscape

Blue dots indicate racial equity and racial justice organizations across Illinois. Numbers in larger population centers indicate clusters of organizations.

1,572

Organizations and groups in the landscape

570

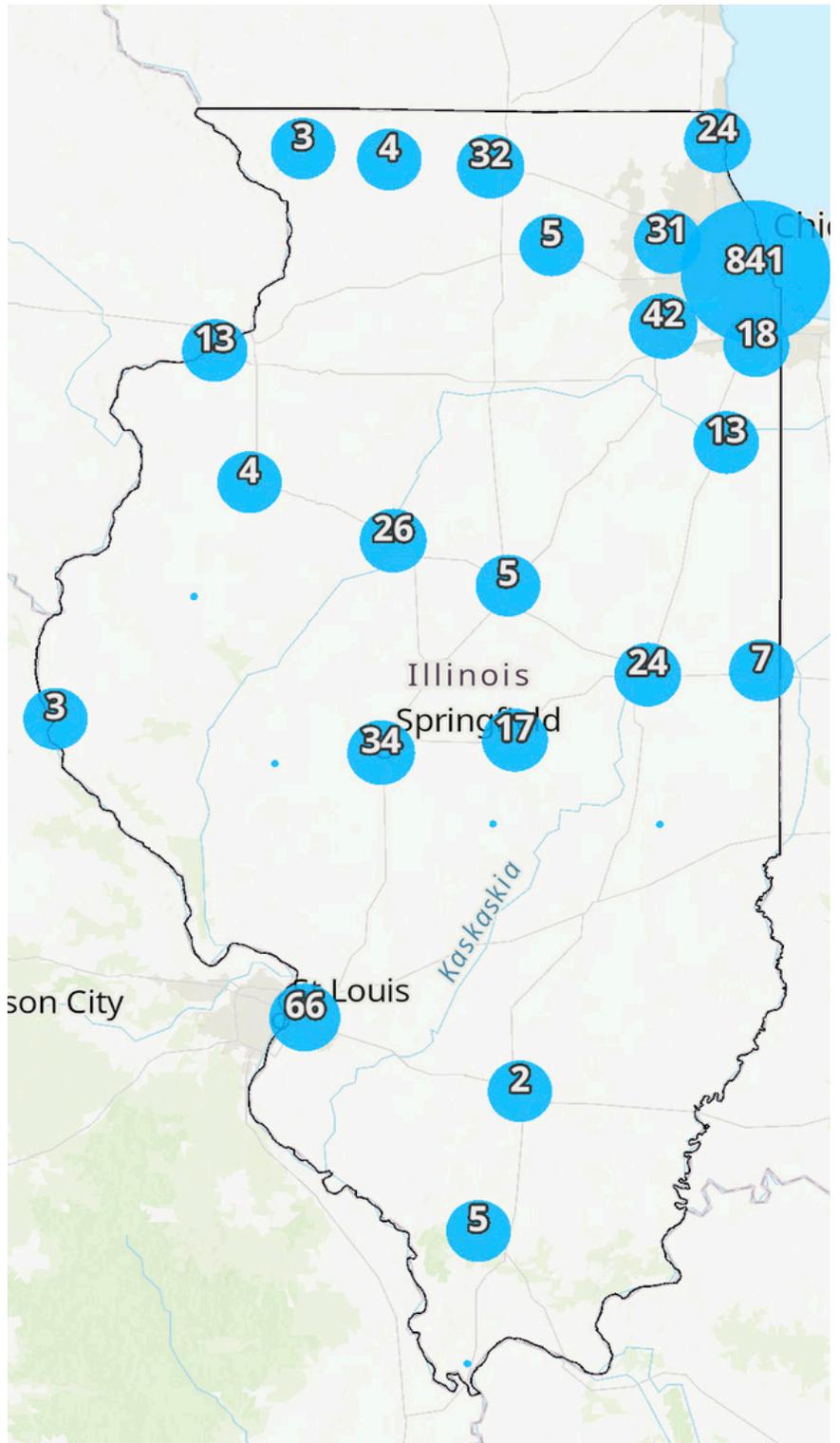
Identified as Black-led, Black-centered, or Black-serving

143

Identified direct community builders¹

165

Identified grassroots groups²



1. Community Builders are organizations that have described or identified their organization's work as organizing, building power, or working on/for rights, equity or justice.
2. Grassroots groups are individuals, groups, coalitions, and/or organizations identified through social media and archival research that are unincorporated and engaged in racial equity and racial justice efforts. This is not the same as grassroots organizations who typically are established and may have 501 (c) 3 tax status or a fiscal sponsor for its work.

Developing a Perspective on the Landscape

Racism is individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural, and it often manifests as a combination of these qualities. Individual racism informs an individual's perception of race as a social construct of worthiness and power. Internal feelings of racial superiority and racial inferiority are expressions of individual racism. Interpersonal racism occurs in social interactions, whether consciously or unconsciously. Institutional racism occurs in an organizational context, including unfair policies and procedures that result in inequitable outcomes for Blacks and other people of color. Structural racism is the summation of all operating forms of racial bias across institutions and society. Individual and institutional behavior often operate synchronously, such as the criminalization of young people in elementary and secondary schools, by which individual bias and institutional policies push Black people into the criminal justice system at a higher rate than White people for the same actions.

