

M I L W A U K E E C O U N T Y



# RACIAL EQUITY BUDGET TOOL



INCORPORATED  
1835

2026 BUDGET CYCLE

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# *By achieving racial equity, Milwaukee is the healthiest county in Wisconsin.*

## MILWAUKEE COUNTY VISION STATEMENT

### Overview

Racism has been and is a public health crisis in Milwaukee County. According to the County Health Rankings, Milwaukee County is, and has consistently been, one of the lowest-ranked counties for health in Wisconsin and, according to Federal Reserve Economic Data, Milwaukee County is one of our nation's most racially segregated areas.

According to 2019 statistics, a white person lives, on average, nearly 14 years longer than a black person and the infant mortality rate is nearly three (3) times higher for black infants compared to white infants. Race is a social construction with no biologic basis, yet racism may produce an assigned societal value based on the way a person looks that has resulted in race being a consistent predictor of a person's quality and length of life.

The Racial Equity Budget Tool (REBT) is a structured racial equity lens for departments to use to critically assess the impacts of budget decisions on communities of color. The tool is structured around Milwaukee County's strategic focus areas to help departments and decision makers better understand the pain points and opportunities to advancing the County's vision.

#### Milwaukee County's Racial Equity Budget Tool (REBT) is designed to:

**Make intentional connections** between the strategic plan and the budget.

**Use racial equity as the key guiding principle** for important decisions regarding investments or disinvestments.

**Initiate conversations** on topics related to the three-year strategic objectives among department leaders and employees.

**Provide baseline data** on departmental efforts to inform enterprise-wide decisions.

## Milwaukee County Strategic Focus Areas

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In 2019, Milwaukee County launched its first strategic plan in 20 years. This plan explicitly recognizes that racism is a public health crisis and leads with the vision that: **By achieving racial equity, Milwaukee is the healthiest county in Wisconsin.**

As part of the strategic plan, Milwaukee County leaders have committed to use a racial equity budget tool to ensure resource allocations advance the strategic focus areas and vision. The questions in this budget tool were guided by the strategic plan and were informed by best practices from other jurisdictions and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE).

### 1. Create Intentional Inclusion

- Reflect the full diversity of Milwaukee County at every level of County government.
- Create and nurture an inclusive culture across the Milwaukee County government.
- Increase the number of Milwaukee County contracts awarded to minority- and women-owned business.

### 2. Bridge the Gap

- Determine what, where, and how we deliver services based on the resolution of health disparities.
- Break down silos across Milwaukee County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered.
- Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.

### 3. Invest in Equity

- Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.
- Enhance Milwaukee County’s fiscal health and sustainability.
- Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

## Instructions

### 1. Submit only one REBT per department.

The REBT should reflect an analysis of the suite of budget decisions per department. Within answers to each question, **details may be provided at the division level**, as determined appropriate. Decision points should be analyzed as part of the comprehensive effort that your department is undertaking in addressing racial equity in programs, plans, policies, and power structures. Since departments are often tasked with cutting their budgets to reflect a reduction from their previous fiscal year's budget, a REBT should also include an analysis of how proposed reductions may or may not burden Black and Brown individuals and communities.

### 2. Keep the focus on the analysis of departments' improvements, reductions, and overall budget.

The REBT will focus on a racial equity analysis of decisions for new policies, programs, and plans under consideration, and the department's ongoing commitment to racial equity.

### 3. Use demographic data to help your department determine benefits and burdens of new decisions and overall budget.

State and federally collected demographic data resources are provided in [Appendix C](#). Departments are encouraged to

use any data they collect on their service users throughout the completion of the REBT. Data from other relevant and credible sources a department may have is also acceptable.

### 4. REBT technical assistance information and opportunities.

If you have questions related to the 2025 REBT, please attend one of the Strategy, Budget and Performance Open Office hours and bring the questions. All persons who may be expected to assist the department director in completing the REBT will be encouraged to participate.

- If you understand the question, but have difficulty determining how to answer a question, please contact your Budget Analyst for assistance.
- The Office of Equity should only be contacted on questions related to the racial equity components (glossary, concepts, etc..) that are unclear and cannot be addressed by your Budget Analyst. Send correspondence via email to [equityoffice@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:equityoffice@milwaukeecountywi.gov).



