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## Milwaukee County Office of Equity Hosts the Third Annual Milwaukee County Health Equity Champion Awards Brunch & Ceremony

The banner is divided into several sections. On the left, it features the Milwaukee County Office of Equity logo and the text 'MILWAUKEE COUNTY OFFICE OF EQUITY'. In the center, the title 'HEALTH EQUITY CHAMPION AWARDS BRUNCH' is written in large, white, serif capital letters. Below this, a group photo of diverse individuals, some holding awards, is shown. To the left of the photo, the text 'You're Invited' is written in a large, elegant, gold script font. Below that, in smaller white capital letters, is 'PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY HEALTH EQUITY CHAMPION AWARDS BRUNCH'. At the bottom of the banner, there are three distinct boxes: the first contains a calendar icon and the text 'SUNDAY SEPT. 20, 2026'; the second contains a location pin icon and the text 'BRADLEY PAVILION MARCUS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER'; the third contains a clock icon and the text 'JOIN US FROM 11AM - 2PM'. At the very bottom, there is a QR code on the left, the text 'FOR MORE INFORMATION SCAN QR CODE OR VISIT COUNTY.MILWAUKEE.GOV/ECAWARDS' in the center, and the Milwaukee County Office of Equity logo on the right.

*Join us on Sunday, September 20, for the Third Annual Milwaukee County Health Equity Champion Awards Brunch and Ceremony. Register online to attend at [county.milwaukee.gov/ecawards](https://county.milwaukee.gov/ecawards).*

Don't read about it later – be there in person for the [Third Annual Milwaukee County Health Equity Champion Awards Brunch and Ceremony on Sunday, September 20!](https://county.milwaukee.gov/ecawards)

The day begins at 11 a.m. inside the beautiful Bradley Pavilion of the Marcus Performing Arts Center, located at 929 N. Water St. You can confirm your attendance from now until July 31.

In 2024, the Milwaukee County Health Equity Champion Awards were created to salute those inside and outside of County government whose efforts and commitment to equity are improving health outcomes across the County.

This year, the Milwaukee County Office of Equity (OOE) received 58 nominations representing Milwaukee County departments, divisions, programs, employees, local organizations, and individuals. Each nominee has shown a strong commitment to improving health outcomes in our communities in areas such as health and healthcare, economic stability, education, neighborhood and built environments, and social and community connections.

Awards will be presented in the following categories:

- Milwaukee County Advancing Equity Award (for Milwaukee County departments, divisions, and programs)
- Health Equity Leadership Award (for Milwaukee County employees)
- Community Trailblazer Award (for organizations)
- Community Equity Impact Leader Award (for community members)
- The Bridgebuilder Award (for leaders connecting community and government)
- NEW- Equity in Action Youth Leadership (young people aged 13 to 18, who promote fairness and justice presented in collaboration with the Milwaukee County Youth Commission).

Questions about the Milwaukee County Health Equity Champion Awards can be sent to us at [equityoffice@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:equityoffice@milwaukeecountywi.gov) or by calling 414-278-7979.



**Milwaukee County Office of Equity 2026 Sustainability Summit Sets the Tone for Success**



*Organizations and business owners alike gained knowledge and access to tools to strengthen their long-term organizational sustainability while attending OOE's Sustainability Summit. Morgan Phelps of Colorful Connections facilitated sessions designed to help navigate the changing landscape.*

In recent years, small businesses and community-based organizations have found themselves facing financial uncertainty as they are impacted by policy changes and shifting public narratives around equity and inclusion. Through the 2026 Sustainability Summit hosted by the Milwaukee County Office of Equity and in connection with Colorful Connections on May 5, organizations and business owners all left with more knowledge and tools to strengthen their long-term organizational sustainability and sharpen their strategic messaging in an evolving landscape.

At the Marcia P. Coggins Center, located at 1230 W. Cherry St., the day opened with networking and lunch, followed by a welcome that outlined the Summit's goals and interactive format. Attendees participated in a legal insights session, moderated by the Law Firm of Margaret C. Daun, covering recent federal policy changes, compliance expectations, and how to navigate risk in publicly funded programs.



A strategic framework workshop helped participants align program priorities and resource decisions with value-aligned strategies for long-term resilience. And through a mix of interactive sessions and peer-learning activities, leaders learned from and alongside each other as they navigated similar challenges.

