



Office on African American Affairs Info and Input Session 2 Dialogue Report

Executive Summary

In partnership with organizers from the Office on African American Affairs (OAAA), the Zeidler Center for Public Discussion hosted small group listening circles for the second information and input session concerning African American workforce development on May 18th, 2016. The following report documents the participant responses within these circles. For the May 18th input session on African American workforce development, Zeidler facilitators asked participants the following questions:

- 1.) In your working career, what is one key thing (outside of yourself) that has helped you get to where you are? (Examples: mentors, events, programs, role models, etc.)
- 2.) Based on your response to Question 1, what is one thing that you think OAAA could do better to bolster employment in the AA community or strengthen the AA workforce?
- 3.) What are your concerns as OAAA develops a comprehensive WFD strategy? What needs to be included to make it effective?

Working Career Development: In response to the first question, participants identified sources of support and inspiration that had positively impacted their working careers. A considerable number of participants identified networking and community support as an important factor in their present success. *“I had a supportive community whose members were dedicated to helping each other out,”* said one participant. *“My church and family connected me with people through networking.”*

In addition to community support and networking, a number of participants also described how former supervisors and general workplace experiences had made a positive impact on their professional development. A number of these participants described how the caring and understanding nature of former supervisors allowed them to succeed in the workplace and beyond: *“My first boss was what inspired me to be who and what I am today,”* said one participant.

Participants also identified education, family, faith, criminal rehabilitation, and internet resources as helpful in their working careers.

OAAA’s Role in Bolstering AA Employment: In response to the second question, participants shared their perspectives on how OAAA can support Milwaukee’s African American workforce. The most popular response category for this question was “Training & Education.” Within this theme, some participants specifically identified improved rates of adult literacy as a significant need among the African American workforce: *“In order to become employable, there has to be a push for adult literacy,”* said one participant. *“I’ve noticed that we’re focusing on children. I used to work in a literacy center. There were a lot of people from different countries, but relatively few African Americans. There’s a certain sense of shame. We need to be supportive and preserve confidentiality.”*

A number of participants also identified effective planning as necessary for OAAA’s success: *“Planning is the key,”* said one participant. *“Strategic planning specifically is essential in setting up and implementing a program such as the OAAA wants to institute.”*

Other popular themes within the small group responses for the second question include partnerships/collaboration; establishing one or more accessible resource centers; comprehensive programming and practical support (including transportation provisions); community development; ensuring job placement; youth outreach and mentorship; and strong OAAA leadership.

Within the “Misc.” category, a participant suggested a program to expunge certain criminal records in an effort to improve offender employability.

Concerns about OAAA Strategy: In response to the third question, participants shared their concerns and suggestions regarding OAAA’s workforce development program.

The most popular category of concern was a concern about potential ineffectiveness of OAAA programming. *“My concern is it turning into another program that doesn’t work,”* said one participant. *“They are talking about creating collaborative structures and collective impact. They are not working. OAAA needs to be having hard and fast outcomes in order for it to be effective.”* Other responses within this category discuss participant’s fears that OAAA will be unable to succeed in its goals due to county politics.

When participants shared their suggested needs for OAAA development, the most popular response categories were effective staffing and continued community outreach. One participant’s response powerfully ties both categories: *“We need to meet people where they are and how we do that is by hiring people from the community to be on staff.”* In addition to staffing and community research suggestions, participants identified their desires to see inter-organizational collaboration and specified programming for special populations (i.e. individuals with disabilities or criminal records). A number of participants expressed a desire for OAAA to recognize and utilize the achievements of existing organizations in order to avoid “re-inventing the wheel.”

Within the “Misc.” category, participants discussed the need for transformational change, the need for people of color in powerful positions to help other minorities, frustration with OAAA’s current state of funding, and the need for public transportation that is connected to suburban workplaces.

Participant Feedback: Of the participants who completed feedback forms, the majority suggested that OAAA focus its efforts on the issue of education (27 votes). The next two most popular issues of interest were criminal justice reform followed by economic development and employment (22 and 24 votes, respectively).