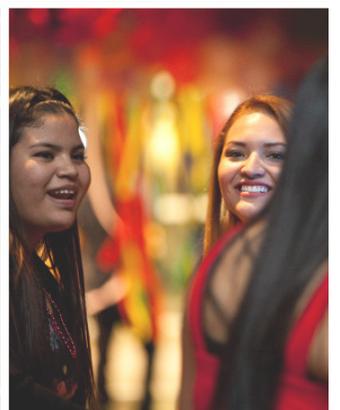
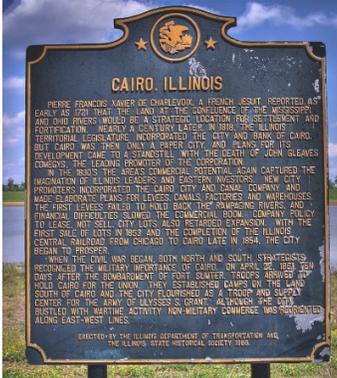
In the face of this, many communities have fought to expand their power and representation—and many have succeeded in doing so. For Black people especially, events of 2020—a global pandemic, police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and a presidential election that necessitated voter engagement—catalyzed a movement to work for and achieve racial equity and racial justice. It made that work urgent for a larger swath of Americans than before.

Many people remain stymied in their efforts and struggle to improve the state and circumstances of the places they live and the people they care about, and society at large. Organizations that provide a social safety net, organize neighbors, influence policy making for good, enhance education, support artistic expression, and any number of other missions also face challenges in supporting the communities they serve. The fact is, whether they live in rural areas or big cities, exurbs or former thriving city centers, whether they are young or old or anywhere in between, the reality is that many Black people face limited choices and engage in a daily struggle simply to survive.

Understanding and addressing the complex systems and processes that limit the choices of Blacks and other people of color—and the reverberating effects those can have on their economy, mobility, careers, and more—is only part of the story. Another part is understanding and acknowledging the existing good work, assets and types of resources, organizing, milestones and successes, joys and concerns, and community-determined desires for a collective future. People are already inspiring and creating change. This acknowledgment of the richness of existing Black-led efforts and the opportunity to support those efforts in a way that leads to freedom and joy for all is what Grand Victoria Foundation defines as “Black Abundance.”

It is essential to approach any analysis of racial equity and racial justice in Illinois intentionally and with appreciation for the work already being done.

Finally, racial equity and racial justice work looks different across Illinois. Local history, economic conditions, leadership, and governance all play a role in how communities work to achieve racial equity and racial justice. Local context always drives community needs and responses.



Row 1: HOMEWOOD, by rising thermals; ROCKFORD, by hajee. Row 2: CAIRO, by k e v i n; KANKAKEE, by rising thermals; DECATUR, by Randy von Liski; PEMBROKE, by stampcny. Row 3: CHICAGO WEST SIDE, by Brian Crawford; CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE, by artist mac. Row 4: PEORIA, by Scott McCloud; CHICAGO, by Hande Tejada. Row 5: parade, by rising thermals; PULASKI, by Randy von Liski; URBANA, by Benjamin Esham; College of DuPage, by COD Newsroom. Row 6: CHICAGO, by Ann Fisher; CHICAGO, by Tadias Magazine. All photos from Flickr, Creative Commons licenses.

Characterizing Racial Equity Work

Each identified community's history of racism experiences, activism, organizing and community-building, and the surrounding political, social and economic systems contextualize their needs and definitions of racial equity work. Therefore, rather than define racial equity solely through academic literature, we asked practitioners and leaders to share how they define their efforts. The sections that follow share how leaders and practitioners define racial equity work and what it means to be Black-led or Black-centered.

Defining Racial Equity in the Landscape

We asked survey respondents and interviewees whether they worked to advance racial equity and, if so, to describe why they categorized their work this way. Focus groups participants engaged in broad conversations about racial equity, defining it, exploring the nuances of the work and the term itself, and analyzing the systems that must be changed for racial equity to be achieved. Across these methods, participants consistently reported that racial equity work is grounded in the most critical issues and needs that are identified and faced by the community or specific population. Racial equity and racial justice work was described across a broad spectrum of fields:

Agriculture	Environment and environmental justice	Legal services
Black culture and Black history	Food sovereignty	Political representation
Civil rights	Gentrification and segregation	Students
Criminal justice and reform	Health	Systems change
Diaspora/Latine	Housing	Voter engagement
Economy and economic development	Immigration	Wealth generation
Education	Indigenous history	Wellness
Employment	Labor and labor rights	Workforce diversity
		Youth

Ninety percent of survey respondents indicated that they worked to advance racial equity, racial justice, or social justice. Most of them also provided one or more definitions or descriptions of how they moved racial equity, racial justice, or social justice work forward. We analyzed the definitions and descriptions provided by survey respondents for themes and identified six overarching categories of racial equity work. Descriptions of racial equity work from conversations with focus group participants and interviewees reiterated and elaborated on these categories.