# MILWAUKEE COUNTY

## RACIAL EQUITY BUDGET TOOL

Date Submitted:

Department: Transportation Services Division

Please note: each response field below has a 2,500-character limit.

### STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 1: CREATE INTENTIONAL INCLUSION

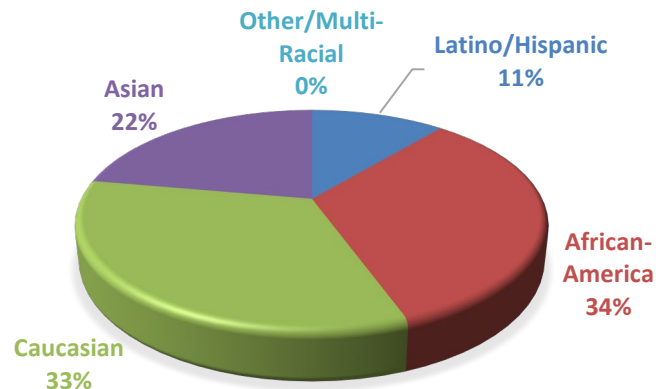
#### 1. What activities are you doing to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce in your department? What are the associated costs of these activities?

MCDOT- Transportation Services Division implemented an Engineering Internship Program in the Department in early 2019, to attract a diverse group of individuals to potentially join our workforce. This program offers individuals studying Civil Engineering the opportunity to get paid for hands on training by working side by side with engineers performing tasks that support the mission of the Department. The purpose of this program is to provide underrepresented groups an opportunity to become part of a diverse workforce within Milwaukee County. In the search for interested Engineering Internship candidates, MCDOT-Transportation Services Division staff participates in Milwaukee area college career fairs and collaborate with colleges as well. We plan to continue our efforts in collaborating with local colleges and to continue our Engineering Internship Program. The associated costs of the program are minimal because the Engineering Intern Students work on Federal and/or State funded projects, however, costs for marketing and collaboration would help increase interest in the program.

MCDOT- Transportation Services Division has closely worked with Human Resources to extend the open position announcements to other appropriate job finding websites and professional organizations (i.e., National Society of Black Engineers, National Society of Women Engineers, Institute of Traffic Engineers), helping to get the word out across other venues other than the Milwaukee County website. This does have a \$300-\$1000 additional cost for advertising per position, depending on how many other websites/organizations are utilized. In addition, MCDOT-Transportation Services Division diversifies its interview panel and increases the opportunity of candidates to be interviewed instead of being screened out. This has helped lead to a diverse and inclusive workforce.

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division continues to maintain a workforce that is racially balanced with diverse cultural identities, supporting the importance of racial equity in Milwaukee County. The Division meets on a weekly basis to foster equity and inclusion while working together as a team to learn about each other's diverse background and work collaboration; this helps the team feel included and part of the team. Leading by example is a transparent way of attracting and retaining a diverse and inclusive workforce

MCDOT - TRANSPORTATION SERVICES DIVISION - WORKFORCE



**2. How do you use professional development and advancement opportunities to promote equity in your department's workforce? What resources are used to support these opportunities for professional development and advancement?**

At MCDOT-Transportation Services Division, internal professional development, advancement opportunities, and promotions are integral to maintaining a well-balanced and effective team. The Division prioritizes equitable internal promotions, ensuring that current employees are considered before external candidates. To support ongoing professional growth, MCDOT-Transportation Services Division actively promotes various training programs and allocates funding for these initiatives within its operating budget.

**3. Our employees can be a great resource for innovation and knowing what is working well and what needs work. Have you engaged a diverse group of frontline employees to inform decisions about your proposed budget changes? If yes, how was input solicited, who was involved, and what were the results?**

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division recognizes the importance of including the entire team in budget decision-making processes to capture diverse perspectives, ideas, and needs. Every team member, regardless of position, deserves a voice. Open communication and providing a platform for all staff to share input are essential for future development and fostering a positive work environment. Embracing this approach has enhanced the Division's communication and strengthened our team as a whole.

