



RACIAL EQUITY



BUDGET TOOL

2027 BUDGET CYCLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	3
Milwaukee County Strategic Focus Area	4
Instructions	5
Racial Equity Budget Tool Questions	6
Strategic Focus Area 1: Create Intentional Inclusion	6
Strategic Focus Area 2: Bridge the Gap	6
Strategic Focus Area 3: Invest in Equity	7

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary	8
Appendix B: Frequently Asked Questions	9
Appendix C: Resources By Strategic Focus Area	14
Appendix D: Public Participation Model	15

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 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.

Racism (not race) is a leading indicator of health because it structures access to opportunity like housing, education, employment, food, safety, and care. When access to opportunity is structured unequally, health outcomes follow that pattern. Other forms of oppression (i.e., ableism, sexism, etc.) operate through similar pathways, and when they intersect with racism, the impact on health compounds.

When we examine and correct the structural barriers created by racism, such as inequitable housing policy, underinvestment in neighborhoods, food apartheid, or unequal access to capital, we are also strengthening the infrastructure that also affects women, people with disabilities, older adults, Veterans, immigrants, and others who face systemic barriers in Milwaukee County.

The Racial Equity Budget Tool (REBT) enables departments to critically assess the impacts of budget decisions. The tool is structured around Milwaukee County's strategic focus areas to help departments and decision makers be better stewards of public resources.

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.

Commented [SC1]: This language was added to address concerns of some electeds about why we are not also focusing on other dimensions of identity (i.e. disability, gender, etc.) There is confusion between structural oppression and identity.

Milwaukee County Strategic Focus Areas

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 2027 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.



RACIAL EQUITY BUDGET TOOL

Date Submitted:

Department:

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?

BACKGROUND

The Milwaukee County Federated Library System (MCFLS) is run by a seven-member board of trustees whose membership is approved by the County Executive's office and County Board of Supervisors. The makeup and authority of the MCFLS Board is set in state statute, with one representative from the resource library board (Milwaukee), two from other public library boards in the system, one County Supervisor and three citizen representatives. The power to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce within the system is in the hands of the MCFLS Board with assistance from the system director, and by extension the County Executive's office and Board of Supervisors who approve MCFLS trustees.

RECRUITMENT

The system staff itself is small, and we currently employ 6.75 FTE. MCFLS is an equal opportunity employer and states that prominently on all position announcements. When positions at MCFLS have become open, the director advertises the opening on the system website and usually state and national job recruitment sites like the American Library Association (ALA) JobList or Wisconsin Library Association job announcement boards. The system has also posted positions on Wisconsin.gov since MCFLS is a quasi-state agency and the UW-Milwaukee iSchool when appropriate to the position. These particular job sites may be appropriate to cast a wide net to ensure enough good candidates apply. Recently we have used sites such as Diversity.com and Handshake (used by academic institutions, including technical colleges) to get the attention of more diverse candidates. Because of these efforts, the system most recently hired a person of color to fill its Library Technologies Administrator role in April of 2026. The system will continue posting open positions to sites that can attract candidates to ensure a diverse and inclusive workforce that represents the libraries and communities we serve.

RETAINMENT

MCFLS offers many incentives to retain a diverse and inclusive workforce. The system in 2024 re-evaluated hourly rates for two part-time positions to keep them in line with similar roles in southeast Wisconsin. MCFLS pays employees a very competitive rate of pay and has been able to retain staff as a result. The MCFLS work culture is flexible but focused on customer service and we've built a very strong team environment. In addition, all system staff become part of the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) shortly after employment and are eligible to take part in a tax deferred compensation program to help save for retirement. MCFLS also gives the option for staff to participate in the state healthcare plan, generally recognized to be one of the best available locally. To retain employees the total cost of salaries is roughly \$557,000 and fringe benefits around \$286,000 after staff copays are taken out.

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?

