



RACIAL EQUITY



BUDGET TOOL

2027 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 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.

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: MCTS

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?

MCTS recognizes that a diverse and inclusive workforce strengthens organizational performance, fosters innovation, and enhances our ability to serve the diverse communities of Milwaukee County. We are committed to creating a workplace where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and experiences.

To support this commitment, MCTS has implemented intentional recruitment and retention strategies designed to promote equity throughout the hiring process. Prior to posting any vacancy, a Scoping Meeting is conducted to develop a Recruitment Plan. These meetings include diverse representation across race and gender to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations are incorporated into each recruitment effort. The Recruitment Plan is developed collaboratively by the Chief Human Resources Officer, Director of Organizational Development and Workforce Relations, and Employment Manager.

Positions are advertised through a variety of job boards, social media platforms, and community partnerships to expand outreach to diverse candidate pools. MCTS maintains relationships with numerous Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) that help promote employment opportunities to historically underrepresented populations. In addition, job descriptions and minimum qualifications are regularly reviewed to identify and remove potential barriers that may discourage qualified candidates from applying.

To support retention, MCTS conducts confidential employee surveys to assess employee experiences, organizational culture, and opportunities to strengthen inclusion and belonging. Feedback from these surveys helps identify potential barriers and informs strategies to improve employee engagement, workplace culture, and equitable employment practices.

MCTS also focuses on retaining a diverse workforce by creating clear pathways for internal advancement. Employees are encouraged to pursue promotional opportunities through mentorship, registered apprenticeship programs, leadership development initiatives, and internal recruitment processes. These programs help employees build the skills and experience necessary to advance within the organization while ensuring equitable access to career growth opportunities. By investing in internal talent development, MCTS strengthens employee engagement, supports succession planning, and promotes a workforce that reflects the diverse communities we serve.

Additionally, MCTS monitors Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data and shares workforce demographic information with hiring managers to reinforce accountability and support efforts to diversify all levels of the organization. Internal analyses of hiring, promotions, and workforce trends indicate that these intentional efforts continue to expand

workforce diversity and equitable opportunities for advancement.

The primary costs associated with these activities include recruitment planning, community outreach, employee engagement surveys, workforce data analysis, and ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Standard recruitment tools and advertising are budgeted through Human Resources at approximately \$40,000 annually. In addition, MCTS may utilize up to \$100,000 annually from its marketing and advertising budget for promotional campaigns, bus signage, and other recruitment advertising designed to attract a larger and more diverse applicant pool.

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?

MCTS is committed to promoting equity in workforce development by creating intentional pathways for professional growth, leadership development, and career advancement for all employees, with a particular focus on increasing opportunities for women, minorities, and other historically underrepresented groups.

In 2022, MCTS launched a mentorship program that continues to expand and evolve. The program provides employees with guidance, professional networking opportunities, career development resources, and support from experienced mentors who understand and value diverse perspectives. Through these relationships, employees gain greater visibility, build professional networks, and strengthen their ability to navigate career pathways. The program has contributed to increased advocacy, professional growth, and more equitable opportunities for advancement throughout the organization.

MCTS also offers two Registered Apprenticeship Programs in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. The 18-month Bus Mechanic Registered Apprenticeship Program provides lower-level maintenance employees with structured training, hands-on experience, and mentorship that prepare them to advance into "A" Bus Mechanic positions. In addition, MCTS has made apprenticeship the standard entry pathway for all newly hired bus operators. Through the 14-month Bus Operator Registered Apprenticeship Program, new operators receive comprehensive training, coaching, and mentorship from experienced operators. These programs create clear career pathways, support retention, and ensure employees have equitable access to advancement opportunities.

To further support employee growth, MCTS invests in organization-wide training programs that strengthen leadership and interpersonal skills. Employees and leaders participate in development opportunities such as The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Leading at the Speed of Trust, and training provided through the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). These programs enhance communication, trust-building, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and employee well-being while supporting an inclusive workplace culture.