**4. Are you tracking contracts with minority and women-owned business? If yes, please share percentages of each. If no, why not?**

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division is committed to supporting minority- and women-owned business contracts and consistently meets or exceeds Milwaukee County's DBE goals—17% for professional services and 25% for construction. Over the past 14 years, the Division has had a 0% waiver rate for DBE goals.

The Division collaborates closely with the Office of Economic Inclusion (OEI) and the Director serves on the Statewide DBE Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The committee promotes DBE opportunities and workforce diversity in the Southeast Region and across Wisconsin.

**STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 2: BRIDGE THE GAP**

**5. How and when have service users, in diverse and inclusive communities, and other key stakeholders been engaged to inform decisions about changes in funding levels for services provided in your requested budget (who was involved, what was the forum, what were the results)?**

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division holds public involvement meetings to give service users and key stakeholders the opportunity to share their opinions and concerns about community improvement projects. Input from these meetings is valued and incorporated into project delivery. The Division's diverse staff actively participates in these meetings and communicates key information to stakeholders during the budget process, ensuring ongoing engagement and informed decision-making. Additionally, MCDOT-Transportation Services Division continuously updates the Milwaukee County website to provide access to information for those unable to attend the meetings in person.

**6. Describe ways in which demographic and economic data were used to prioritize resource distribution. (Data can include sources found in the resources section of this tool, department collected data, or any other relevant data from other sources.)**

**a. Please provide specific examples of data and how that influenced decision making.**

In past Capital Budgets for MCDOT-Transportation Services Division, racial equity is one of the criteria in determining and prioritizing which improvement projects are completed. The racial and economic data of the location of where the improvement project(s) lies becomes an important part of the decision-making process.

**b. Are there gaps in the data that need to be addressed to better understand disparities in equity?**

The racial and economic data helps to get a better of idea of how MCDOT-Transportation Services Division is doing with providing services to underprivileged areas. With this information it can be determined if it is necessary to re-prioritize and/or include more improvement projects in the Capital Budget, improving efforts to

service these areas. We are not aware of any discrepancies; we are using available federal census data.

**7. a. How does your budget reflect efforts to work across departments to break down silos to maximize access to and quality of services offered? b. How does this help us achieve the vision of achieving equity and health?**

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division collaborates with other Milwaukee County Departments and Divisions to enhance access to and quality of services. For example, the Division provides bridge inspection services for Parks, Zoo, Airport, and Highway Maintenance, ensuring service consistency and generating cost savings over the years. Strengthening interdepartmental relationships is essential to advancing equity and health, and greater focus on these areas is needed to achieve meaningful progress.

**8. What are the expected benefits and potential unintended consequences to disadvantaged communities of your proposed budget changes?**

**a. What analysis did you do to determine the expected benefits and potential unintended consequences?**

The anticipated benefits include expanding opportunities for residents in disadvantaged Milwaukee County communities to receive neighborhood improvements. This initiative supports the County's commitment to racial equity and fosters the trust and appreciation of its residents.

**b. What will your department do to mitigate unintended consequences resulting from your proposed budget changes?**

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division will prioritize input from disadvantaged communities when selecting improvement projects. Public information meetings or town halls will continue to provide all stakeholders a voice in how County funds are allocated, ensuring equitable benefits. The Division also aims to strengthen and expand partnerships with communities, municipalities, and organizations to promote equity and health.

**c. What are the demographic impacts of any fines and fees accessed by your department? Are there disproportionate impacts on any particular groups? N/A**

### STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 3: INVEST IN EQUITY

**9. If your department were to receive some additional funding for addressing equity, what specific strategic plan priority would you address, what would be the project/activity and intended outcome, and how much would it cost?**

MCDOT-Transportation Services Division would allocate additional funding toward advancing racial equity through community outreach aimed at attracting young people to engineering and construction careers. This includes expanding programs like the Civil Engineering Program. Funding would support adequate staffing levels to effectively manage these initiatives, provide necessary support, and deliver training.

**10. What is your department doing to dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities, including meeting multilingual needs and other communication or accessibility barriers?**

Many improvement projects undertaken by MCDOT-Transportation Services Division traverse neighborhoods with residents who speak various languages. The division makes every effort to prioritize projects that address the needs of multilingual communities, ensuring that all Milwaukee County neighborhoods benefit equitably from implemented improvements. A key initiative planned for the coming years is to provide a Spanish translation of the department's website to better serve the Spanish-speaking population. Furthermore, the Division actively seeks input from diverse and inclusive communities to ensure their perspectives are incorporated into project development.



