Racial Equity and Social Justice

Community Engagement TOOLKIT

Contents

March 8, 2019

Dear Friends,

MONTGOMERY COUNTY HAS A LONG HISTORY of working with residents to identify and achieve shared goals aimed at improving opportunities for our community. Building off this work, today we launch the County's Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative aimed at advancing fair and equitable outcomes for individuals and communities of color in government decision-making across all County-funded agencies:

- **Montgomery County Government,**
- **Montgomery County Public Schools,**
- **Montgomery College, and**
- **the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.**

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Nancy Navarro
Council President

Many of you joined the County Council as partners in the **Ready for Tomorrow Education and Workforce Summit,** which made the compelling case that narrowing employment and academic achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, and language were moral and economic imperatives for Montgomery County. Today, we ask you and your community partners to help us continue this conversation by sharing your perspectives and helping us identify opportunities to advance racial equity and social justice in government decision-making.

Last April, the County Council adopted Resolution No. 18-1095 articulating a vision for racial equity in the County and a commitment to developing a Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy for the County. Executing this resolution requires the meaningful engagement of all communities in the County, with communities of color at the forefront, to ensure that the policy reflects the needs and priorities of those most impacted by disparities and inequities.

We have built a coalition of government and community leaders to join us in this effort because advancing racial equity is a top priority for the County. A County Racial Equity Office will be created to oversee the implementation of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy. While the County will have technical assistance to implement this policy, we need the community's assistance to set priorities and address potential challenges.

Our March 13 community conversation on equity at the Silver Spring Civic Building will bring together a diverse set of participants to brainstorm opportunities for improving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. With this community engagement toolkit, we also are asking

members of the community to host community conversations that capture residents' perspectives, ideas, and recommendations for action to reduce inequities.

The Council will use the feedback we receive from our March 13 kick-off meeting, community conversations, and responses to our Equity Matters Community Survey (launching on April 1, 2019) to inform the development of our County's Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy. More specifically, feedback through these three community engagement opportunities will shape next steps for how government entities in our County apply equity lenses to their policies, practices, and decision-making.

Please join us at our community conversation kick-off, facilitate a community conversation, or complete the Equity Community Survey available online through July 15, 2019. Each of you has something important to contribute, and we look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Sincerely,

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Nancy Navarro
Council President

Advancing Racial Equity and Social Justice in Government Decision-Making[2]

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITY, RATHER THAN EQUITY, characterizes many systems of well-being nationally and locally. As noted by the Racial Equity Institute, people of color (African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and some subgroups of Asian Americans) are often over-represented in the child welfare and criminal justice systems, and experience higher levels of disadvantage on measures of health, education, and economic development. Local data in Montgomery County tells a similar story.

Data on Disparities by Race and Ethnicity in Montgomery County, 2011-2015

System	Outcomes	White	Asian	Black	Latino
Education	High school completion	98%	92%	92%	69%
	Some college education	88%	81%	72%	45%
Employment	Employment rate	78%	74%	73%	77%
	Unemployment rate	4%	5%	20%	8%
Housing and Income	Households owned their own home	75%	74%	44%	50%
	Average household income	$160,000	$131,000	$88,000	$88,000
	Residents living in poverty	4%	6%	11%	12%
	Children living in poverty	2%	6%	16%	14%

Source: 2011-15 Census Data compiled by L. Hendey and L. Posey, Racial Inequities in Montgomery County, 2011-15 (The Urban Institute, 2017)

Despite high rates of high school completion (69–98%) and employment (73–78%) among adults from each racial and ethnic group, Black and Latino residents in Montgomery County were more than twice as likely as Whites to be unemployed and have household incomes below the federal poverty level. Blacks and Latinos were also 32–41% less likely to own their homes and their children were 2–7 times more likely to live in poverty than Whites and Asians in the County.

Research suggests that increasing equitable outcomes among communities of color stimulates economic growth that benefits communities overall. For example, PolicyLink's Equitable Growth Profile for Fairfax County, Virginia, estimates that eliminating disparities in incomes by race and ethnicity would have increased their County's gross domestic product by $26.2 billion in 2012.[3]

The Government Alliance for Race and Equity (GARE) finds that racial disparities evident across measures are often "explained by blaming individual people—promoting 'hard work' as the way to get ahead." They note that while hard work can help, the underlying systems driving racial inequities must be addressed to eliminate disparities by race and ethnicity. Based on their work in more than 100 local jurisdictions, GARE offers three sets of best practices for local jurisdictions to advance racial equity:

- **Normalize** conversations about race and equity, including the distinctions between individual and institutional racism and between explicit and implicit bias.