Our system staff is small but all of them have access to a variety of professional development opportunities that MCFLS offers to our member libraries. MCFLS, along with other systems in Southeast Wisconsin, contracts with the Bridges Library System to offer access to high quality continuing education opportunities in the form of in-person events or online sessions and webinars. The group is named SEWI Libraries Continuing Education and has a website with registration and links to sessions throughout the year: <https://sewilibraries.org/>. The sessions are organized by a Bridges staff member and in recent years many sessions have focused on equity and inclusivity in the workplace and libraries. Many of these sessions emerged from the very successful Wisconsin Libraries Talk About Race project (<https://www.wislibidea.com/>). A few examples from recent years include: Beyond Diversity 101: Micro-inequities, Implicit Bias, and Moving toward Equity, How to Move Past Midwest Nice Towards Safety and Belonging, Build Skills & Take Action to Stand Up for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Becoming an Active Ally Workshop, LGBTQ-Inclusive Trusteeship, LIFT Wisconsin's Legal Tune Up Tool, and The Art of Conflict Transformation.

In addition to local professional development opportunities, the Wisconsin Department of Instruction, Division for Libraries and Technology (DPI-DLT) employs an experienced staff member with responsibilities that include collaboration and information sharing for inclusive services for libraries at the state level. The DLT has made it a point of emphasis in recent years to make sure all library systems in the state are kept informed and collaborate on issues affecting equity and inclusivity.

In 2021 MCFLS reached an agreement with the Milwaukee Public Library to begin providing inclusive services guidance for the system and liaison with our member libraries and the Department of Public Instruction. This led to the establishment of our MCFLS Inclusive Services ad hoc committee made up of system and member library staff that discuss ongoing issues and improvement of services to all residents, but particularly those relevant to people of color. The Inclusive Services committee members now have representation across all subcommittees and inclusive service topics are a standing agenda item on all subcommittee agendas. In early 2022 the MCFLS Board of Trustees adopted the DPI Inclusive Services Statement upon the recommendation of member libraries. This adoption supports the committee's efforts, including assistance to member libraries as they implement changes using the state inclusive services assessment and guide.

MCFLS budgets \$10,000 for continuing education and participation in the SEWI group of libraries. In addition, the system has added \$10,000 to support professional development related to inclusive services each year moving forward.

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?

The MCFLS system staff comprises seven people: five full time staff and two part-time employees. The small size of our staff means each member has an opportunity and responsibility to influence our budget and share their views regarding possible changes.

The system director regularly polls system staff to identify changes for inclusion in the system budget throughout the year. The director, for example, will challenge the Public Information Coordinator to engage in generative thinking to anticipate ways to reach marginalized communities about resources available through their libraries. As a result, this staff person is using funds in our marketing budget to reach these communities through a variety of channels, including radio advertisements and mailers. We have now a plan and budget in place to address that need moving forward. This is but one example in an iterative process involving all system staff members. Many elements of our budget are dictated by the 2025-2028 MCFLS Strategic Plan, which contains a strong emphasis on outreach to marginalized communities.

System staff have a heavy influence on the makeup of that plan and are responsible for implementing activities related to the objectives within it. Some of these activities involved funding through the budget. In effect, system staff not only have a great influence on the strategic plan and the budget, but also in determining specifically ways in which that money is being spent.

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

MCFLS has begun tracking contracts with minority and women-owned businesses as part of our new financial system in 2024. In addition, we consult with the Milwaukee County's Vendor List when considering purchasing services from a vendor. Our major contracts and agreements are usually with the City of Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Public Library, although we do use vendors for other purposes. In 2022 the system contracted with a minority-owned business for ongoing sorting of library materials, an important service provision to our member libraries. That contract has since been renewed and will extend beyond 2026.

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)?

The Milwaukee County Federated Library System (MCFLS) operates as a member organization designed to facilitate collaboration and cooperation among all public libraries in Milwaukee County. The MCFLS Board and system have always considered our primary audience or service users to be our member libraries. System staff do communicate directly with the community in a general support role, assisting residents with questions related to use of the catalog and electronic resources like Libby, but the primary responsibility of MCFLS is to our member libraries who in turn support their residents.

Currently the key stakeholders we work with when determining the budget include the MCFLS Board, member library directors and system staff. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) approves the system plan for services that does include the system budget each year. Member library directors are important to our budget process and are given the chance to offer input each year. Feedback from communities through their member libraries is critical. System staff are also important in the budget process. We hold several meetings with staff throughout the spring and summer to determine priorities within our budget in conjunction with our strategic plan.