## Appendices

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Appendix A:  
**Glossary**

Appendix B:  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

Appendix C:  
**Resources by Strategic Focus Area**

Appendix D:  
**Public Participation Model**

## APPENDIX A

# GLOSSARY

**Communities of color:** In the context of the Milwaukee County Racial Equity Budget Tool, the term communities of color is interchangeable with Black and Brown communities and inclusive of all non-white populations of color.

**Disadvantaged communities:** A collective term for referencing communities that have historically experienced inequities where they learn, live, and work that were/are not optimal due to disenfranchisement, disinvestment, marginalization, racism, and other systems of oppression.

**Diversity:** Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term “diversity” is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values.

**Diverse group:** As it relates to question 5, an intentional effort to include individuals from different racial, ethnic, gender, and social backgrounds proportionate to the diversity of the department.

**Economic data:** Numerical data collected based on service delivery criteria determined by departments.

**Equity:** The just, fair, and impartial treatment, acceptance, or behavior of people without favoritism or discrimination. Equity means righting wrongs, doing what’s right, and giving people what they need to thrive, which is different from equality, which means everyone gets the same thing regardless of circumstance or need.

**Frontline employees:** A grouping of Milwaukee County employees that serves as the initial point of contact for service users or a range of employees from all levels of the workforce with emphasis on the inclusion of direct service rendering staff.

**Inclusion:** Assurance that the culture, values, and opinions of individuals and groups are represented in the decision-making processes.

**Inclusive workforce:** A workplace environment that recognizes the contributions of all employees, while valuing their social status, race, gender, or other demographic classifications.

**Key stakeholders:** Both internal and external individuals, agencies, or organizations who participate in the planning, development, implementation and decision-making process of an activity, process, or service delivery. (AMOP: Key stakeholders are service users, the workforce, partners, governing boards, donors, suppliers, taxpayers, regulatory bodies, policy makers, funders, and local and professional communities.)

**Multilingual needs:** The ability of Milwaukee County departments to address linguistic needs for all service users through staffing, documentation, and other communication platforms.

**Professional advancement:** Opportunities for staff to build their capacity and ascend or pursue lateral movement to further advance their career trajectory.

**Racial data:** Demographic data collected by Milwaukee County departments that identifies the race/ethnicity of service recipients.

**Racial equity:** The just and fair inclusion of all people in society, regardless of their race/ethnicity, with unfettered ability to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Racial equity is achieved when race no longer determines one’s health and socioeconomic outcomes and when everyone has what they need to thrive and decide what’s best for themselves, their families, and their communities, no matter where they live.

**Service user:** Current or potential user of Milwaukee County services.

**Unintended consequences:** Outcomes of a purposeful action that are not intended or foreseen.

APPENDIX B

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**PURPOSE**

**1) What is the purpose of using this tool?**

The Racial Equity Budget Tool (REBT) has many intended purposes:

- It is about making an intentional connection between the strategic plan and our budget. We cannot sufficiently change our institution if we do not think critically about how and what we are spending money on.
- Whether we are making investments or disinvestments, we must do so with racial equity as the key guiding principle to those important decisions.
- It is meant to spur conversation on topics related to the strategic focus areas among department leaders and employees so we are all challenging ourselves to think critically about our efforts to advance the vision.
- This tool is an opportunity to baseline departmental efforts to make informed enterprise-wide decisions.

These are only some of the many answers to why we are using a tool to assess budget decisions.

**2) What other jurisdictions have used a racial equity budget tool? Where did the budget tool questions come from?**

Milwaukee County's REBT builds on the success of other jurisdictions in implementing a budget tool. Jurisdictions Milwaukee County looked to for guidance include the City of Seattle, the City of Portland (Ore.), King County (Wash.), and the City of San Antonio. Resources from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) were also used. The questions are largely framed around Milwaukee County's strategic plan.

