



# **PROGRESS REPORT:**

## **State of Equity in the City of New Orleans**

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Office of Human Rights and Equity // November 2021

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Racial injustice and inequality are pressing issues in New Orleans, especially as it relates to how residents interact with City government. The Office of Human Rights and Equity is situated to assist the analysis and action required to achieve an equitable process and improve quality of life for residents of color, to ensure all New Orleanians can thrive.

This report was conducted from September through November 2021 in an effort to understand the current state of equity among City of New Orleans employees, historical perspective on need, and future opportunity for continued improvement to guide the Office of Human Rights and Equity.

To implement this assessment, various data sources were collected and examined:

1. Employee Assessment for Advancing Racial Equity in Local Government
2. Pay Disparity Analysis of City of New Orleans Government Employees
3. Key Informant Interviews

The Employee Assessment for Advancing Racial Equity uncovered important perspectives, particularly that the vast majority of responding staff acknowledged the significance of discussing race and understanding racial equity while also indicating a lack of departmental infrastructure to support equity initiatives or progress achieving workforce equity. The findings from the pay study highlight a notable lack of parity among employees between the top and bottom pay bands. These same sentiments were echoed in the key informant interviews, during which participants considered racial equity to be a priority but believed that they were ill-equipped to resolve issues of racial equity and institutional racism in the workplace.

The findings from the data highlight a dual nature to the current state of equity in the City: City employees both indicate significant opportunities for improvement as well as a desire for tools and resources to close the current gap. Not only does the City need to continue to build and communicate its position in equity, but subsequently support it with tactical steps and resources by the Office of Human Rights and Equity as the bridge between commitment and implementation.

## BACKGROUND

The Office of Human Rights and Equity works to promote and protect human rights and advocate for equity in local government. The areas of focus for the Office of Human Rights and Equity include: i) providing policy and technical assistance, ii) forging partnerships with residents and advocates, iii) providing training to City departments and to the community, iv) providing assistance and support to the Human Relations Commission, v) creating a welcoming city, vi) coordinating the City's racial equity initiatives, and vii) facilitating the City's LGBTQ+ Task Force. The Office is intended to be both a catalyst for change and a mechanism to understand past challenges.

This report was conducted September through November 2021 in an effort to understand the current state of equity among City of New Orleans employees, historical perspective on need, and future opportunity for continued improvement. To create this assessment, various data sources were collected and examined:

4. Employee Assessment for Advancing Racial Equity in Local Government
5. Pay Disparity Analysis of City of New Orleans Government Employees
6. Key Informant Interviews

## EMPLOYEE ASSESSMENT FOR ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

The first data source in this analysis was an all-City survey to assess perception regarding racial equity. This survey provided unique and powerful data on the opportunity for improvement and the need for continued equity work across the City of New Orleans.

### ***Background and Methodology***

An Employee Assessment for Advancing Racial Equity in Local Government was distributed to all 4,000 City employees via email at the end of September 2021. Designed by the National League of Cities, the assessment provided a baseline snapshot of employee perspectives and attitudes regarding racial equity.

The assessment was comprised of the following sections:

1. Your Experience and Perspectives
2. In Your Department
3. Your Department's Racial Equity Work, Leadership, Infrastructure, and Tools
4. Your Department's Racial Equity Work: Workforce Equity
5. Your Department's Racial Equity Work: Advancing Racial Equity in My Community
6. Your City as a Whole
7. Your Community
8. About You

## ***Findings***

Upon closing the assessment in mid-October, a total of 325 employee submissions were received (8% of all City employees). Half of all respondents were Black and 31% were Caucasian, with Asians and American Indian or Alaskan Natives each representing ~1%; 15% of respondents chose not to report their race. Twenty percent of respondents were of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Females represented 46% of respondents, 41% were male, and 10% preferred not to say. Nearly three-quarters of respondents identified as straight, 14% chose not to self-report, and 12% identified as LGBTQ.

Staff across 47 departments in the City were completed the assessment, with Property Management (12%), the Public Library (10%), and the Fire Department (9%) most well-represented. Nearly 50% of all respondents primarily work in a downtown office environment, with the vast majority (97%) employed full-time. Close to 40% of staff have been working for the City of New Orleans between 1-5 years, as those employed with the City for 6-10 years comprised 20% of respondents.

### *1. Your Experience and Perspectives*

Seventy-percent of all respondents strongly agreed that it is valuable to examine and discuss impacts of race, with comparable percentages reported by BIPOC (72%) and White/Caucasian (73%) respondents. Notably, less than half (47%) of respondents strongly believed in their competency during interactions with people of other races, indicated by 60% of BIPOC respondents and just over 25% of White/Caucasian respondents. Ninety-percent of total respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they



have a basic understanding of concepts related to racial equity, while 72% agreed to some extent that they could identify examples of institutional racism. However, slightly more than 25% of all respondents believed that they had the tools to address institutional racism in the workplace.