In late 2023, we engaged our members and trustees in a strategic planning process for 2025 and beyond. Part of the data collection for this process included a patron satisfaction survey which solicited 10,000 responses from the community. Our system will continue to engage with the public to identify which services are important to them as specified in our strategic plan. Service to all of our communities, especially people of color, is a point of emphasis for MCFLS and our members in our 2025-2028 strategic plan.

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.

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

Racial and economic data has not been used to prioritize resource distribution in our budget process. The primary stakeholders that MCFLS serves are the public libraries of Milwaukee County. The system has always viewed the libraries as our constituents and connection to the communities they serve. The system board and staff rely heavily on constant communication with directors and library boards to determine the best way to serve their communities. This is borne out during negotiations with the libraries with regard to system agreements every 4-5 years, all of which result in direct payment to libraries for services they provide the system and other members. The data used to determine the agreements are internal reports that focus primarily on usage statistics to determine use and ultimately compensation.

Discretionary resource distribution within our budget is further limited because of the amount of system operating expenses tied to these agreements. Over 50% of the MCFLS budget is tied to system agreements that run through 2028: 34% to reciprocal borrowing among member libraries, 14% for cataloging services from the Milwaukee Public Library and 6.25% is also earmarked to the Milwaukee Public Library to serve as the MCFLS resource library.

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?

MCFLS has worked hard in recent years with the help of others to break down silos and barriers to access to libraries and materials. A silver lining of the pandemic has been that our communication with other library systems and libraries throughout the state has improved dramatically and offered us opportunities for shared services that may have not materialized previously.

- In 2026, the MCFLS Board authorized a one-time payment of \$1,000 to support materials acquisition for the County Jail Library after system and member library staff visited in late May 2026. The funding will support the acquisition of used materials, particularly magazines, that are of interest to residents at the facility. The system also purchased a book binding repair machine for the Community Reintegration Center in Franklin to help prolong the life of paperback materials.

- In 2025, a \$2,000 acquisition was authorized by the MCFLS Board to support the school at the Vel R. Phillips Juvenile Justice Center, including materials for all nine pods at the school. The project was made with support from staff at the Milwaukee Public Library.

- In 2022 and 2023 the system took the lead on several ARPA grants that will save significant money and expand access to residents. We participated in one ARPA grant through DPI that provided one year of access to Brainfuse JobNow and HelpNow that offers one-on-one tutoring and job help and saved member libraries (including Milwaukee Public Library) around \$60,000 in 2022.

- Through the DPI LAWDS grant (Libraries Activating Workforce Development Skills) MCFLS has established relationships with local job centers as well as Employ Milwaukee and Worker Connection to increase access to those seeking job or career assistance. The system has and will continue to devote staff time and expertise to help our partners establish relationships with our member libraries and help expand their reach. We meet monthly with our workforce partners to share information on events and strive to involve our libraries as part of this process.

- Significant MCFLS staff time and expertise has also been expended in assisting libraries with increasing access to library materials and resources through the MPL LibraryNow program. LibraryNow serves all MPS students and has become a model of resource sharing with other school systems in the County including those in Brown Deer, Greendale, and Hales Corners.

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?

We did not perform an analysis this year, but would welcome the opportunity to do so in the future, particularly if the county would help with training on how to analyze our budget with an eye to better serving disadvantaged communities.

POSITIVE RACIAL EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Since MCFLS does not directly serve county residents it is difficult to answer this question, but the new 2025-2028 Strategic Plan does include objectives that may be viewed as having long term positive racial equity implications.

- *Equity Based Decision-Making. The new strategic plan includes language to create a MCFLS Board policy to identify how DEI needs are being met when creating a new or evaluating an existing system service. The plan also prioritizes the expansion of diverse perspectives when hiring system staff and recommending appointments to the MCFLS Board. MCFLS will also begin the process of integrating the Milwaukee County Racial Equity Budget Tool (REBT) into the system budgeting process.*
- *Support for the Community Reintegration Center. MCFLS staff have begun discussions with staff at the Community Reintegration Center to explore ways to support library services to residents. Concepts include financial support for new materials at all three county facilities, expertise on collection management to keep track of loaned materials, and better access to library materials as residents leave these facilities.*
- *MCFLS Literacy Program. The system has begun marketing for an adult literacy program aimed at assisting patrons who want to learn to read. MCFLS has made investments in Reading Horizons, an online, self-directed tutoring program, and the Juice, a news source focused on providing reading material at different ability levels.*
- *Inclusive Services. MCFLS has traditionally focused on delivery and automation services to member libraries as our primary role, but the system also plays a role in coordinating inclusive and youth services for member libraries. Our experiences during the pandemic and completing this survey of our offerings forced us to address this issue and Milwaukee Public Library has agreed to help facilitate these services in their role as resource library. The system has set aside funding for inclusive and youth services activities, including training and outside speakers to help our member libraries become more responsive to our communities.*