**3) How does this tool work when departments must make budget cuts year over year? What is the point of doing this when departments don't have a lot of latitude about what disinvestments to make?**

Milwaukee County's structural deficit and budget challenges are no secret. However, Milwaukee County still has an annual budget of over \$1 billion. Whether the County is

making disinvestments or investments, those decisions must be made with racial equity at the forefront of decision-makers' minds. Departments should think critically about their current assumptions and spending versus shifting investments to address root-causes of inequities.

**COMPLETING THE TOOL**

**4) Are there right answers to the questions?**

Responses to this tool will inform our future action to see where Milwaukee County can improve on the path to health and racial equity. There are no right answers to the questions, and each department is starting in a different place, serves different people with different needs, and faces a different set of barriers and opportunities. While there are no right answers, the information provided in the tool will be used for decision making throughout the budget process and will be available to the public. Therefore, answers should be robust, defensible, and easy to understand. Your department's answer may look very different than another department's answer and that is okay as long as the answers address the question.

**5) What if there are inequities to other groups other than racial groups? Should we be talking about those inequities in our analysis?**

Yes! Milwaukee County is race forward, but not race exclusive. If there are other inequities identified in your analysis, please include them.

**6) Does every department complete one tool, or is it one tool for each division?**

Please submit one tool per department. Responses can be broken down at the division level within your department's tool, as appropriate. All questions should be completed.

**7) Who is responsible for filling out the budget tool?**

The department head is ultimately responsible for the content in the REBT. It is up to department leadership to determine who in their department is most appropriate to be involved in completing questions in the tool, which will differ from department to department. Likely people to include are department leaders, fiscal staff, and administrative staff.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**8) Is this tool supposed to imply that we should be taking actions on each of these items? Are the questions meant to be directives to departments?**

The REBT will focus on an equity analysis of decisions for

A budget is a reflection of priorities. Ultimately, Milwaukee County's budget should reflect our values and advance our vision and strategic plan. However, we acknowledge our organization is on a journey to continuously improve our efforts toward health and racial equity. The REBT is meant to spur conversations among department leaders and staff about what they are and are not able to do in a given budget year to advance the vision. To that end, the tool is not an absolute directive to departments. We fully expect that some departments' answers to some of the questions will be that they are not doing anything this year with an explanation about why that is the case. Looking ahead to future years, departments will be expected to show how their budgets help Milwaukee County make progress toward its vision.

**9) How do I use this when my work is statutorily required?**

What services Milwaukee County provides is often statutorily required. However, how we do our work usually is not a directive. This tool is meant to challenge us all to think about how to do the enormous part of our work that is within our discretion and control.

**10) Is there a standard approach all departments are expected to take to answer the questions?**

No. Answer the questions based on the approach your department currently takes on these items.

**11) What type of analysis is expected for each of the questions?**

It depends on what your department is currently doing in each area. Please use the diverse expertise and experiences of staff in your department to determine the most appropriate way for your department to answer the questions.

**12) What part of the budget is this tool being applied to?**

new policies, programs, and plans under consideration, and the department's ongoing commitment to equity. Your department is asked to identify what considerations are considered in the overall budget to maximize equitable outcomes.

Performance, Strategy and Budget and the County Board.

## USING THE DATA

### **13) Who will receive the data departments provide in the REBT? Who will be expected to answer questions about the information provided?**

Responses to the REBT will be publicly available and will be presented to the County Board. If any decision-makers (e.g., County Executive, County Board Supervisors, department directors) have questions about the information provided in the REBT, the department should be prepared to answer them. We are all partners in Milwaukee County's strategic planning effort to achieve racial equity, and the budget tool is in-part meant to inform and focus conversations around strategic priorities, understanding that not all questions have known answers or solutions.

### **14) What if someone questions the analysis, conclusions, or recommendations made in the budget tool?**

Like all research and analysis, there will be questions and critiques and we should embrace these important conversations. The work presented in the budget tool should be defensible, but most of these questions do not have a clear right or wrong answer. If someone finds something wrong in the analysis, then we need to fix it. However, if it is a question about the interpretation and meaning of the analysis, then we can make space for different perspectives to find the best path forward with the information we have available.

### **14) Will the budget tool submissions be scored?**

No, the REBT submissions will not be scored. However, they will be made available to the public and reviewed by the County Executive's office, the Office of Equity, the Office of

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

## LOGISTICS

### 16) When will the budget tool be due?

The REBT is due on July 15 — the same due date as the requested budget.