MCTS also developed the Transportation Leadership Development Program, a 10-month initiative designed to prepare supervisors and emerging leaders for future leadership opportunities. The program focuses on emotional intelligence, communication, relationship building, conflict resolution, coaching, and constructive feedback through case studies, discussions, and practical problem-solving exercises. By investing in internal talent and establishing a consistent leadership framework, the program creates equitable advancement opportunities and helps build a diverse pipeline of future leaders.

Through mentorship, apprenticeships, leadership development, and ongoing training, MCTS continues to create equitable access to career advancement, foster an inclusive culture, and develop a workforce that reflects the diverse communities it serves.

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?

MCTS incorporates employee input into budget development and operational decision-making through a variety of formal and informal engagement processes. The organization utilizes a zero-based budgeting approach, requiring department leaders to review operational needs annually and build budget requests from the ground up. Throughout this process, directors engage with their teams to discuss operational priorities, service improvements, workforce needs, and opportunities for innovation. These discussions help inform budget requests before they are reviewed by senior leadership and submitted through Milwaukee County's annual budget process.

The group of department directors and executive leaders involved in these decisions is diverse, consisting of approximately 35% women and 47% minorities or people of color. This diversity helps ensure that multiple perspectives are considered throughout the budget development and decision-making process.

Because transit service levels significantly influence MCTS's operating budget, frontline employee input is especially important in service planning decisions. The Service Development Department actively solicits feedback from bus operators regarding route and schedule performance through Operator Service Reports, which are available both at operating locations and electronically through the employee portal. Service planners review and analyze this feedback and incorporate recommendations when appropriate.

MCTS also gathers input from station personnel, route supervisors, and representatives from the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). These stakeholders provide valuable insights regarding route performance, scheduling challenges, passenger demand, and operational concerns. Feedback received through these channels is used to inform service planning decisions, including adjustments to schedules, recovery time, and layovers, which can be implemented on a quarterly basis when warranted.

As a result, MCTS's budget and service planning processes are informed by a diverse group of leaders, frontline employees, supervisors, and union representatives. This collaborative approach helps ensure that operational decisions reflect the experiences of those closest to the work while supporting equitable, effective, and responsive transit service for the communities MCTS serves.

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

Yes. MCTS tracks spending with minority- and women-owned businesses through its participation in Milwaukee County's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Targeted Business Enterprise (TBE) programs. MCTS reports this information annually through the County's established reporting processes and works closely with the Milwaukee County Office of Economic Inclusion (OEI) to support supplier diversity efforts and increase participation by disadvantaged businesses whenever possible.

Based on currently available information, MCTS's direct spend with DBE- and TBE-certified firms remains approximately 1%. In addition to direct expenditures, MCTS also captures participation through subcontracting opportunities, which further contribute to the overall utilization of minority- and women-owned businesses on applicable projects and procurements.

MCTS continues to monitor regulatory changes that impact DBE program administration. Following the October 2025 U.S. Department of Transportation Interim Final Rule, Milwaukee County OEI has been engaged in the process of recertifying DBE firms. As a result, DBE goal assignments on new contracts have been temporarily paused while the recertification process is completed. MCTS remains in communication with OEI regarding the status of these efforts and will continue to incorporate DBE participation goals into procurements as appropriate once the recertification process is finalized.

To strengthen tracking and reporting efforts, MCTS has worked with Milwaukee County OEI to enhance its understanding and use of the County's B2Gnow system, which is used to monitor DBE and TBE participation and subcontractor utilization. MCTS remains committed to improving data collection and reporting practices to ensure accurate tracking of supplier diversity participation across its contracts and procurements.

MCTS recognizes the importance of supporting minority- and women-owned businesses and will continue to partner with Milwaukee County OEI and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to increase participation and promote equitable access to contracting opportunities.

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)?

MCTS recognizes the importance of engaging riders, community members, and key stakeholders in decisions that may affect transit service and funding priorities. In the second quarter of 2026, MCTS engaged Jarrett Walker & Associates to conduct a comprehensive redesign of the fixed-route bus network for implementation in 2027 within available funding levels. The network redesign is intended to ensure that transit resources are allocated in a manner that best meets the needs of Milwaukee County residents while supporting equitable access to transportation.