NEGATIVE RACIAL EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Some negative racial equity implications that we've been able to identify:

- *State aid uncertainty. Although we've made great strides in advocating for more state funding for library systems, these advances are always tenuous and subject to the whims of the state legislature. State aid makes up roughly 96% of our total revenue. Any reduction in our system budget has negative racial equity implications because MCFLS operates on the margins and cannot accommodate reductions as easily as other organizations.*

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

MCFLS will work closely with the system board and libraries to determine relevant needs as they come up. For example, the system and member libraries deciding to open up more access to our communities by expanding max checkouts on our hoopla streaming service because of the pandemic.

The system also has an established practice in place to make changes through a mid-year budget revision process. This process generally takes place in July or August after the system audit has taken place and is approved by the MCFLS Board.

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

MCFLS does not directly assess fines and fees to County residents, but our libraries have traditionally assessed fines and replacement fees for materials that are overdue or have not been returned.

Recently there has been movement in our system away from assessing overdue fines for late materials. Milwaukee Public Library and other public libraries have never assessed fines for children's materials, but now libraries like Wauwatosa and Shorewood Public Libraries have gone completely fine free. The justification for this is based in equity and removing barriers to access. We feel other libraries will soon join this movement. No resident should be denied access to library materials because of their economic status.

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?

Possible project ideas:

- 1. Support for library facilities at the Community Reintegration Center, County Jail and Vel R. Phillips Juvenile Justice Center. MCFLS is proposing ongoing financial support and expertise to assist these facilities in attaining new materials for residents. Currently the libraries at these facilities rely on donations of used materials. Based on a formula of per capita library support in Milwaukee County, we estimate \$20,000 per year would meet the needs of all residents. This includes the purchase cost and library staff time needed to order and process new materials.*
- 2. Continued support for the Adult Literacy program. MCFLS is currently running an adult literacy campaign aimed at enriching the lives of county residents who want to improve their reading skills. The system has purchased two online applications to support this campaign: Reading Horizons and The Juice. Reading Horizons is an online literacy tutoring platform aimed at adult learners. The Juice is an objective news source that allows residents to choose terms and language at their personal reading level. We'd like to propose continued support for both these resources. Reading Horizons costs \$2,200/year. The Juice will cost around \$3,000. Total cost is \$5,200.*

10. What is your department doing to dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities, including meeting multilingual needs, accessibility barriers, food apartheid, financial empowerment or other factors that impact the stability and wellbeing of people in Milwaukee County?

Dismantling barriers for our member libraries and residents are generally focused on removing barriers to information that should be available to all our communities regardless of race or language.

- *Since late 2025, Greenfield, Milwaukee and Wauwatosa libraries are piloting a "Welcome Card" project with support of MCFLS to break down barriers to library access to those with housing insecurity. In this pilot, patrons are not required to provide a residence address and can still receive access to print and electronic resources at these three participating libraries.*

- *Since MCFLS is responsible for the automated library system, we've identified a need to increase the number of languages supported by the software. Since 2023, the system invested over \$60,000 in additional language support for traditional Chinese, Russian, and Arabic character sets for the training and live Sierra systems.*

- *In 2024 MCFLS received board approval to purchase a product called [UserWay](#), a web-based accessibility widget that provides screen reading, text enhancement and website translation into over 50 languages. UserWay has been installed on the new catalog released in June 2024 and the system website.*

- *In past years, MCFLS used grant funding to provide the first significant Spanish language collection within the state OverDrive collection of eBooks and audiobooks. Maintaining and improving this collection has now been standardized as part of the statewide collection development policy governing the purchase of all materials. More materials in different languages have been added since this initial collection.*

- *In May 2020, MCFLS negotiated with our vendor to provide 3,200 electronic magazines to community residents through member libraries. These titles are offered in 18 different languages through an easy-to-use interface and app. This collection is now part of the popular Libby app that makes it even easier to access.*

- *In 2022, the system adopted a new CountyCat mobile app product that offers 11 language options, including changing the default language options for the app to German, Spanish, French, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean.*

We support multi-lingual needs through a number of budget lines totaling around \$26,000, including support for multilingual forms. MCFLS subsidizes the cost for electronic magazines, which for 2026 is around \$9,000. This does not include the thousands of multi-language materials owned by member libraries and made accessible through the online catalog and mobile app.



