

Summit County Racism as a Public Health Crisis Assessment

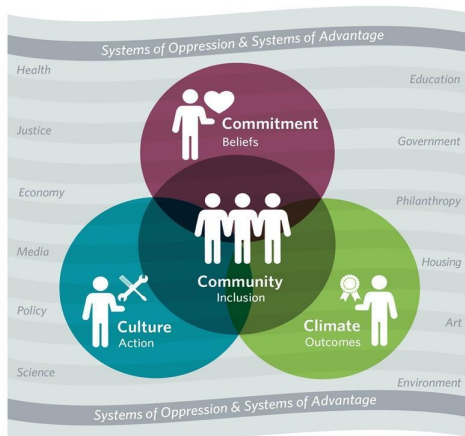
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

In 2020 Summit County courageously [declared Racism as a Public Health Crisis](#) (RAPHC), which established the Special Review Committee (SRC) whose charge was to determine how best to address systematic and structural racism throughout the municipality's nine townships and twenty-two cities and villages. The County conducted an initial examination of internal operations through dialogue and data analysis to highlight existing promising practices and uncover immediate next steps to address racism in the County. To facilitate the advancement of the county's racial equity journey, [UPD Consulting](#) was enlisted by the County to more systematically assess and examine several critical questions in the County's equity journey:

- To what extent are County leaders and staff able to identify inequitable policies and practices?
- To what extent has the County examined the effect of systemic inequities over time?
- To what extent does the County know and understand where it is in the change process and how best to move across the Continuum to Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Institution?

METHODS



Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in order to assess: Community, Commitment, Culture, Climate, of UPD's 4C Equity Implementation Framework. Experiences, values (both implicit and explicit), power distribution and dynamics therein, sustainability efforts, along with levels of trustworthiness, were just a few of the many aspects examined across Summit County departments and agencies. UPD utilized the following methods in order to determine findings and develop recommendations:

Data Analysis: Summit County staff and stakeholders provided our team with data related to the following critical categories: human resources, procurement, and budgeting. To the extent possible, UPD disaggregated data by race and ethnicity, gender, management level, and department or agency.

Staff Survey: 827 County staff completed the survey; at least one staff member from 100% of departments and agencies responded. The responses were representative of the racial/ethnic populations and management levels across the County.

Interviews and Focus Groups: Interviews and focus groups were conducted with staff of color (2 sessions), contractors and external partners (8 sessions), directors (2 sessions), human resources, procurement, and budget leaders (3 sessions), middle managers (2 sessions), and general staff (3 sessions). In total, more than 70 individuals across 20 interview and focus group sessions were consulted in qualitative reviews.

Document Review: UPD conducted a review of more than 50 key documents to build an understanding of Summit County's practices, processes, and policies including: strategic planning documents, data and reports concerning County racial equity focused work in Summit County, human resources, resource allocation and budgeting.

We are thankful for the guidance and support from the County Executive, Ilene Shapiro, as well as, the close collaboration of the champions of this work: Elizabeth Walters, Veronica Sims, Mark Potter, and Kent Starks of Summit

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County Council, Sharon Reaves and Lashawrida Fellows of Summit County Department of Human Resources, and Brian Nelsen of Summit County Executive Office. We would also like to thank the members of the Special Review Committee, staff, and external partners who provided us with their feedback through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and granted us access to data and documents to review.

FINDINGS

The Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization, adapted from an original concept by Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman, describes the six phases of becoming an anti-racist multicultural organization. The Continuum aids in diagnosing where an organization is and the pathway forward on the journey toward anti-racism. Based on data gathered in the assessment phase, UPD determined that Summit County departments most consistently embody the characteristics of an organization between Symbolic Change and Identity Change. The key findings across each of the 4C Equity Implementation areas is outlined below.