The six categories we have identified include: systems change, community survival and support, workplace operations and culture, coalition building and activism, storytelling and truth telling, and civic engagement. More specifically, we heard the following definitions and descriptions.

Systems Change

This includes developing new policy for institutions and in local, state and federal government, working to change issue-based systems (e.g., education, legal), and working in electoral campaigns. It also includes work to dismantle systems that do not serve Black people and other people of color and/or hold them back. Responses focused on:

- Systems change, including achieving and instituting policy change; increasing ownership of homes, land, and businesses; generating wealth in the face of institutional barriers such as lending; and achieving food sovereignty and sustainability (98 descriptions)
- Education, especially with youth and children, as a way to further racial equity and racial justice work and because young people are the future; they work in schools and in educational systems for change; and they focus on taking educational attainment to the next level to achieve equity and racial justice (49 descriptions)

Community Survival and Support

Community survival and support is an approach that provides direct services to Black communities and other communities of color facing poverty and disinvestment and raises awareness of issues that Black communities and other communities of color experience with racism. This work also involves, and often depends on, collaboration. Responses focused on:

- Programming that includes, addresses, or contributes to racial equity and racial justice; that provides access to a program, service, or right; and/or directly supports Black community or other communities of color or another organization(s) with funding or other resources (94 descriptions)
- Awareness in the Black community and other communities of color about pressing issues and work to cultivate inclusive leadership on those issues; this includes raising awareness about leadership opportunities, focusing on the incorporation and representation of different experiences and voices; and caring for whole person, including Black wellness and ministry (61 descriptions)
- Collaboration, including through partnerships, identifying new partners and new populations, and incorporating new voices so they can have multiple voices or entry points for approaching an issue (29 descriptions)

Workplace Values and Culture

This includes approaches that addresses transforming workplace operations and values to make them more inclusive, diverse, and racially equitable. Responses focused on:

- Changing workplace values and circumstances to be more racially equitable, cultivating diverse board leadership and organizational leadership, as well as staff diversity; instituting equitable hiring practices such as fair pay; and determining and following racially equitable procurement standards (51 descriptions)
- Using and applying the values and goals of equity, racial justice, racial equity, social justice, and intersectionality as direct lenses for their approach to issues; organizations work through this lens and also internally promote this lens (38 descriptions)

Coalition Building and Activism

This category includes organizing, coalition building, advocacy, and antiracism. This work builds new leaders and power to create equitable and just systems change. Responses focused on:

- Organizing and coalition building to build power, including around labor rights (22 descriptions)
- Advocacy work around racial equity, racial justice, or social justice issues as a primary focus (33 descriptions)
- Advancing antiracism programming and training (10 descriptions)

Storytelling and Truth Telling

These are expressions of history, culture, and change narratives through art, music, oral history, and storytelling, among others. This approach engages in truth telling to shed light on racial injustice. Responses focused on:

- The narrative about how the Black community and other communities of color or specific racial and cultural topics are viewed, whether locally or statewide; this can be tied to helping bringing Black history to light (20 descriptions)
- Black experience or explicitly on Black culture or Black history in their work; encompass or focus explicitly on Indigenous history and culture (13 descriptions)

Civic Engagement

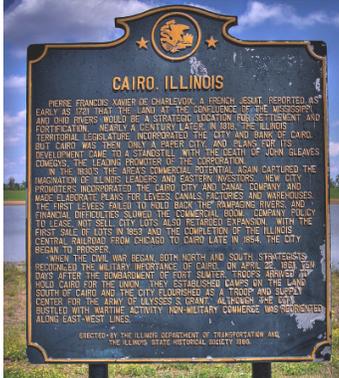
These approaches build civic and political engagement, voter registration, participatory democracy, and combat voter suppression. This approach works to build civic power to create more democratic and equitable political, economic and social systems. Responses focused on increasing civic engagement in order to achieve racial equity and racial justice (11 descriptions)

Defining Black-Centered in the Landscape

We also asked survey respondents and interviewees whether their work was Black-led or Black-centered and, if so, to describe why they categorized their work this way. Many focus group participants discussed their work as Black-centered and offered ideas about furthering Black-centeredness. In different ways, from different sources, and across the state, we heard about Black survival, Black community, hope, and life at the center of racial equity and racial justice.

We heard that work is Black-centered if it...

- Serves Black people of all ages and Black communities at all scales (68 descriptions)
- Happens in a Black workplace and a Black community (40 descriptions)
- Focuses on Black experiences (26 descriptions)
- Engages in work to change a system (24 descriptions)
- Has Black and/or Latine leadership (22 descriptions)
- Closes gaps caused by racial disparity and shifts narratives from the past to the future (16 descriptions)
- Is antiracism work and antiracist (10 descriptions)
- Improves economic conditions for Black places and builds Black community (10 descriptions)
- Builds coalitions and organizes and advocates for change (5 descriptions)



Row 1: HOMEWOOD, by rising thermals; ROCKFORD, by hajee. Row 2: CAIRO, by k e v i n; KANKAKEE, by rising thermals; DECATUR, by Randy von Liski; PEMBROKE, by stampcny. Row 3: CHICAGO WEST SIDE, by Brian Crawford; CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE, by artist mac. Row 4: PEORIA, by Scott McCloud; CHICAGO, by Handel Tejada. Row 5: parade, by rising thermals; PULASKI, by Randy von Liski; URBANA, by Benjamin Esham; College of DuPage, by COD Newsroom. Row 6: CHICAGO, by Ann Fisher; CHICAGO, by Tadias Magazine. All photos from Flickr, Creative Commons licenses.