When asked to identify the most beneficial part of the discussion, most participants said that they enjoyed sharing ideas and perspectives. A number of participants wrote that they enjoyed connecting with other group participants. One participant said that they *“truly appreciated the opportunity to connect with and hear from others through the breakout groups.”*

When asked what questions or concerns they were leaving with, most participants expressed that they were uncertain about the future development of OAAA (next steps, staffing, and ability to produce concrete results). *“What will really happen,”* a participant asked. An additional number of participants expressed concerns and questions about future community involvement.

When asked what OAAA should do to keep them engaged, the vast majority of participants suggested that OAAA continue to reach out to Milwaukee’s African American communities through methods such as email notifications, newspaper advertisements, newsletters, and email notification. Several participants provided their contact information. Other participants stated that OAAA should take authentic action to keep them engaged. *“No lies. No idle talk. Work for the real goal of Milwaukee people,”* one participant responded.

Facilitation Method

The Zeidler Center facilitated these listening circles on African American workforce development in Milwaukee using the Reflective Structured Dialogue method, which invites small groups of individuals to discuss personal experiences, values, and uncertainties in structured and facilitated conversations. The specific focus of this method is to encourage greater trust and to create a platform for mutual understanding. Participants experience both structured and unstructured portions of dialogue.

During the structured portion, each participant is given the same amount of time to speak without interruption. After each speaker, there is a short pause of silence so that all may reflect upon the speaker's response. The following communication agreements were used to facilitate the small group discussions:

Proposed Agreements for Communication

1. We will speak for ourselves, from our personal experiences.
2. We will share airtime and not interrupt others.
3. We will "pass" or "pass for now" if we're not ready to respond to a question.
4. If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor that request.

Small Group Participant Responses

Question 1: In your working career, what is one key thing (outside of yourself) that has helped you get to where you are? (Examples: mentors, events, programs, role models, etc.)

Networking & Community Support

- Mentoring and connections was huge for me. A lot of it is who you know in Milwaukee.
- I think young folks need mentoring and role models.
- I took the time to make connections with people and built off these relationships.
- In my teen years there are many people who saw potential in me. These people had influential stakes and put me in places to grow. Family, uncles and colleagues, they all enabled in me talent and potential.
- I had a supportive community whose members were dedicated to helping each other out. My church and family connected me with people through networking.
- I had a community that cared about my academic performance and well-being. I also had community programs to guide me to areas of interest.
- My exposure to grassroots organizing in the community. I've always been involved with social service community
- Access to people who are "in the know"; who have specific knowledge of what choices to make to arrive at career goals. Knowing who the "Gate Keepers" are in particular career fields and areas of knowledge.
- The high expectations of others (family and friends), constantly pushing me to the next level of achievement.

Workplace Support & Motivation

- My first supervisor was a mentor, an example, and friend. She provided me the space to become who I was to become with guidance and the willingness to understand that I was in school and had a family. She was firm but fair in her expectations of the nature and scope of what I was there to do.
- My first boss was what inspired me to be who and what I am today. I have a Ph.D. in education and I am currently a C.E.O. of my own Business and Management Consulting agency. My first boss provided me with a sense of direction. I was exposed to the concepts and practices of Dale Carnegie and Zig Ziglar and other luminaries in their field. In addition, he encouraged me to continue my formal and informal life-long educational process.
- I learned a lot from my old boss. They really gave me a different perspective on work styles.
- Working in the caregiver position for many years. Sharing my knowledge of housekeeping and mothering skills to young mothers
- We have to adjust our mindset to work with white people. My success came from being able to adjust. I was the only African American on the job. Being able to adjust as a black female supervisor in an all-white environment is what helped me get to where I was in my working career.
- Military experience helped me succeed in my working career.
- In my first job, my clients were men and women who were recovering drug and alcohol abusers. I did more than counsel them. I helped quite a few of my clients to turn their lives completely around and become "whole" again.
- Opportunities that place on me the demand to expand my skill-set and push the boundaries of my own knowledge.