- **Organize** for racial equity by building organizational capacity within government to advance equity and engaging communities to advance racial equity, particularly communities of color.

- **Operationalize** for racial equity by using racial equity tools and data to evaluate progress.

[2] Summarized from OLO Report 2018-8, Racial Equity in Government Decision-Making.
[3] See page 56 of Equitable Growth Profile of Fairfax County, PolicyLink and USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity.

Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative Timeline

- **April 24, 2018,** Resolution 18-1095 adopted affirming the Council's commitment to creating a Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy for Montgomery County

- **September 25, 2018,** release of Office of Legislative Oversight Report 2018-8, Racial Equity in Government Decision-Making: Lessons from the Field

- **January 10-11, 2019,** Racial Equity Training for County Leadership

- **February 12, 2019,** Racial Equity Training Debrief for County Leadership

- **March 13, 2019,** Kick off Racial Equity and Social Justice Community Engagement Campaign with press conference and community conversation at the Silver Spring Civic Building

- **April 1, 2019,** Launch of Community Equity Matters Survey and Community Conversations

- **April 8, 2019,** Youth Forum on Racial Equity and Social Justice

- **June 11, 2019,** Council meeting on Racial Equity and Social Justice

- **Spring/Summer 2019**
  - Community Conversations through July 15, 2019
  - Release of baseline report describing disparities by race and ethnicity in education, employment, housing, health, criminal justice, and other measures of opportunity
  - County Council starts work on developing Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy legislation

- **Fall 2019**
  - Public hearing on proposed Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy
  - Pass legislation enacting Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy

Preparing for Community Conversations

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS CAPTURE COMMUNITY INPUT. They engage community members to discuss what helps and hinders community priorities from advancing. Community conversations can bring together similar individuals from existing community-based organizations as well as strangers on topical issues. Moreover, "community conversations can help mobilize ideas, improve skills, and build on the passion of the community."[4]

To enable community conversations to generate knowledge that can inform decision-making, participants should feel comfortable sharing different perspectives and differences of opinion so long as they do so in a way that enhances the conversation. To help ensure a productive session, please review the guidelines and key assumptions for community conversations described below.[5]

Guidelines for Community Conversations

Speak from your experience	• Be honest and willing to share. • Speak only for yourself and avoid speaking for others or for an entire group. Use "I" statements. • Avoid critiquing others' experiences; focus on your own experiences.
Respect the group	• What you share during community conversations is honored and respected. • Be mindful of the time. • If you tend to share a lot, challenge yourself to listen more. • If you tend to remain quiet in group discussions, challenge yourself to speak a little more.
Listen to learn	• Listen with curiosity and the willingness to learn from others and to change your mind. • Lean into discomfort. Allow yourself to stretch beyond your comfort zone.
Be aware of your impact	• Resist the temptation to interrupt. • Suspend judgment. Be open to the wisdom in each person's story. • Use the skills that you have to help the whole group have a good conversation. • Be courageous.

Assumptions for Community Conversations

- Diversity is a valuable community asset.
- Diversity of input and strategy is essential to yield results that will serve a diverse population.
- Taking time for people to genuinely connect, learn together and develop relationships can grow trust and generate more effective collaborative action.
- If people are passionate about something and involved in the creation of the plan, they are more likely to be invested in the implementation of actions.
- Local government is responsible for representing the interests of residents from all backgrounds and all walks of life.
- Trust and cooperation are necessary for positive and productive relationships between residents and local government.

Source: *The Better Together Initiative Conversation Guide,* Decatur, GA

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[4] Health Equity Alliance of Rock County Community Engagement Toolkit
[5] The Better Together Initiative Conversation Guide, Decatur, GA

The Community Conversation Toolkit

WE OFFER THIS DOCUMENT TO HELP ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES across the County continue the community-wide conversation on racial equity and social justice launched at our kick-off meeting on March 13, 2019. We invite members of the community to take this conversation to homes, houses of worship, neighborhood associations, book clubs, PTAs, and other places and organizations that bring people together in Montgomery County. The County Council will rely on input received from these community conversations by July 15, 2019, to help shape legislation for a County Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy by the end of 2019.