Recommendations

Having developed a view of the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work occurring across the state, in this section we offer our findings and recommendations for philanthropy, the public sector, and in some cases, organizations working on racial equity and racial justice. These findings and the recommendations draw primarily on input from participants in this research. We recognize them as the experts. The information and experiences they have shared with us, and asked us explicitly to listen to, are reflected here. We hope these recommendations are viewed as a starting point for conversations about racial equity and racial justice in the state and about making Black communities and communities of color, as well as their efforts and organizations, the center of that work.

Each category that follows presents our findings as well as specific recommendations. Some recommendations also feature more specific action items to support the recommendation.

So many of these recommendations cross categories. To make them as easy to think about, explore, and implement as possible, we have used icons to indicate four different pillars that can be considered in leveraging the recommendations. For example, readers interested in convening allies—as presented, for example, in recommendations about statewide discussion forums—then readers can focus on recommendations with the Convening Allies icon.



Convening Allies: Recommendations related to relationship and trust-building opportunities at the local, regional, or state level.



Thought Leadership: Recommendations related to strategies and actions that can help bring about changes in how things are done or existing narratives, including in philanthropy, the public sector, and among organizations.



Funding Innovation: Recommendations specifically related to how philanthropy can fund racial equity and racial justice work differently.



Data Stewardship: Recommendations specifically for Grand Victoria Foundation on sharing the data and information collected and the tools created for this project.

Bolster Racial Equity and Racial Justice Work

Participants offered a variety of ways that racial equity and racial justice work could be supported, whether it is respecting a new way to address challenges in Black communities and in other communities of color, understanding methods and restorative practices, or advocating for systemic change based on informed local communities. The findings and recommendations below draw directly from participant input. The following recommendations are for grantmakers including foundations, corporations and government agencies and elected officials, and racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations.

Findings

- Community members and leaders from Black communities and other communities of color have experienced persistent disinvestment and racism. Some shared a sense of hopelessness regarding being able to eliminate structural racism, and others reported that sense is pervasive for entire Black communities.
- Community members and leaders from Black communities and other communities of color also reported hope and joy. Moments of joy and hope for the future mean celebrating life itself and the victories it offers: young people’s dreams, individuals’ new steps and milestones, accomplished measurable change at any scale, even survival.
- Calls for systems change are loud and clear, as both a first step toward and the ultimate goal of racial equity and racial justice work locally and at the state level.
- Participants discussed wanting more access to policy information and space and time to reflect and strategize about how to bring about change particularly in Black communities.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders and community-serving organizations working for change reported that they want to be listened to and trusted as the experts they are and invited to decision-making tables.
- Participants described centering race and being race explicit as necessary to this work but also that it requires sensitivity, as some perceive or fear—or have experienced—this as pitting Black and Brown people against one another.
- To bring about systems change at any scale, racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations indicated that they are working across sectors to drive policy change and within organizations to improve programs and services offered to the public.
- Many participants reported focusing on education and youth engagement as areas for racial equity work to be built and bolstered both locally (birth to college) and systemically.

“Black and Brown people get pitted against each other all the time and...that impedes progress for both of our communities.”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

When being race explicit in racial equity and racial justice work consider also being explicit that this is not at the exclusion of other groups, which face their own specific challenges in the pursuit of equity and abundance that need to be respected.

Recommendation

Allow racial equity and racial justice organizations space to reflect and learn from the work they do to refine their approaches internally as an organization and externally with their communities and with other racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations to:

- Engage in exploration of what systems change means to their work and how to define it.
- Develop a statewide racial equity agenda(s) inclusive of Black communities and make decisions about moving forward together in new ways that respect local needs and set a path for systems change.
- Come together to reflect on and share their experiences with racism and in advancing racial equity and racial justice, to discuss and create healing spaces, and to celebrate and lift their many successes.

“ We need to be having conversations for one. We need to build people power. ”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

Include a new focus to provide direct funding to nontraditional grantees, such as individual change makers, school districts, youth-led initiatives, parents, libraries, co-operatives, and farms, as well as to traditional nonprofits.

Recommendation

Contribute to shifting existing narratives about rural and urban Black communities and other communities of color by funding training and leadership of youth, community members and grassroots organizations to allow for a larger presence of community power in the nonprofit ecosystem.

Redefine Public Sector Involvement

Participants shared barriers to achieving racial equity and racial justice related to the public sector as well as ways to reimagine a public sector that serves people of color equitably. The findings and recommendations below draw directly from participant input. The following recommendations are for grantmakers including foundations, corporations, and government agencies and local, state, and federal government officials and institutions.