As part of this process, MCTS is conducting a robust public engagement effort designed to gather input from a diverse range of stakeholders, including riders, community members, local organizations, advocacy groups, municipal partners, and other interested parties. Opportunities for engagement include both in-person community meetings and virtual engagement sessions, as well as surveys that allow participants to provide feedback on service needs, travel patterns, and priorities for future transit service.

Community engagement activities are scheduled throughout the third and fourth quarters of 2026 to ensure that residents from diverse backgrounds and communities have multiple opportunities to participate and share their perspectives. Feedback collected through these efforts will be used to help inform service planning decisions and evaluate how available funding can be used most effectively to meet community needs.

Because the engagement process is ongoing, final results and recommendations are not yet available. However, MCTS is committed to incorporating stakeholder feedback into the network redesign process and using community input to help guide future service and funding decisions.

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?

MCTS annually assesses the bus route network to ensure that services are provided in a non-discriminatory manner as required under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

MCTS also collects rider survey data and uses the latest American Community Survey census data to understand who is served by transit routes.

In addition, MCTS collects and uses economic geospatial data from the Census American Community Survey and from intergovernmental partners like the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) to inform ridership generator locations. MCTS also analyzes location data for WisGO fare outlets to confirm that the low-income and minority population would continue to be served in an equitable manner compared to the non-low-income and non-minority population.

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?

MCTS remains an active partner across Milwaukee County departments, particularly in the areas of marketing and communications. We work closely with the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation, including hosting regular office hours at MCTS for the Director of Public Affairs and Marketing (among other MCDOT staff). This collaboration has strengthened communication, improved coordination, and helped break down silos.

MCTS also proactively supports countywide initiatives by sharing information about equity, health, and community events through its communications channels, helping to expand awareness and engagement. In partnership with departments such as the Office for Persons with Disabilities and the Office on Equity, MCTS continues to collaborate on joint initiatives that advance shared goals. These partnerships and collaborative efforts will continue under the adopted Marketing Department budget.

Through a variety of internal communication channels, MCTS promotes employee wellness, including physical and mental health resources, and encourages utilization of Milwaukee County Health Clinics and related services. Externally, MCTS celebrates and educates the community through bus promotions recognizing influential American leaders such as Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., while also participating in civic and cultural events, including the Juneteenth Day Parade.

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?**
- b. What will your department do to mitigate unintended consequences resulting from your proposed budget changes?**
- c. What are the demographic impacts of any fines and fees assessed by your department? Are there disproportionate impacts on any particular groups?**

The proposed 2027 Network Redesign Initiative, being led by Jarrett Walker & Associates, is intended to evaluate and redesign MCTS's fixed-route bus network to better align transit service with current travel patterns, community needs, and available funding resources. The anticipated benefits of the initiative include improved service efficiency, enhanced transit access, and a network that more effectively connects residents to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential destinations throughout Milwaukee County.

As part of the planning process, a comprehensive Service Equity Analysis will be conducted for the Final Network Plan. This analysis will assess the potential benefits and adverse impacts of the proposed service changes on disadvantaged communities, including minority populations, low-income individuals, and other transit-dependent riders. The analysis will be used to identify areas where service changes may create unintended consequences and to evaluate strategies to avoid, minimize, or mitigate those impacts whenever practical.

The Service Equity Analysis will serve as the primary tool for evaluating both expected benefits and potential unintended consequences. In addition, community engagement activities, stakeholder feedback, ridership data, demographic information, and service performance metrics will be considered throughout the planning process to help inform decision-making and ensure that equity considerations are incorporated into the final recommendations.

If the analysis identifies potential negative impacts on disadvantaged communities, MCTS will work with Jarrett Walker & Associates and community stakeholders to evaluate mitigation strategies prior to implementation. These strategies may include modifications to route design, service levels, stop locations, or other operational elements to reduce adverse impacts and improve equitable access to transit services.

Because the network redesign process is ongoing, the final benefits, impacts, and mitigation measures have not yet been determined. The findings of the Service Equity Analysis will be incorporated into the final plan before approval and implementation.

MCTS does not assess fines. While MCTS collects passenger fares for transit services, the proposed Network Redesign Initiative does not include any changes to fare policies or fare structures. Therefore, no demographic impacts related to fines or fees have been identified as part of this proposed budget change.