To assist community-based organizations and individuals in hosting community conversations on racial equity and social justice, this toolkit offers information on the following:

- **Roles and Responsibilities**
- **Community Conversations Check List**
- **Racial Equity and Social Justice Discussion Guide**
- **Final Reminders**

1. Roles and Responsibilities

The experiences of other jurisdictions that have used community conversations to broaden their community engagement suggests the need for five specific roles:

- **Hosts** to convene community conversations;
- **Moderators** to facilitate community conversations;
- **Scribes** to record specific reflections and suggestions shared by participants;
- **Timekeepers** to ensure the flow of community conversations; and
- **Participants** with a strong interest in the topic of discussion.

Brief descriptions of the key responsibilities for each of these roles follows. ***We also recommend that each person assisting or attending a community conversation review this toolkit beforehand.***

- **Hosts** are responsible for setting a date, time, and location for the conversation and inviting participants. Five to 10 people make a good-sized group; groups with more than 10 people can divide into two or more sub-groups. A sample invitation follows:

   On [date], I will be hosting a community conversation on racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. The County Council is intending to develop a Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy for County Government aimed at advancing racial equity and social justice in government decision-making. Their proposal for legislation will be based in part on input from people like us who are invested in the future of the County. I am excited about this opportunity and hope you will join me. Here are all of the details: [insert date, time, place, what to bring, and RSVP] If you have any questions, please let me know. You might also want to visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html for more information about the Council's ongoing equity work. Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you.

The Host also recruits several people to help with the conversation (Moderators, Scribes, and Timekeepers) and obtains all necessary supplies (see details in the Community Conversation Checklist). On the day of the conversation, the Host should plan on welcoming and, afterward, thanking participants for their engagement.

- **Moderators** are responsible for keeping the conversation moving and staying on topic. They make sure everyone has a chance to speak and keep an eye on the Scribe. They are also responsible for slowing the conversation down whenever the Scribe needs a moment to catch up on note taking. In turn, Moderators should contribute very little as participants.

- **Scribes** take notes using a notebook, notecards, or a laptop computer—whatever works best. They are not responsible for capturing every detail—just the highlights. Scribes should not hesitate to ask participants to repeat or clarify something they have said. The Scribe will also be responsible for completing the Community Conversation Report within two days of the group's discussion at *www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html*. If a Scribe needs a paper response form, please contact Dr. Elaine Bonner-Tompkins at elaine.bonner-tompkins@montgomerycountymd.gov.

- **Timekeepers** assist Moderators in keeping the conversations moving. Timekeepers are encouraged to use their cell phones to keep track of time without literally watching their clocks. Timekeepers are also encouraged to give "two-minute warnings" to help participants wrap up their thoughts and move to the next discussion question. Unlike Moderators, Timekeepers are encouraged to actively participate in the conversation.

- **Participants** are responsible for keeping their remarks on topic, listening to others, and if they disagree with someone, doing so respectively. In particular, participants should try to understand the positions of others, not monopolize conversations, and make the extra effort to contribute opinions, questions, and ideas if they tend to be quiet in groups. Anyone with a strong interest in Montgomery County can participate. Most participants will be Montgomery County residents, but people who work in the County and frequent visitors can also be invited to participate.

2. Community Conversations Check List[6]

- **A Group of People**—Five to 10 people is a good-sized group. If your group is larger, consider breaking into smaller sub-groups.

- **A Location**—Groups can meet in private homes, houses of worship, community centers, or even one of Montgomery County's excellent eating and drinking establishments. Anywhere participants can sit comfortably and hear each other will do.

- **Racial Equity and Social Justice Community Engagement Toolkit**—Copies are needed for the Host, Moderator, Scribe, Timekeeper, and Participants. The Toolkit is available for download at *www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html* and a limited number of print copies are available from the Montgomery County Council.

- **Pens and Pencils**—Make sure there are enough for everyone.