Findings

- Individuals and organizations in Black communities and other communities of color report a severe disconnect between themselves and the public sector agencies or government representatives who are meant to work for them in their community or for the population they serve.
- Leaders and community members from low-income municipalities or rural areas reported that they do not get the services they need due to local and political challenges such as lack of a tax base and inadequate political representation and local governance constraints.
- Many research participants described failures in leadership and representation at the local level as a barrier to greater investments in the Black community and in other communities of color and a hindrance to efforts to achieve racial equity and racial justice. For example, participants described redistricting efforts that undermined community representation to advocate for systems change.
- Many research participants from Black communities and other communities of color reported that they felt the public sector was unreliable due to its notable absence in their community and/or failures in leadership and representation at the local level.
- The GCI research team found a lack of reliable, consistent, and publicly available data on voter turnout rates and civic engagement at the local level and statewide.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders reported needing more knowledge about how to reach, invite, support, and/or get to the decision-making table all of those who can contribute their expertise to policy making.
- Participants reported access to the decision-making table is sometimes blocked by local and state officials, and other larger, competing nonprofits who already hold power, and also by a lack of transparent resources that specify requirements for participation.

Recommendation

Encourage intentionality around the inclusion of Black and other people of color as stakeholders in advocacy activities.

- Develop a confident understanding of who is already at the decision-making table and who should be there.
- Compensate community members—or require that grantees do so—to bring them to the table.
- Fund summits in rural areas disinvested in by the public and private sector to support the Black community and other communities of color and existing stakeholders in identifying leaders and ways to leverage current strengths to bring about change.

“People that are being served need to be represented on decision-making boards and committees.”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

Encourage government to engage with racial equity and racial justice community groups to provide clarity on which policy and budget decisions they can meaningfully participate in and to repair broken trust and build common understanding.

- Invest in racial equity and racial justice based leadership development in Black population centers, either via community directly or government organizations.
- Share or facilitate access to policy makers and government agencies tasked with addressing an organization's particular focus area. Connect existing networks of racial equity and racial justice organizations to those same policy makers and agencies, and ones that are already supporting change.
- Support efforts by individuals and organizations to elevate the voice and decision making power of Black communities in public spending and policy development. An institute devoted to racial equity and racial justice policy is one such possibility to support change making. Spotlighting this more generally as a strategic need is another.
- Invest in radical government transparency, oversight, and accountability by funding watchdog and community groups and/or by funding a partnership between local government and a convening organization to achieve transparency.

Recommendation

Fund efforts to gather data on voter engagement, voter turnout, and civic participation across Illinois at multiple scales so it can be put to use to catalyze changes for racial equity and racial justice and to increase voter engagement and civic engagement.

“ So when you think about the continuum of partners that need to be at a table in order to win [policy change]. Yeah, there are some significant gaps. ”

Research Participant Quote

“ I would say we'd need to shift the political landscape... I think we really have to address the political infrastructure. ”

Research Participant Quote

Encourage a Focus beyond Chicagoland

Participants shared ways to build racial equity and racial justice through increasing visibility of Black population centers outside of Chicago, developing connections among racial equity and racial justice organizations across the state, and sharing information and data. The findings and recommendations below draw directly from participant input. The following recommendations are for grantmakers including foundations, corporations, and government agencies, elected officials, and government institutions.

Findings

- Many Black community members outside of Chicago reported feeling unseen, even completely overlooked especially in terms of political representation, the provision of public services, and the allocation of private and public resources.
- The Illinois racial equity and racial justice landscape shows evidence of multiple hyperlocal, local, and regional networks, and many of these are strongest in the Chicago area.
- The landscape study shows some evidence of a statewide racial equity and racial justice network and statewide partnerships, but they are not well established.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders expressed interest in leveraging their existing networks and developing regional ecosystems.
- Multiple racial equity and racial justice leaders in areas across the state reported a desire to cultivate connections, share experiences, and learn from others who are engaged in racial equity and racial justice work with the purpose of creating a deeper understanding of racial equity and racial justice work and greater local and statewide impact.

“The farthest they come, is Springfield... We don’t see anything, you know...We don’t get any funding.”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

Reject investments in statewide projects or organizations that do not have a statewide lens by adjusting granting terms to ensure true community representation. This can include the following:

- Ask that potential grantees explain local conditions and how their proposal addresses a specific identified need.
- Co-create guidelines to make statewide engagement with similar organizations in key areas of the state a condition for statewide funding. These partner organizations should receive credit and compensation for their added value, knowledge sharing and contribution to the work.
- Consider a formal condition of funding that requires local organizations to conduct on-the-ground or direct engagement with Black communities and other communities of color to co-create and ground truth relevant goals that meet their needs and inform statewide work.

Recommendation

Expand racial equity and racial justice work by creating spaces, physical or virtual, to share practices, celebrate successes, create solidarity, develop new connections, and deepen existing partnerships. Specific ideas include:

- Convene existing racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations in Black population centers to determine whether they see interest or value in being seen or seeing themselves as a network, and if so whether they can develop shared principles or mutual goals.
- Find ways to share visualizations of networks with racial equity and racial justice organizations so they can learn and identify new ways to share resources or to connect with others in new or needed ways.
- Develop a needs-based approach, not a geography-based approach, to connect like-minded racial equity and racial justice organizations and enhance collaboration across sectors and geographical scales.