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?

Additional funding can support a scalable, demand-responsive paratransit program that provides emergency rides when conventional ADA paratransit vans are unavailable. Because the service is modular, ride volume can expand or contract based on the level of funding allocated.

Additional funding would also enable MCTS to further advance its commitment to equity by expanding employee development, leadership training, and inclusion initiatives. Professional development and education are essential tools for creating equitable opportunities, building cultural competency, and supporting a diverse workforce; however, these programs require dedicated resources to be effective and sustainable.

To support these efforts, MCTS would prioritize funding for an additional full-time position dedicated to workforce development, equity, and inclusion initiatives. This role would be responsible for developing, coordinating, and facilitating internal training programs focused on leadership development, equity, inclusion, employee engagement, and professional growth. Having dedicated staff support would increase MCTS's capacity to provide consistent, high-quality learning opportunities across the organization.

Additional staffing resources would also allow MCTS to expand its internal mentoring program, which has proven to be an effective strategy for supporting career development, increasing employee engagement, and creating advancement opportunities for employees from historically underrepresented groups. Expanding mentorship opportunities would strengthen succession planning efforts, enhance leadership pipelines, and promote greater equity in career advancement throughout the organization.

The intended outcome of this investment is to build a more inclusive workplace culture, increase employee development opportunities, strengthen retention, and create equitable pathways for advancement at all levels of the organization. The estimated annual cost for this additional full-time position, including salary and fringe benefits, would be approximately \$108,000

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?

MCTS is committed to reducing barriers to transportation access and ensuring that services, programs, and communications are accessible to the diverse communities it serves. Reliable transportation is a critical component of community wellbeing, providing residents with access to employment, education, healthcare, grocery stores, and other essential services that support economic stability and quality of life.

To support individuals with limited English proficiency, MCTS utilizes Certified Languages International to provide interpretation services, helping riders access information and assistance in their preferred language. In addition, MCTS conducts targeted community outreach and public engagement efforts in languages other than English, including Spanish-language public meetings, to ensure broader participation and meaningful community input.

MCTS also works to remove accessibility barriers for individuals with disabilities through a variety of transportation services and programs. The organization provides paratransit van service throughout Milwaukee County, offering transportation options that exceed the minimum service requirements established under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These services help

ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to employment, healthcare, education, shopping, and other essential destinations.

In addition, MCTS operates a comprehensive Mobility Management Program that supports seniors and individuals with disabilities by providing education, training, and travel assistance. Through this program, participants learn how to safely and confidently navigate the transit system to access work, school, medical appointments, shopping, and other daily activities. By increasing independence and expanding access to transportation, the program helps remove barriers that can limit participation in community life.

Through language access services, inclusive community engagement, accessible transportation options, mobility training programs, and equitable transit service delivery, MCTS continues to advance its commitment to equity, inclusion, accessibility, and the overall wellbeing of Milwaukee County residents.



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.*

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.

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](#)