Community Mentorship

- Role models. They taught me how to manage public speaking opportunities with valuable connections to maximize impact.
- I had key mentors.
- A caring, sympathetic and understanding white Republican shared his white privilege with me and took me under his wing.
- Working with and mentoring the youth in my church and community.
- Coaching and guidance from experienced elders. People believing in me. Nice, encouraging people, helping and providing guidance
- Working with and mentoring the youth in my church and community.

Family Support

- I had a supportive family structure.
- I had the support of family. They created the foundation to achieve what I wanted all in order to serve others – to grow and push forward. My faith was strong, as well.
- I learned a lot from my mother. She had true pride and integrity and passed that on to me. Also, I learned from the church.
- My mother and current pastor helped me.
- My faith and my family always taught me that if I was blessed to give back, then I should. In my position now, if I see the need then I need to do something about it.
- Family support with me being a single mother. My family provided the childcare while I finished my education and in the early years of my working in the workforce.

Education

- What helped me was my educational background.
- Educational Scholarships. Having a broad base of connections for information and real-world knowledge (the participant mentioned this last point was especially important).

Misc.

- I had internet resources to help guide me.
- Crawling out of the challenges of life makes me hungry for more.
- A few years back I gave my life to Christ. Now I am a pastor here at Community of Grace Church
- To some people there 2 Milwaukee's. So they do recreational things to forget where they are from. We also have individuals running around out of control. There's something here in the city for anybody who want to pursue it if you choose.
- In my opinion I haven't become successful. I've made achievements as a part of my past successes, but I'm far from achieving my goals.

Question 2: Based on your response to Question 1, what is one thing that you think OAAA could do better to bolster employment in the AA community or strengthen the AA workforce?

Effective Planning & Partnerships

- Planning is the key, strategic planning specifically is essential in setting up and implementing a program such as the OAAA wants to institute.
- We need to have a research team to find out the impediments and have people present to stand by and see that it happens. They need to ask why people are not getting jobs.
- We need to take an assets based approach and using that to build programs.
- Feasibility studies (in regards to public impact) should be conducted prior to committing to funding existing proposals in local government (example: “How will the proposed changes to the Transit System effect people in areas with high unemployment in the effort to find and keep a job?”). A common sense approach is needed in regards to how cuts to libraries and schools will affect the future employability of people in the hardest hit areas of the city.

Partnerships/Collaboration

- Partnerships with other agencies; collaboration.
- Collaboration is another component that is crucial. True collaboration is and will be reflective of effective communication.

Training & Education

- Not just “Job Training” but actual Vocational Development.
- OAAA should provide education on employment etiquette and speech protocols, even more-so than “employment” (as in unskilled labor jobs).
- In order to become employable, there has to be a push for adult literacy. I’ve noticed that we’re focusing on children. I used to work in a literacy center. There were a lot of people from different countries, but relatively few African Americans. There’s a certain sense of shame. We need to be supportive and preserve confidentiality.
- We need instructions and resources in layman’s terms. We need to ask how OAAA can make information more accessible to current literacy levels in the African American communities.
- Grants for those who were incarcerated on drug charges and are now ineligible for funding to educate themselves which would lead to employment.
- We need training and training opportunities for those without funds. People without a high school diploma need an opportunity to earn their GED, and these programs need to be close to home.
- There needs to be training around the values of keeping a job. A lot of programs are court ordered, but teaching values like problem solving in a job can help people before they become in the court system.
- Job Readiness, Soft Skills.

Establishing Resource Centers

- I think there is a need for a resource center, where people can be trained on job readiness
- A lot of the time people don’t know about programs. There has to be an awareness of who these people are and what they do so they can be in the process of obtaining a job.
- A lot of people lack connections to mentors or groups that will move them forward. They are missing valuable input that can make them successful.

- We need more resources available in African American communities so that they are a walkable distance.

Comprehensive Programming & Practical Support

- A focus on the whole person must be a part of any initiative of this sort. The caring must be genuine and the assistance provided must be customized and real.
- Provide transportation to work.
- People need homes to lie their heads down first. And then we need to provide transportation to get to training and jobs.
- One-on-one case management and follow-up accountability in case management (success rates, placement rates).