Recommendation

Use and regularly update the data in this report to inform the public and community organizations about Black population centers outside of Chicago and across Illinois.

- Provide data to Black community leaders and organizations so they can see how their experience is reflected in other public data, and in comparison to other communities.
- Publicize information about identified Black population centers to raise awareness and encourage racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations to make connections and to know where to look to find partnerships and alliances.
- Raise the visibility of Black population centers and racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations outside of Chicago to build an awareness of shared need, issues, and successes and to foster resource development and grant allocations for racial equity and racial justice work.
- Relieve the burden nonprofits experience in accessing knowledge gained, data, and tools, or help them close a gap in resources, by openly sharing those and publicizing their availability.
- Provide funding to combine public data with community stakeholder input to establish a baseline of need.
- Convene racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations to determine other types of tools that exist or could be developed and can be of benefit to both them and to grantmakers. For example, additional education, housing, or economic data; use of existing data to develop community or issue-based indexes; enhancement of data collected for Black population centers with more or different organizations and leaders.

“ And why are these partnerships important because they all are. They could help catalyze and accelerate our policy agenda and our power building efforts. ”

Research Participant Quote

Acknowledge the Universal Lack of Resources and the Need for Collaboration

Participants universally expressed the need for philanthropy to recognize the uncomfortable reality that the primary challenge facing racial equity and racial justice organizations is a lack of financial resources, including to ensure their survival. The findings below reflect organizational needs identified by participants in focus groups as well as in conversation in one-on-one interviews. The following recommendations are for grantmakers including foundations, corporations, and government agencies.

Findings

- Participants consistently discussed the grave lack of financial resources available to meet need as their most significant obstacle. In some cases, designated funds are not reaching organizations.
- Many organizations working in Black communities and other communities of color dealing with extreme poverty and historic disinvestment report not having enough resources or staffing to focus on systems change work because they must first ensure that basic needs are met in the community.
- The racial equity and racial justice and Black-centered organizations that serve Black communities and other communities of color know what they need. Having to prove their knowledge or spending the time, energy and resources to make the case to receive funding detracts from the work when resources are so scarce.
- In the midst of scarce resources, racial equity and racial justice leaders report there is competition and relationship hoarding that occurs to protect the limited funding available.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders shared that, as a result of competition for resources, innovative ideas are seen as a commodity to be protected instead of scaled, and potential lessons learned about effective practice remain solely with program managers and participants.
- Participants reported a perception that grantmakers are not aware of racial equity and racial justice leaders and have difficult connecting with organizations engaged in the work. Similarly, participants reported challenges connecting with and engaging with a variety of grantmakers.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders reported that they have difficulties reaching members of their own communities and other racial equity and racial justice leaders at different organizations to share about programming and outreach.
- Some Black community members reported their communities have no communications platform or media, like a local newspaper or newsletter, creating a significant barrier to community building.
- Participants described frayed community connections and lack of communication infrastructure and expressed a desire for community gathering spaces, access to property ownership or leasing, and the ability of statewide programs to truly reach across the state.

“ We are constantly living aspirationally, practically day-to-day. You know, we’re moving with great hope. But you know, constantly triaging what’s happening. ”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

Fund trusted organizations (e.g., university extension offices, libraries, community colleges) specifically to assist in communications and outreach about racial equity and racial justice programs, services, events, and campaigns and ways to become involved in communities.

Recommendation

Develop a larger “investing in a racial equity and racial justice ecosystem” strategy that seeks to connect racial equity and racial justice organizations seeking common outcomes to work together in new ways. Some potential ideas identified:

Coalition Learning

- Connect grassroots leaders and groups to more established organizations as mentors and to avoid compartmentalization of available resources. Fund organizations for their mentorship services.
- Fund and generally support regional convenings to build trust among racial equity and racial justice organizations, facilitate mergers, encourage organizations to see how they can come together, and cut out competition and ill will across some organizations.

New Funding Models

- Invest in clusters of partners or team building within partnerships and among similarly oriented racial equity and racial justice organizations.
- Create financial incentives for racial equity and racial justice organizations to come together to explore, collaborate, and co-create in their work, in their organization’s theory of change, and in shared decision-making models.
- Ensure that grant funding involves sufficient resources for an organization to support its mission and to engage in partnerships, collaborative work, resource sharing, and network building as desired.
- Consider new types of funding to ensure a connection between resources and community impact. Specific examples proposed by participants included community-managed funds, community-determined strategic planning, or coworking spaces to leverage organizational resources and staffing.
- Determine new ways to fund coalitions, outside the convener-participant or community organization intermediary model, to eliminate gatekeeping and to encourage connectedness with program officers in the advocacy ecosystem.

Civic Infrastructure

- Invest in identifying and supporting civic infrastructure where community gatherings and convening spaces can occur, such as public libraries, public universities, public schools, and park fieldhouses.
- Invest in physical spaces for gathering or coworking, real estate, cooperatives, and other assets that allow organizations and communities to pool their resources and avoid duplication of work.
- Consider direct investments in building and enhancing community and nonprofit communication mediums or platforms.