Appendices

Appendix A:
Glossary

Appendix B:
Frequently Asked Questions

Appendix C:
Resources by Strategic Focus Area

Appendix D:
Community Engagement Frameworks

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.*

Historically marginalized 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.*

Food Apartheid: *Inequity in the food system on the basis of race, class, and geography that are the result of discriminatory planning and policy decisions.*

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.

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?

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?

The REBT will focus on an equity analysis of decisions for 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.

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.

APPENDIX B

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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.

15) 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 Performance, Strategy and Budget and the County Board.

LOGISTICS

16) When will the budget tool be due?

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

Commented [SC2]: Update with 2027 Budget Due Date

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.

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

- [Community Engagement Toolkit](#)

Additional County Resources

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

Disparities in Food Access

- [Food Apartheid](#)
- [Food Access](#)

APPENDIX D

Community Engagement Frameworks & Guidance

Community Engagement connection to the REBT Tool and Budget Alignment

These frameworks help guide users of the REBT tool to think critically about how budget decisions align with the strategic plan and advance racial equity. By applying the continuum, staff can assess whether their fiscal choices reflect appropriate levels of community involvement, ensure that decisions are informed by community priorities, and understand the equity impacts of how resources are allocated. This supports intentional, equity-centered budgeting rooted in community voice and shared responsibility.

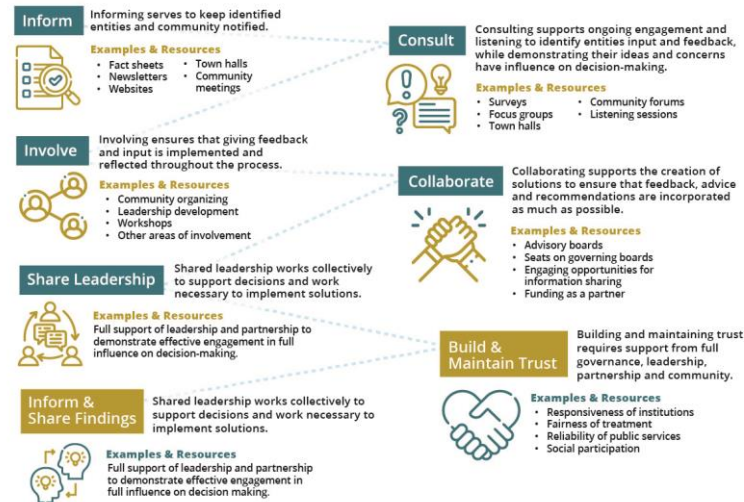
Summary of the Community Engagement Frameworks

The Community Engagement Continuum & Breaking Down the Path outlines five levels of engagement—Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Share Leadership, supported by practices that build trust and ensure findings are shared transparently. At the early stages, engagement focuses on providing information and gathering feedback through tools like fact sheets, surveys, and town halls. As engagement deepens, community members help shape decisions, co-create solutions, and participate in shared leadership structures such as advisory boards or governing bodies. Across all stages, trust-building, transparency, responsiveness, and partnership are essential for meaningful and equitable involvement.

Community Engagement Continuum



Breaking Down the Path



For future assistance, please access OOE's Technical Assistance program by sending us an email at OOEAssist@milwaukeecountywi.gov For direct self-serving tools around our Community Engagement efforts, please visit the [Office of Equity Community Engagement web page](#)

ON THE COVER



“ WELCOME TO THE PEOPLE’S HOUSE ”

Artist: Tia Richardson

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MILWAUKEE COUNTY
HEALTH & RACIAL EQUITY

ONE COUNTY ONE VISION

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

County.milwaukee.gov/vision

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