For more insight into the evolving funding landscape, a panel consisting of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Zilber Family Foundation, and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation addressed trends in grantmaking, documentation needs, and collaboration strategies.

In addition to the above, the Summit also allowed attendees to take part in an organizational exposure snapshot exercise to help them prioritize strategic shifts to make within their own organization. Guests also supported one another through the Interactive Messaging Lab, where small groups applied the strategic framework they had learned earlier to real-world communications scenarios – such as contract renewals, media inquiries, funders asking for language revisions, and Board members questioning equity commitments.

The Summit closed with shared reflections, key takeaways, and an introduction to a post-event digital toolkit that was emailed afterwards to all attendees.

## **Data Reveal and Panel Discussion Centers on Community Wealth Building**



*More than 300 people filled the event hall at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society for “Milwaukee’s Story of Black Wealth: Community Experience & Data Reveal,” which included a panel discussion.*

Milwaukee County residents, community leaders, advocates, and families filled the room on Saturday, April 25, at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum for “Milwaukee’s Story of Black Wealth: Community Experience & Data Reveal.”

The Story of Black Wealth unveiled community-centered findings that will help inform our forthcoming Financial Empowerment Blueprint for Milwaukee County. The research findings reflect responses from 946 residents who completed the community survey and give insight into what wealth means, what barriers families are navigating, and what solutions communities believe are needed most.

Key takeaways from the findings indicate that for many Milwaukee residents, wealth is defined by stability rather than luxury, although housing costs, debt, low wages, transportation barriers, and lack of capital impede long-term wealth building.

For the “Milwaukee’s Story of Black Wealth” event, the activities started with a panel discussion focused on the historical and present factors affecting Black wealth in Milwaukee. The panelists included Museum Founder Clayborn Benson, Dr. Kirk Harris, Dr. Deborah Blanks, and local radio host Michelle Bryant, who shared their insights from the data, the impact of historical policies, and potential community-driven solutions for the future. Attendees also heard from James Bell Jr., co-founder and partner with Bell & Wright Financial Services – part of the Northwestern Mutual Network. - He shared four places to build wealth and establish a solid financial footing for one’s family.

In addition to the panel and keynote speaker, guests experienced visual storytelling and data exhibits based on the survey findings. Some also had the opportunity to share their reflections on the information presented and what the next steps should be to support community wealth building.

Our community engagement partner, InPower, contributed greatly to the research and event planning by engaging residents through surveys, listening sessions, and direct conversations to ensure the community's voice helped shape the findings.

## SIDEBAR



During Milwaukee's Story of Black Wealth event, OOE was proud to present one of our community partners, BankOn Greater Milwaukee, with a proclamation from Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley commending the organization in honor of April as Financial Literacy Month in Milwaukee County. OOE's Strategic Communications Manager Jacqueline Zeledon (left) and Senior Program Manager Rick Banks pose with BankOn's Program Director Constance Alberts.

## **Workshop Centers on Narrative Change and Furthering Impact**

**(photo?)**

In a powerful workshop centered on the art of storytelling, participants explored how narrative can be a tool for challenging harmful assumptions and reshaping collective understanding.

In April, the Milwaukee County Office of Equity (OOE) hosted the Narrative Change Workshop, presented by Race Forward. It brought together individuals, representing several County departments, who are dedicated to advancing racial equity in Milwaukee County. Participants explored the power of storytelling to challenge harmful narratives and learned innovative strategies to promote racial justice.

At the Narrative Change Workshop, attendees learned how to:

- Define and adopt shared terms and concepts used in narrative change,
- Identify and interpret harmful dominant narratives around race,
- Assess how narrative is an arena of power that historically and politically has been used to both promote racial injustice and racial justice, and
- Experiment with new narrative strategies that promote governing racial justice.

The workshop and its facilitators led attendees in an engaging day of learning, reflection, and communal growth. The concepts and their applications allowed all to add to the foundation Milwaukee County is building to advance our shared vision of making Milwaukee the healthiest county in Wisconsin.

OOE looks forward to providing more opportunities like this one that strengthen the collective impact Milwaukee County is creating across our community.