Community Development

- We need to establish welcoming communities so that individuals do not just give up.
- Rebuild a sense of community in our neighborhoods.
- There need to be a campaign to make work sound desirable. A lot of people just don't see work in a positive light. It should be seen in a much better light publicly.
- A lot of people are not interested in getting a job. They are just not interested in education at all.
- Learning the possible paths to success after High School. There needs to be ongoing mentoring on the current reality of the working world.

Youth Outreach & Mentorship

- It starts with kids having first jobs at a young age. Keeping kids in school is important. First [youth] jobs keep kids from wanting to deal drugs and do illegal activities for money. My first job kept me focused.
- Mentorship.
- Young people need guidance in order to learn that having an attitude of service and a healthy work ethic is not the same as “servility”.
- Learning the possible paths to success after High School. There needs to be ongoing mentoring on the current reality of the working world.

Ensuring Job Placement

- Help find employment for persons with disabilities on different levels.
- Hold companies and employers accountable for the employment of those eligible and able bodied.
- Give people a job that has nothing to do with training. Let them cut the grass in parks. It doesn't have to be fancy. Teach them how to work.
- We need to make sure certification is linked directly to certain employment opportunities.
- We need to figure out how to create jobs in the African American communities again – especially in the 53206 zip code.
- Nothing will be effective until we get family supporting jobs. We need to bring in community development, industry and whatever is necessary to bring in family supporting jobs.

Strong Leadership

- The person who has administrative oversight of the office (local government) needs to have a great deal of respect for and understanding of the role of the director of the office.

- I believe that the direct supervisors or program directors must be tolerant and patient in their approach to teaching and setting an example for the clients they are going to be serving, mentoring, and assisting to become proficient in whatever field they choose.
- Interpersonal skills from all involved and strong and capable leadership is of paramount importance.

Misc.

- I would like to see more opportunities for non-violent offenders to have their records expunged as well.

Question 3: What are your concerns as OAAA develops a comprehensive WFD strategy? What needs to be included to make it effective?

Concerns about Ineffectiveness

- My concern is it turning into another program that doesn't work. They are talking about creating collaborative structures and collective impact. They are not working. OAAA needs to be having hard and fast outcomes in order for it to be effective.
- My concern is that there is going to be a study. We know what the problems are. No study is needed. To make it effective somebody has to do something.
- The question should be not what needs to be included but what needs to be removed. In viewing this report [document distributed by representatives of Milwaukee County at the beginning of session] it appears, in my estimation that the office has bitten off more than they can chew.
- No "token" programs that make good photo-ops but don't accomplish anything substantial.
- OAAA was created as "political football" then de-funded immediately after the election. Measures have already been taken (such as requiring 100% consensus approval on directorship by the County Board) which will ensure that the office fails. The County Board has systematically worked against the office's ability to function effectively.
- The over-arching recommendations written in the report defy the basic concept of the office and suggest that the Board is making it impossible for the office to be functional.
- They know what to do. They paperwork it. They go home to their families, and nothing ever gets done.
- I would ask that this office create definite and achievable goals that separate lofty ideas from concrete goals.

Need for Effective Staffing

- I want the office to attract affordable talent – people who are local and familiar with the city, its organizations, and the services already available.
- I go back to my focus on leadership which is certainly a key component. The new leader of this organization cannot do "on the job training." They have to come with the proper skill set to hit the ground running. Lastly there must be a sense of urgency prior to and after the OAAA is established and that should be a part of any vision or mission statement and part of the established culture of the entire organization.
- We need to meet people where they are and how we do that is by hiring people from the community to be on staff.
- If this is a true OAAA, it needs to be that in every aspect. The office needs qualified African Americans who have a proven track record, from the community, and care for the community. Politics should not be involved at all.
- We don't have strong leaders any more like Dr. King. They [those placed in charge/power over the OAAA] need to lead.

Need for Continued Community Outreach

- There is a problem with getting the word out in general.
- I would like OAAA to keep the community informed and continue gathering community input. It should research what similar organizations have done and avoid reinventing the wheel. It should transfer knowledge from what has been done before.
- OAAA needs to know African American areas so they can effectively canvas – especially in 53206. They also need to keep including residents in the development process.