- **Food and Drink**—You can provide drinks and snacks or ask everyone to bring something to share.

- **A Moderator**—This person facilitates the conversation, making sure the group stays on topic and everyone has a chance to speak. This could be the Host or someone else in the group. Make sure the Moderator is identified before the group meets.

- **A Scribe**—This person takes notes during the conversation and submits the group's Community Conversation Report online to the County Council via *www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html*. This job can be shared by two people.

- **A Timekeeper**—This person assists the Moderator, so the group finishes on time.

3. Racial Equity and Social Justice Discussion Guide[7]

This section describes the recommended flow and agenda for community conversations, including the discussion questions to review as a group. It is presented in three parts.

A. Capture Information about the Convening Group

The Moderator should consult with the Host and/or Scribe to answer the following questions before the conversations begin. Responses should be recorded on a separate sheet of paper so that they can be entered into the Community Conversation Report online following the meeting. After participants have introduced themselves, review this information with the full group and ask for any additional input they might have.

- Group Name
- Description of your group. You might include gender and racial mix, age range, neighborhood, how long participants have lived in Montgomery County, etc.
- Where did you meet? (e.g., private home, house of worship, community building, library, recreation center, restaurant, park, etc.)
- Is this an existing group (e.g., book club, Sunday school class, neighborhood association, etc.) or did you gather specifically for this discussion? If it is an existing group, please tell us what kind.
- Is there anything else you want to tell us about your group?

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[6] Adapted from The Better Together Community Conversation Toolkit, Decatur, GA
[7] Adopted from Health Equity Alliance of Rock County Community Education Toolkit and the Better Together Conversation Guide, Decatur, GA

B. Introductions and Getting Started

The Moderator should ask each participant to introduce and share information about themselves. After everyone is introduced, remind them of the Community Conversation Guidelines and Assumptions previously mentioned. This part of the conversation should last no longer than 20 minutes; the Scribe does not need to record information shared during introductions.

- Name, neighborhood, or other affiliation
- Why did you choose to participate in today's community conversation on equity?

C. Discussion Questions

The Moderator should spend a predetermined amount of time (10–12 minutes) on each of the discussion questions. Out of respect for the time commitment of the group, we recommend sticking to this agenda. Scribes should record responses to questions **3 – 6** on separate sheets of paper to enter online later. If the Scribe experiences difficulties recording responses, slow the conversation down. If the conversation goes over time, allow participants to leave at the scheduled end.

1. *Why does racial and ethnic equity matter to you?*
2. *As a resident, how are you impacted by inequities by race and ethnicity in your daily life? How are members of your family and/or community impacted?*
3. *What do you see as the top three challenges to achieving racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County? Why?[8]*
4. *What are some of the changes that could be made to reduce inequities in Montgomery County?*
5. *What are some of the barriers to advancing racial equity and social justice in the County? What suggestions can you offer for addressing these roadblocks/concerns?*
6. *Is your organization/group addressing racial and ethnic equity? If so how? If not, what activities, if any, are envisioned? How could the County be of assistance to your group toward this end?*
7. *What would Montgomery County look like if we eliminated inequities by race and ethnicity?*

In closing, the Moderator and/or Host should thank participants for taking time out of their schedules to participate in the Community Conversations and share appreciation for their suggestions. The Scribe will be responsible for completing the Community Conversation Report at *www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html*. We ask that reports are completed within two days of the community conversation if possible and submitted no later than July 16, 2019. If a paper response form is needed, please contact Dr. Elaine Bonner-Tompkins at elaine.bonner-tompkins@montgomerycountymd.gov.

4. Final Reminders

- Community conversations on racial equity and social justice should take place between **April 1 and July 15, 2019**.
- Participants should **take a few minutes to read this Community Engagement Toolkit** before their group meets. It is available for download at *www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html*.
- To ensure that your group's input helps inform the development of Council legislation to develop the County's Racial Equity and Social Justice Policy, **Community Conversation Reports must be submitted online by July 16, 2019** at *www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html*.
- Groups submitting **paper responses** may send them to Dr. Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Office of Legislative Oversight at 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850.

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[8] An alternate question to get at the same point is "What policy areas (e.g. education, housing, criminal justice, economic development) should the County prioritize in its efforts to advance equity?"