<p>COMMUNITY</p> <p><i>Who has power, influence, and authority? Who doesn't? Whose voices are included? Whose are ignored or silenced? Who makes decisions and by what process (both formally and informally)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (1.1) As it pertains to the extent to which underrepresented groups can hold the County accountable, power, influence, and authority is disproportionately distributed in the representation of diverse leadership and limited, and often one-sided communication to staff. ● (1.2) As it pertains to the extent of full participation from staff of color and contractors, systemic gatekeeping limits opportunities for employment, advancement, and contracts due to lack of transparency and accessibility.
<p>COMMITMENT</p> <p><i>What equity beliefs and values do we stand for? What written commitments have we made to antiracism in our mission, vision, policies, and official communications?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (2.1) A lack of Summit County's clear vision and commitment to antiracism, diversity, equity and inclusion objectives limits shared understanding, implementation, and ownership by Summit County departments and agencies. ● (2.2) Awareness, understanding and trust of internal practices aligned with advancing ADEI varies drastically among staff across racial groups.
<p>CULTURE</p> <p><i>Does what we do align with what we say we believe? Is it consistent across our organization? What initiatives have we prioritized with our spending and actions?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (3.1) ADEI initiatives within Summit County government lack clear ownership to ensure continuity, have limited collaboration across departments, and are constrained by laws and regulations dictating the locus of control vs. influence (e.g., department, county, state, federal). ● (3.2) Our analysis was limited in many ways due to the lack of robust data collection, data disaggregation by key demographic categories, and analysis practices to promote sustainability of equitable practices.
<p>CLIMATE</p> <p><i>What disparities and harm exist as a result of our actions or inactions? How do stakeholders of various groups experience the County differently?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (4.1) There is compelling evidence that shows employee experiences vary across departments and racial ethnic groups but many see compelling incentives of being a County employee that supersede racial equity concerns. ● (4.2) Staff of color fall within a tighter salary range, with notably less representation among higher salary levels. Staff at higher ends of the salary ranges are typically more senior staff. Some of the roles require certain levels of education (e.g., Chief Medical Examiner) while others are more related to experience.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are based on assessment findings across the 4Cs. Summit County demonstrates elements of both **Symbolic** and **Identity Change** on its way to becoming a transforming institution by addressing **Structural Change** with the ultimate goal of becoming a **Fully Inclusive Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization in a Transformed Society**.

In pursuing recommendations, action must be coupled with a willingness and ability to recognize when the County is approaching an “equity detour,” a way of being that unintentionally or intentionally perpetuates white supremacist culture and is counter to the County’s desire to dismantle racism and its effects. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Sense of Urgency:** Addressing racism and its effects should be an urgent matter, but being effective at implementing ADEI changes often requires us to slow down and first determine if it’s a technical or adaptive problem we’re trying to solve.
- **Power Hoarding:** Organizations that want to make effective changes and drive innovation are at a huge disadvantage if they don’t figure out how to expand the meaningful voices in their decision making process.
- **Right to Comfort:** We can’t let preservation of people’s good feelings get in the way of progress. We have to be willing to have the hard conversations—and, more importantly, take on the hard change work—even though it is going to cause pain and dissonance for some people.
- **Burnout:** Large-scale change can be *led* by just a few people, but it is never accomplished without much broader effort and involvement. Ultimately it shouldn’t just be the DEI office that is accountable for equity outcomes.

Our recommendations for the County as they move across the continuum and strengthen their internal capability to ultimately address racism as a public health crisis are as follows:

Commit to ongoing, long-term action focused on racial equity

Without a clear and collective vision toward the future—a “north star”—systemic and structural change can be nearly impossible to achieve. By addressing internal operations first, the County will set the foundation to manage and effect the County’s programmatic impact on racism and serve as a model to agencies outside of the County’s locus of control for how to effectively address RAPHC.

Institutionalize equity capacity

In order to move the County’s racial equity work forward in a sustainable way, the county must dedicate capacity and ongoing resources to a Summit County Office of Equity, a team (of more than one person) to lead interagency and community collaboration for systemic change with the authority to drive accountability.

Leverage interagency collaboration toward a shared RAPHC vision

The County has begun to build a shared lexicon around racial equity and create a safe space for crucial conversations where people can be heard and understand others’ viewpoints. The dismantling of systemic barriers will require continued collaboration and strong strategic partnership.

Increase data capacity for transparency and accountability

It is imperative to create a formalized data collection, use, and reporting procedures for quantitative and qualitative RAPHC data including, but not limited to, employee experience, workforce composition, dollars spent on equity initiatives, minority business contract dollar, and contract/staff pipeline program impact metrics.

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