### 17) Where do I go if I have questions?

If you understand the question, but have difficulty determining how to answer a question, please first try to problem solve within your department by looping in additional experts (e.g., people leaders, frontline staff, etc.).

If you need assistance understanding what the question is asking, contact your Budget Analyst for assistance.

The Office of Equity should only be contacted on questions related to racial equity components (glossary, concepts, etc.) that are unclear and cannot be addressed by your budget analyst. Send correspondence via email to [equityoffice@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:equityoffice@milwaukeecountywi.gov).

APPENDIX C

# RESOURCES BY STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA

## STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 1: **Create Intentional Inclusion**

- [2020 Milwaukee County Workforce Audit](#)

## STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 2: **Bridge the Gap**

- [American Community Survey](#) (from US Census Bureau – descriptions below from US Census Bureau)
  - [Data Profiles](#) have the most frequently requested social, economic, housing, and demographic data. Each of these four subject areas is a separate data profile. The data profiles summarize the data for a single geographic area, both numbers and percent, to cover the most basic data on all topics. (Can compare state/County/Municipal data. With some effort, can get zip code level data.)
  - [Narrative Profiles](#) are short, analytic reports derived from the ACS 5-year estimates. Each Narrative Profile covers 15 different topic areas and provides text and bar charts to display highlights of selected social, economic, housing, and demographic estimates for a selected geographic area. (Easy to get zip code level data)
- [Personal Income Data](#) (Bureau of Economic Analysis) Per Capita Personal Income by State/County, 2016 – 2018 for the entire nation.
- Per Capita Income by County
- [Public School Enrollment](#) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction)
- [Private School Enrollment](#) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction)
- [State of Wisconsin WBE/MBE/DVE](#) This provides a list of all Woman/Minority/Disabled Vets Business Enterprise information. You can search by business name, by product/service, and by location.
- [Milwaukee County Diversity and Compliance Website \(B2GNow\)](#) Links to certified lists for the State of Wisconsin ACDBE/DBE/SBE Directory and the Milwaukee County approved DBE/SBE vendors (training available on using system).

## STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 3: **Invest in Equity**

- [Public Participation Model](#)




### Additional County Resources

- [Strategic Plan \(Objectives\)](#)
- [Health and Equity Framework](#)

APPENDIX D

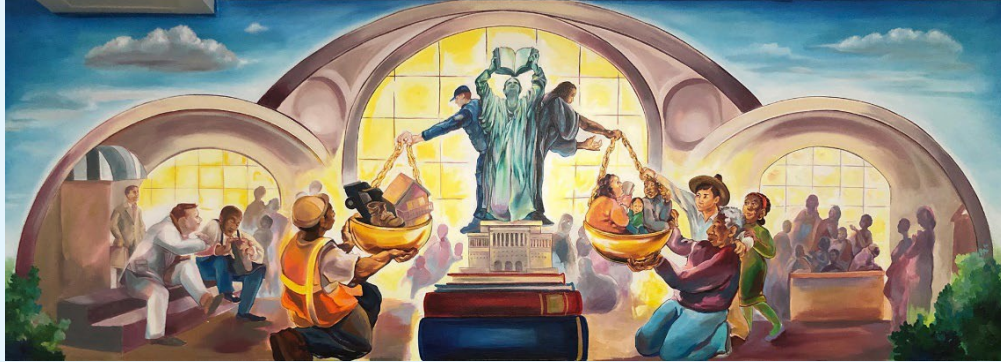
# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MODEL



	<b>INFORM</b> 	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>INVOLVE</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b> 	<b>EMPOWER/LEAD</b> 
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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ON THE COVER



“WELCOME TO THE PEOPLE’S HOUSE”

Artist: Tia Richardson

Commissioned in 2020. Used with permission of the artist.



MILWAUKEE COUNTY  
HEALTH &  
RACIAL EQUITY

**ONE COUNTY  
ONE VISION**

By achieving racial equity, Milwaukee  
is the **healthiest county in Wisconsin.**

[county.milwaukee.gov/vision](https://county.milwaukee.gov/vision)