- I think OAAA needs to approach those who are actually working and find out what they need as individuals, families, and communities.
- We need a collective impact, and this definition needs to be provided for people. It is a specific approach, and if the definition is not clear to the community, then it can be detrimental. There also needs to be more engagement.
- Everyone works towards common goal.
- Include the whole 53206 community, not just high-profile areas like Harambee and Walnut Way.

Need for Inter-Organizational Collaboration

- Collaboration with the religious community, running rebels, Table of the Saints.
- Where are the other organizations in this such as NAACP, Milwaukee Urban League, and Common Ground?
- Fully fund existing programs before creating new ones. Make sure policies are effectively serving the needs of the community.
- Important not to replicate other programs (like Big Step and other jobs initiatives) County needs to audit existing programs.

Need for Specified Programming for Special Populations

- Do better establishing benefits for AA with disabilities.
- I would like to see more opportunities for non-violent offenders to have their records expunged. I think with more programs like that there will be more opportunities to get people off of the streets. Perhaps even a safe haven for prostitutes and hustlers could be created.

Misc.

- Transformational change is a must. Meaningful change is the objective and should be valued as the clients that are being served grow into that which they are to become and successful in their careers and professions (not just a job).
- I think of this process as, 'there's the money to buy the skates, but they haven't bought the skates yet.'
- Get Going! Organize and fund the office so it can begin its work.
- We have a lot of people of color in positions of power who do not want to uplift/help other people of color. We need to take responsibility for that.
- Why are we here? Bus routes to jobs in suburbs have been cut so people cannot get to them. Open the door! Move the impediments and restrictions.

Participant Feedback

Question: Outside of segregation and inequality, what other issues do you feel the Milwaukee County Office on African American Affairs should be focused on? (Circle all that apply)

Topic	No. of Interested Participants
Education	27
Criminal Justice Reform	24
Economic Development and Employment	22
Health Disparities	20
Attracting and Retaining Talented African Americans to Milwaukee	18
Supporting African American Cultural Institutions	16
Place-Based Initiatives and Residential Segregation	15
Family Household and Make Up	13
Other: Safety - Community	1
Other: Spiritual/Earth	1
Other: (Criminal Justice System) CCAP	1
Other: Focus on youth (MPS); positive successful transition from high school to adulthood and employment	1

Question: What was the most beneficial part of the discussion for you?

Sharing Ideas & Perspectives

- The talk back free open discussion generating ideas amongst each other
- Hearing viewpoints or comments from others
- Opportunity to give input
- Hearing the different ideas and concerns
- Varied perspectives
- Actual dialogue; group discussion
- The sharing of ideas
- Putting the ideas on the table
- Clarity of thought from participants
- Sharing ideas
- Perspective from other communities
- Listening to the voices of other

Connecting with Group Participants

- Coming together as a group
- Honesty
- Openness
- The open dialogue amongst group participants
- Group discussion
- Truly appreciated the opportunity to connect with and hear from others through the breakout groups
- Sharing similarities

Discussing OAAA

- Learning about OAAA
- More awareness of OAAA

- To be able to discuss the position of African Americans of OAAA
- Good to have the opportunity to learn about the OAAA at this formative stage to give input

Discussing Other Specific Topics

- The ability to share the racial inequalities
- Discussed PTSD and mental health. We also went into detailed discussion on collaboration -- how individually we see groups and other AA as silos and not unified as other ethnic groups.
- The areas of mental health and felony convictions being a stumbling block

Misc.

- Everything
- Give me a better look on what's going on in Milwaukee
- Facing the real truth about how we can reach the goal of the needs for African American affairs
- Progress/change
- Not sure yet

Question: What questions or concerns are you leaving with?