Recommendation

Cultivate collaboration within the philanthropic community.

- Facilitate raising awareness among grantmakers about community needs and challenges through site visits or community-built resource-sharing initiatives.
- Convene grantmakers to discuss the impacts of past investments as a first step toward trust building.
- Develop a strategy to convene and guide investments in collaboration with other funding organizations within the philanthropic community with a focus on racial equity and racial justice.

Shift Grantmaker Expectations to Support Racial Justice

Participants reported how expectations of philanthropic organizations and the public sector can hamper the growth of racial equity and racial justice work including short-term grant cycles and not being included in community resource decision-making. The findings and recommendations below draw directly from participant input. The following recommendations are for grantmakers including foundations, corporations, and government agencies.

Findings

- Participants from racial equity and racial justice organizations of all sizes reported perceiving that philanthropic organizations and public sector actors had unrealistic expectations of the impact and outcomes possible within most funding constraints (i.e. short-term grant cycles and not sufficient funding). In addition, many participants reported that metrics were not grounded in community context or specific Black and other people of colors' cultural and racial experiences.
- Participants shared internal changes in grant requirements for some funders, such as that organizations must focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to receive funding, need staffing and resources to accomplish, limiting which organizations can meet the requirement. They reported that this results in organizations that have a history of doing racial equity and racial justice work not receiving funding.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders reported they felt left out of community resource decision-making because they do not see grantmakers engage the Black community or other communities of color.
- Participants shared a broad lack of trust in grantmakers, which is exacerbated when they do not see grantmakers work to establish trust before arriving in a community or organization or do not appear to understand or prioritize local circumstances.
- Participants reported feeling forced to focus on short-term wins at the expense of long-term vision and systems change work because of short-term funding cycles of one to three years.

“ I think people need to trust community; trust Black people. I think that there needs to be more Black people in spaces and tables. ”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

Invest in the grantmaker/grantee relationship in new ways.

- Establish a relationship-building protocol with grantees to build trust with organization staff, learn about local conditions and co-create expectations (including the possibility that an organization may not be funded at all), and maintain a working relationship with them in any case to allow for flexibility and learning through the process.
- Provide reporting standards that allow for a racial equity and racial justice organization to document learning in a way that is helpful for them moving forward.

Recommendation

Encourage longer-term investments with more flexibility and adaptability to realities defined by racial equity and racial justice organizations.

- Establish funding for convening organizations and local community organizations to define and implement long-term systems change and racial equity and racial justice work, giving them the space to take a long-term view and not solely seek more immediate metrics or outcomes.
- Fund roles within organizations to allow for a focus beyond crisis mode and to foment systems change and racial equity and racial justice work.

Recommendation

Ask racial equity and racial justice organizations and Black communities and other communities of color about how they define success and allow for those definitions to have an effect in grant applications.

Recommendation

Work with racial equity and racial justice organizations to co-create dynamic metrics and adjust grant requirements accordingly. Create the space for the tracking of programs and projects that value organizational learning, community insights and emergent outcomes with grantmaking organizations and institutions and/or other community organizations.

Recommendation

Ask for grassroots and organizational input on which areas should be considered high priority for funding for Black communities and other communities of color and racial equity and racial justice work.

Recommendation

Determine whether there is a shared understanding of systems change work or propose one for widespread adoption.

Recommendation

Work with boards of grantmaking organizations (and community organizations) to develop approaches for diverse board recruitment, composition, retention and organizational leadership that is funded. Provide guidance on board engagement for grantees when the need to address racial equity issues arises.

“It’s one thing to be invited into the conversation. But then there’s also the trust building factor in terms of knowing that if we’re invited to participate or collaborate.”

Research Participant Quote

Adapt to Community Need

Participants reported ways in which internal processes of grantmaking organizations and institutions created challenges to furthering racial equity and racial justice work as well as ways these organizations can develop more flexibility, accountability processes, and co-creative models that are more responsive to the needs of communities of color. The findings and recommendations below draw directly from participant input. The following recommendations are for grantmakers including foundations, corporations, and government agencies.

Findings

- Participants reported they believe it is hard for grantmakers and organizations to spend time examining their institutions' assumptions or racial biases, or to be nimble in meaningfully shifting to a new focus, especially after they have set an agenda.
- Racial equity and racial justice leaders reported it takes a long time for community organizations to respond to shifts in funding agendas, and some perceive grantmakers as acting on a whim or following a trend.
- Participants reported a desire for creating co-learning relationships that can reduce time needed for adaptation efforts created by funding agenda shifts.
- Participants from racial equity and racial justice organizations that provide direct services vehemently expressed that racial equity and racial justice work was part of a shift in grantmaker focus and reported that they are not given additional funding for racial equity and racial justice work creating a cost barrier for implementation.

“If there’s any hesitancy I have in us doing it [racial equity work] it is ensuring we have the capacity to do it, not just one and done. It is work that needs its own significant investment to keep.”

Research Participant Quote

Recommendation

Establish a process to check grantmaker organization and institution’s racial assumptions or biases. Being in relationship with grantees and present in the public conversation allows for grant-makers to learn and adapt.