## 55<sup>th</sup> Juneteenth Day Celebration Honors History, Freedom, and the Future





*On behalf of Milwaukee County, the Milwaukee County Office of Equity returned as a sponsor for Milwaukee Juneteenth Day festivities. Pictures (Starting clockwise from top left): Milwaukee County Transit System's Juneteenth Day Bus designed by young artists through TruSkool Inc; Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley and members of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors share a casual pose before the parade. The Juneteenth Day Festival allowed County departments and offices to meet residents and provide direct access to services and resources.*

Milwaukee County was well represented in both the 55<sup>th</sup> Annual Juneteenth Jubilee Parade and Celebration. The Milwaukee County Office of Equity returned as one of the lead sponsors on behalf of Milwaukee County, allowing for all of us to participate.

The day began with elected officials, department leaders, and their staff members cheerfully adding to the atmosphere while marching in the parade starting at 8<sup>th</sup> Street to Atkinson Avenue all the way to Burleigh Street & Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. Fourteen of Milwaukee County's departments and divisions were among more than 500 vendors at the street festival along King Drive. Thousands of Juneteenth guests stopped by our "village" booths to learn about opportunities ranging from support services for the aging to job openings in several areas within Milwaukee County departments.



## **Summer Events Provide Connection Opportunities with the Office of Equity**





*Thanks to the Milwaukee County Office of Equity, St. Ann's Intergenerational Center's Indaba Nights Concert Series provides a welcoming space each week for residents to learn more about Milwaukee County's many services and resources.*

Coming to a neighborhood near you, the Milwaukee County Office of Equity's (OOE) Community Engagement team will be connecting residents to resources and event information all summer long!

Each event we sponsor or attend is part of our **County Days** programming – one of OOE's community-engagement frameworks in which we dedicate specific days or periods to bring Milwaukee County services, resources, and leadership directly into neighborhoods and communities. The goal is to make County government more visible, accessible, and collaborative by meeting residents where they are, creating intentional opportunities for residents to connect with service providers, learn about available programs, share concerns, and participate in problem-solving. These events often include mobile services, resource tables, workshops, and direct engagement with other Milwaukee County departments – strengthening trust, transparency, and community partnership in a simple, approachable format. One way OOE puts this framework into practice is as the sponsor of the Indaba Nights Summer Concert Series and the Heal the Hood Block Party – part of our seasonal activities.

**Indaba Nights** is a free weekly summer concert series in Milwaukee held at the **Indaba Band Shell on St. Ann Intergenerational Center's Bucyrus Campus**. The concert series takes place on Wednesdays from **June 3 to September 16**. Indaba Nights were created to strengthen community bonds, provide accessible family-friendly entertainment, and help revitalize the surrounding neighborhood by giving residents a welcoming weekly space to connect. Indaba Night's origins come from the traditional African concept of an "indaba," a communal gathering

where everyone has a voice and leaves with a shared story. It features accomplished local musicians performing soul, reggae, jazz, and old-school classics, routinely drawing more than 300 concertgoers weekly.

**Heal the Hood** is more than just an annual event; it's a movement that began in 2012 when founder Ajamou Butler hosted a modest block party with 50 attendees. Today, after 14 years, the event has transformed into a vibrant block party and resource fair, drawing over 1,000 people to Atkinson Avenue for live entertainment, free food, African drumming, arts, health screenings, and youth programming. This initiative not only facilitates mass resource distribution—from employment and housing support to health services—but also fosters cultural celebration and relationship-building among residents, nonprofit groups, and public agencies. Supported through partnerships with OOE, local nonprofits, churches, and volunteers, Heal the Hood exemplifies community-led engagement that celebrates Black culture while strategically addressing neighborhood inequities. With the aim of fostering healing, empowerment, and cross-sector collaboration, everyone is invited to join OOE and other Milwaukee County departments at the next **Heal the Hood event on Saturday, August 29, in Merrill Park.**



*The Milwaukee County Office of Equity is catalytic to Milwaukee County's vision to be the healthiest county in Wisconsin by achieving racial equity. We value and empower residents to identify and create impactful change through awareness, responsibility, and action. We work to challenge and change policies, practices, and power structures that have resulted in historic and persistent barriers to equity.*

Editor: Jacqueline Zeledon

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Photo Credits: Sims Strong Studios, St. Ann's Intergenerational Center-Bucyrus Campus, Heal the Hood MKE

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