Future OAAA Development (Next Steps/Timeline)

- What's next?
- Will this be real?
- Where is this project really going?
- Are we going to be led by African Americans who are competent and qualified? (Not a token?)
- What is the timeline of this plan?
- Why is the county doing the study?
- How soon can OAAA get started and what will they do exactly?
- When will this happen?
- What are the measurable goals and achievements the office wants to obtain?
- What will really happen?
- The future of the final product - effectiveness - longevity - objectivity
- The ability to implement meaningful change - and instead create another study
- Planning team/Director Selection

Future Community Involvement

- Will we know what's needed?
- What can I do?
- Initiating community engagement
- How to communicate effectively - re: Keeping the community informed concerning resources & accessibility to services
- Getting involve with the community and staying involve
- How to connect with others to solve issues since no easy way to do this
- How to be united
- That we are all on the same page as to what should be done to make it to the top
- Hope the people will see the important of this initiative

Misc.

- Why was a Black company not secured to facilitate the sessions?
- It should say African American racial disparity and not just racial disparity
- The new office may be overreaching
- None really don't believe this was as effective as hoped for

Question: What should OAAA do to keep you engaged?

Continue Outreach Efforts

- Email & newspaper
- Send emails to keep people informed invite to workgroups or focus groups & transition into committees
- Stay involve with the community
- Keep me informed
- Advertise more
- Communication
- Provide opportunity for engagement!!!
- Keep me informed – get emails that connect me to the next brainstorming
- Stay open with communication - Show what works - Continue to share the changes / People need to
- Keep calling on me and asking for ideas
- Continue to have meetings amongst its constituency and send emails on status
- Send information via email
- Come to meetings - Keep me informed
- Email me, have more, want sessions, possibly develop
- Transparency. Open communication
- Email more than a month in advance
- Keep me informed
- Keep it open to the public for ideas
- Keep the communities engaged and I will be there. Results.

Take Action

- Execute the ideas given
- Moving forward
- Implement action and stop talking
- No lies. No idle talk. Work for the real goal of Milwaukee people!
- Advertise the sessions in the African American newspapers

(Contact Information Provided)

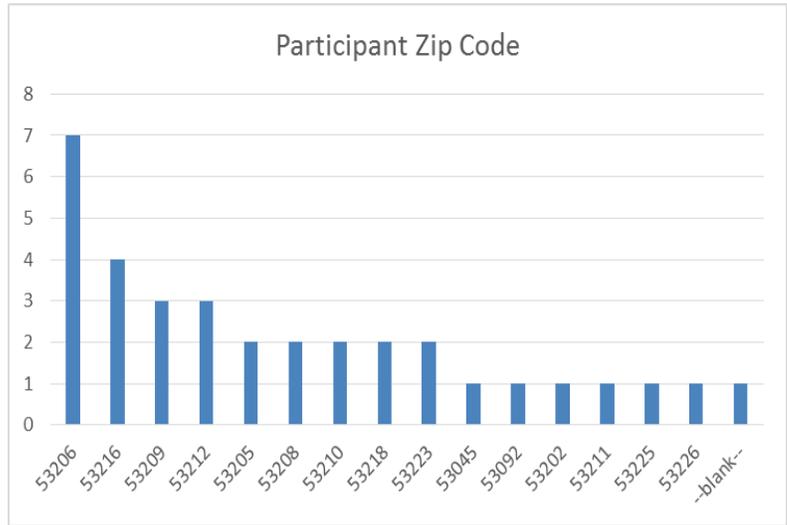
- Contact me at woodward140@ameritech.net
- ossie_kendrix@baldwin.senate.gov
- Contact my office 342-7176
- Email me : marthajgray@hotmail.com

Misc.