Recommendation

Create a mechanism for grantmaking focus to shift, being nimble and acknowledging when a previous investment potentially was “wrong” or caused harm. The learning organization allows past mistakes to inform improvements for the future.

Recommendation

Rethink the role and institutional narrative of program officer to one of philanthropic partner and facilitator. The program officer can help assist and/or guide the racial equity and racial justice organization or Black community or other community of color to achieve its goals by providing support in the form of tools and process guidance based on the shared understanding of the work .

Recommendation

Adopt innovative shared decision-making and co-creation models with Black communities and other communities of color to transform not just grantmaking organizations and institutions but also Black communities and the nonprofit ecosystem broadly.

Appendix A

Step 1: Define and Identify Black Population Centers. Black population centers are municipalities, census tracts in municipalities, and unincorporated areas with Black/African American population of 30% or more, by the 2020 US Census. The 30% threshold was determined with Grand Victoria Foundation. To confirm the threshold, we looked at ranges between 15% and 45% but with low total population fluctuation in this analysis, we continued with 30% as a threshold. There were two steps to identify centers. First, Census-designated places at the 30% threshold were identified. Next, individual census tracts were analyzed to ensure the incorporation of municipalities with significant Black/African American population and unincorporated areas. We identified 81 Black population centers.

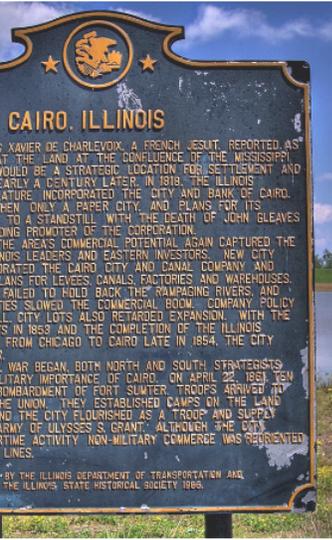
Step 2: Data Collection and Analysis. To begin to understand the landscape of organizations, leaders, and Black population centers, and place, history, and context, we analyzed American Community Survey data. We also analyzed IRS Form 990 data for tax-exempt organizations (from GuideStar). We downloaded this for all tax-exempt organizations in Illinois in scope (over 10,000), then filtered and analyzed by type of organization and services provided to narrow to approximately 2,200 organizations (used for survey distribution). Criteria for inclusion were organizations that (1) are led by, centering, or serving Black, Latine, Indigenous, Asian, and other People of Color or located in a Black Population Center; (2) report serving racial or ethnic populations to the IRS; (3) are likely to be engaged in racial equity and/or racial justice based on reported subject areas and IRS NTEE codes (agriculture, arts and culture, community and economic development, education, environment, health, human services, information and communication, public safety, religion, social justice, sports and recreation). Using IRS data to identify landscape organizations and leaders has limitations: it does not capture unincorporated organizations, for example. We supplemented the IRS data with in-depth social media and internet research to find an additional 264 organizations and leaders.

Step 3: Online Survey. The survey gathered information on Illinois organizations to deepen understanding of the networks among organizations. The survey collected information about a leader or organization's work or programs; population served; whether the organization is Black centered and, if so, how; descriptions of work to advance racial justice, racial equity, or social justice; definitions and names of local, regional, and statewide partners; the greatest need and obstacles in the local community; demographic information; and recommendations for others to include in the scan. The survey was sent to 2,136 email addresses statewide, including leaders, organizations, and elected officials. We received 314 responses (response rate ~15%).

Step 4: One-on-One Interviews. Interviews were designed to learn about the programs the organization or leader works on and dig deep into questions around partnerships and thriving community. Invitees had expressed interest in participating on the survey, were recommended to us by Grand Victoria Foundation, and were identified through research and referrals. We conducted 21 interviews. Participants were given the option to conduct interviews in-person or virtually. Each interview used a narrative inquiry approach, with semistructured questions, and lasted approximately one hour.

Step 5: Focus Groups. Focus groups allowed for exposure to discussion of multiple perspectives around a common issue to hear divergent viewpoints. The format was helpful in determining what, if any, themes and similar ideas exist across the state among leaders. Discussions arose among participants from across Illinois about what it looks like for communities to thrive and how to fuel racial equity and racial justice work, as well as Black abundance. In addition, facilitators shared a draft community profile of a Black population center to groundtruth and receive feedback on the data presented, utility, and format. Ten focus groups were conducted with 67 participants across the state. We conducted eight focus groups virtually and two in-person, including one in East St. Louis and one in Pembroke Township, Kankakee County.

Step 6: Analysis. Data analysis was on-going throughout the research process. Open ended survey responses were cleaned and coded. Survey data on partners was cleaned, geocoded, coded and analyzed through network analysis. Interviews were transcribed, cleaned, coded using inductive coding, and analyzed for themes. Focus groups were transcribed and analyzed for themes. We analyzed themes surveys, interviews and focus groups for repetition and for reinforcing ideas to select the findings and recommendations to share in this report.



Illinois Racial Equity and Justice Landscape Study



Prepared for Grand Victoria Foundation, Spring 2023

GRAND VICTORIA FOUNDATION



Great Cities Institute