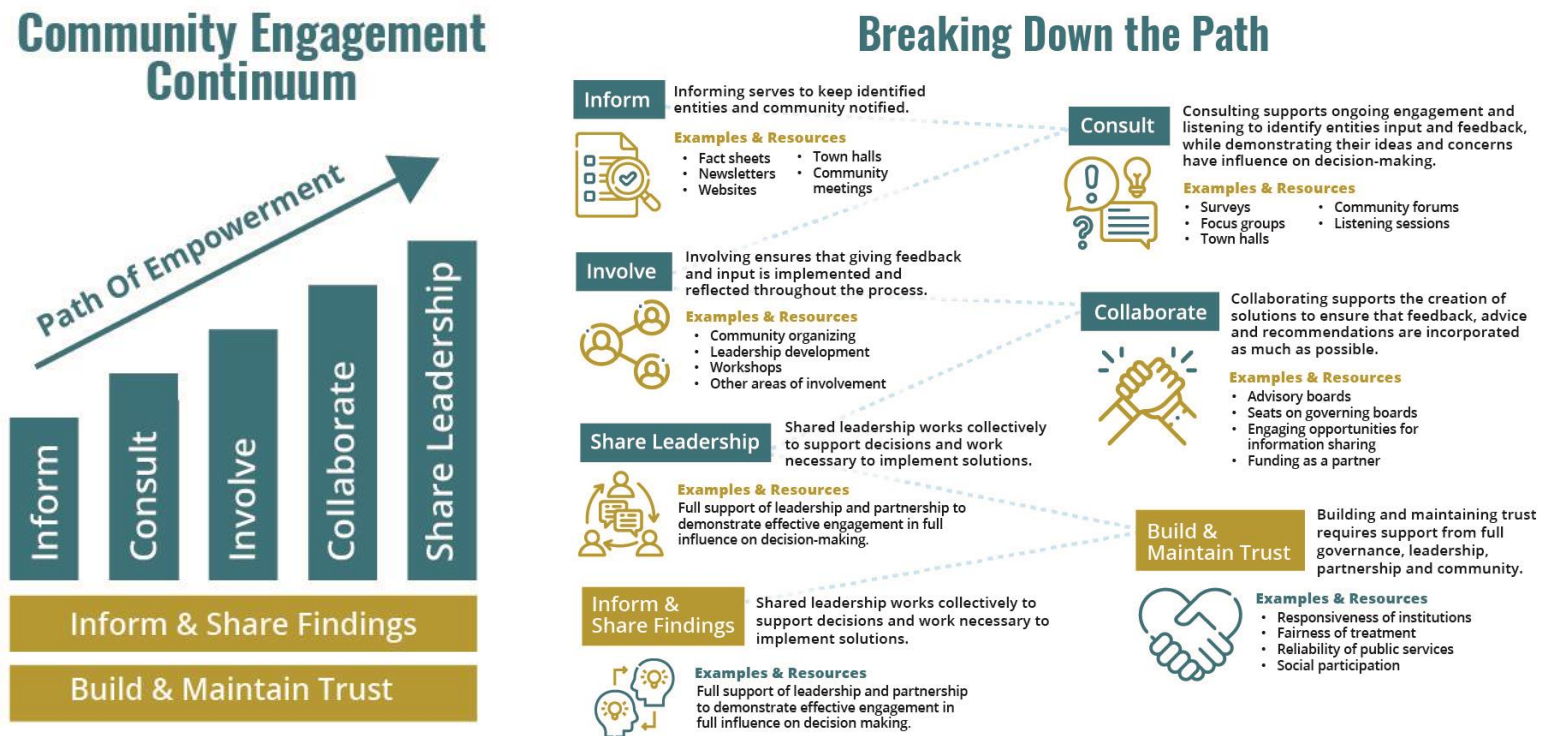
Community Engagement Frameworks & Guidance

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.

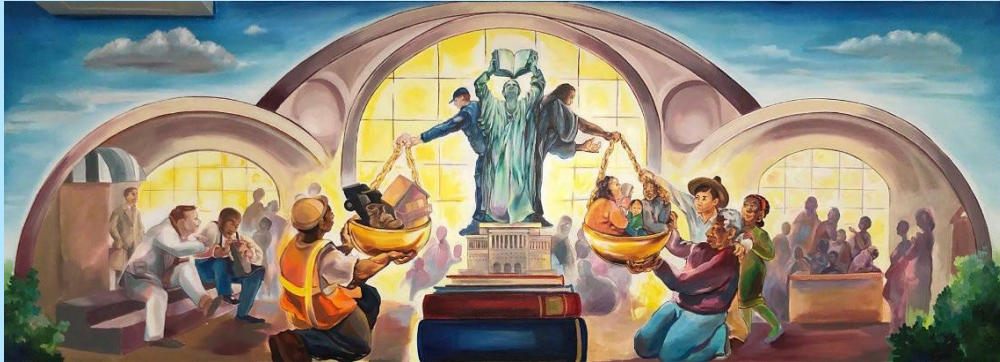
Summary of the Community Engagement Frameworks

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.



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

Commissioned in 2020. Used with permission of the artist.



ONE COUNTY ONE VISION

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

County.milwaukee.gov/vision

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