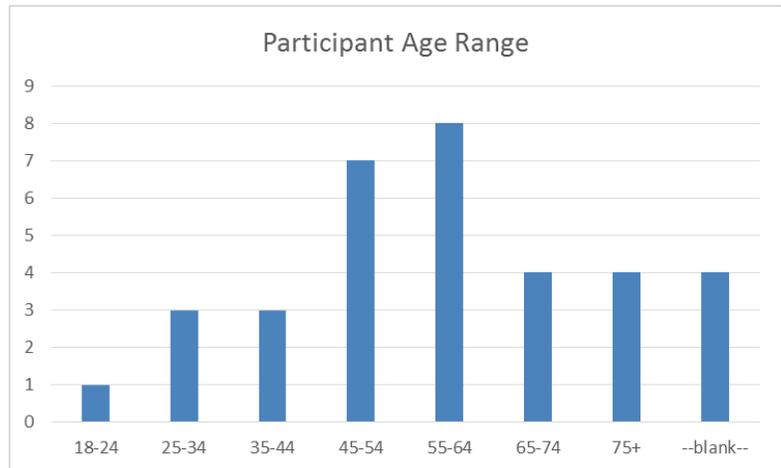
- Following up w/ organizations that are connected in providing direct services, also churches
- This should be facilitated by all blacks

Participant Demographics

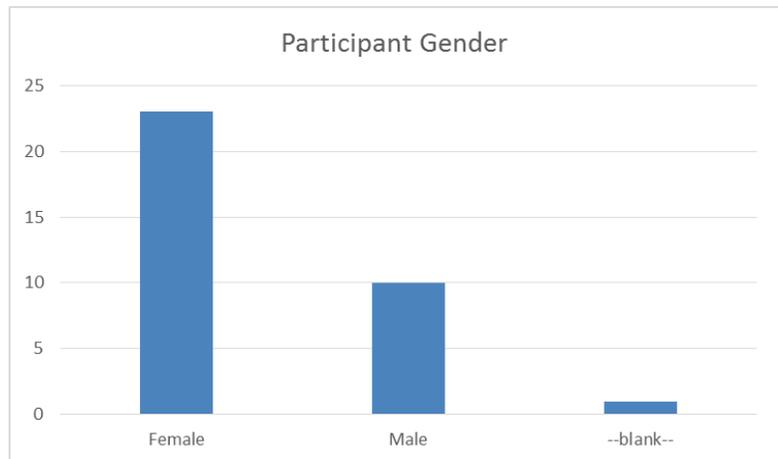
Zip Code	No. of Participants
53206	7
53216	4
53209	3
53212	3
53205	2
53208	2
53210	2
53218	2
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53045	1
53092	1
53202	1
53211	1
53225	1
53226	1
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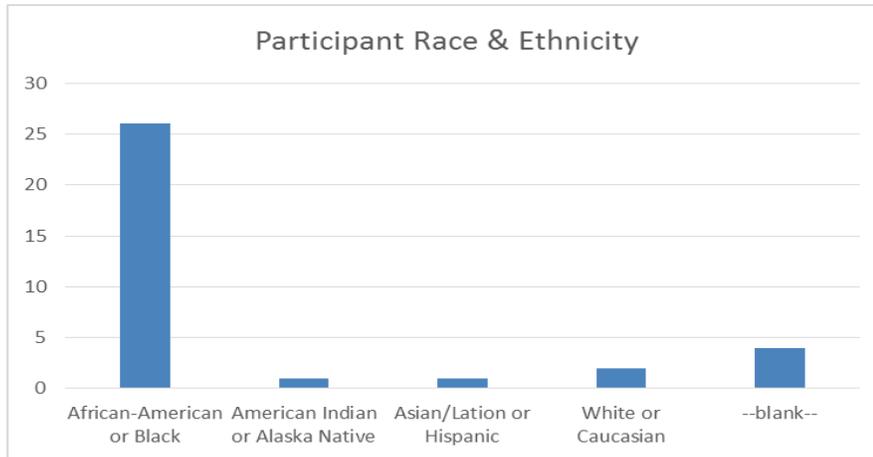
Age Range	No. of Participants
18-24	1
25-34	3
35-44	3
45-54	7
55-64	8
65-74	4
75+	4
--blank--	4



Gender	No. of Participants
Female	23
Male	10
--blank--	1



Race & Ethnicity	No. of Participants
African-American or Black	26
American Indian or Alaska Native	1
Asian/Lation or Hispanic	1
White or Caucasian	2
--blank--	4



Education	No. of Participants
Less Than High School	1
High School or GED	3
4 Year College Degree	7
More than 4 years/Graduate	13
Some College/ 2 Year Degree/Vocational	9
--blank--	1