***60% of BIPOC respondents strongly believed in their competency during interactions with people of other races while just over 25% of White/Caucasian respondents believed in theirs.***

## 2. In Your Department

Over 75% of respondents agreed to some extent that they are comfortable talking about race at work. Nearly 60% of staff reported that they are actively involved in advancing racial equity in their work, yet 57% of respondents have not utilized a racial equity tool on policy, program, or budget decisions. Staff noted that they would have increased involvement in advancing racial equity given the following:

I had more information so I knew what to do	40% (n=130)
I received training	39% (n=128)
Racial equity strategies received more funding	30% (n=98)
I had the support of my supervisor or manager	26% (n=84)
I am happy with my currently level of engagement	26% (n=83)
I had more time	20% (n=64)
I believed there are serious issues related to race	19% (n=63)
Total	100% (N=325)

## 3. Your Department’s Racial Equity Work: Leadership, Infrastructure, and Tools

Twenty-one percent of staff strongly agreed that their department is committed to racial equity. Moreover, even less (16%) considered their departmental leadership to participate in and support conversations about racial equity, with only 14% indicating that leadership communicates the importance of addressing racial inequities in achieving racial equity. Additionally, only 7% of staff strongly agreed that City

departmental leaders have taken steps to publicly acknowledge the impact of structural racism in the department, with 7% noting that their department provides resources for addressing racial inequities and achieving racial equity.

In terms of initiatives and resources, 48% percent of respondents indicated that their department does not have a

racial equity workgroup and 31% reported that their department does not have a racial equity plan. While 8% strongly agreed their department is making progress towards achieving racial equity, only 6% noted that their department consistently uses a racial equity tool in making decisions.

***Only 16% of respondents considered their departmental leadership to participate in and support conversations about racial equity, with 14% indicating that leadership communicates the importance of addressing racial inequities in achieving racial equity.***

#### *4. Your Department's Racial Equity Work: Workforce Equity*

Few staff (14%) believed that the racial demographics of employees in their department reflected the diversity of the community. Less than 10% considered their department to be taking concrete actions to improve workforce equity. (Note: see demographic findings in Part 2: Pay Disparity Analysis of City of New Orleans Government Employees.)

#### *5. Your Department's Racial Equity Work: Advancing Racial Equity in My Community*

Under 10% of respondents strongly agreed that their department is taking concrete actions to increase racial equity for the New Orleans community, with just over 11% strongly agreeing that their department seeks input and assistance on decision-making from communities of color. While 13% considered their department to be making progress on improving access to services for people of color, even less (10%) believed that progress was being made at providing interpretation and translation services.

#### *6. Your City as a Whole*

Only 11% of staff firmly believed that the City of New Orleans has made an explicit commitment to advancing racial equity, with just 9% of employees able to identify one or more concrete actions that the government has taken to address racial inequities in the community. Respondents were also presented with a list of 13 strategies to

advance racial equity and asked to identify which ones have been utilized to advance racial equity. The most common response was ‘None of the above’ reported by 40% of staff, with the second most common response being ‘Increasing workforce diversity’ selected by 30% of employees. This demonstrates the immense need for continued advancement of racial equity efforts through the Office of Human Rights and Equity.

### *7. Your Community*

Only 5% of staff strongly agreed that the community is making progress towards advancing racial equity.

### **Considerations**

Overall, the majority of staff who completed the assessment believe it is important to talk about race and feel competent in their understanding of racial equity. However, few respondents feel that their department or their departmental leadership are committed to racial equity. Notably, less than 10% of respondents believe their departments are taking appropriate actions to address racial equity in the workforce and in their communities. This is both in perception of the City overall and of department leadership’s commitment to advancing racial equity. This assessment highlights a notable opportunity for improvement across City institutions to address racial equity and further communicate the vision, commitment, tools, and resources for these goals to all employees.

## **PAY DISPARITY ANALYSIS OF CITY OF NEW ORLEANS GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES**

The pay analysis described here is a powerful snapshot that adds to the prior assessment data on perceptions among City employees. It provides an objective balance to the subjective findings above and demonstrates the need for more comprehensive equity-based policies to complement the City’s commitment through the Office of Human Rights and Equity.

## ***Background and Methodology***

In February of 2020, the City of New Orleans conducted a pay disparity analysis of government employees to address racial and gender-based differences in compensation. In their analysis, they compared the average hourly rates of female and male employees, as well as minority and white employees to identify any key differences that might be directly or indirectly associated with an employee's race or gender. The comparison of hourly rates were measured across the following categories:

- Exempt and nonexempt employees
- Classified exempt and nonexempt employees
- Unclassified exempt and nonexempt employees
- Departments with at least 30 employees

A number of variables were examined in the gender and racial comparison, including type of job (exempt/nonexempt, classified/unclassified), part-time or full-time employee status, specific departments, and service with the city/pay grade/step, among others. The study also reviewed 2017 pay analyses and employee classifications.

## ***Findings***

It was found that job code, position, and employee placement onto grades and steps made a statistically significant difference in the average hourly rates among employees. Specifically, the pay study noted that the “strong Civil Service System pay step and promotion plan accounts for 97% of differences in pay among the City of New Orleans employees.” According to the study, employee placement onto pay steps, based on experience, length of service, etc., is the most important determinant of their compensation within the City of New Orleans.

The analysis also provided demographic data within the agency and its departments that allows this report to critically analyze potential disparities across race and gender. Representative of the New Orleans population, the City of New Orleans government employee population is largely African American (59.27% and 60.51% respectively), and 60% of all City departments identified in the study show that more than half of their employees are women.



Key race and gender-based disparities highlighted within the pay disparity analysis:

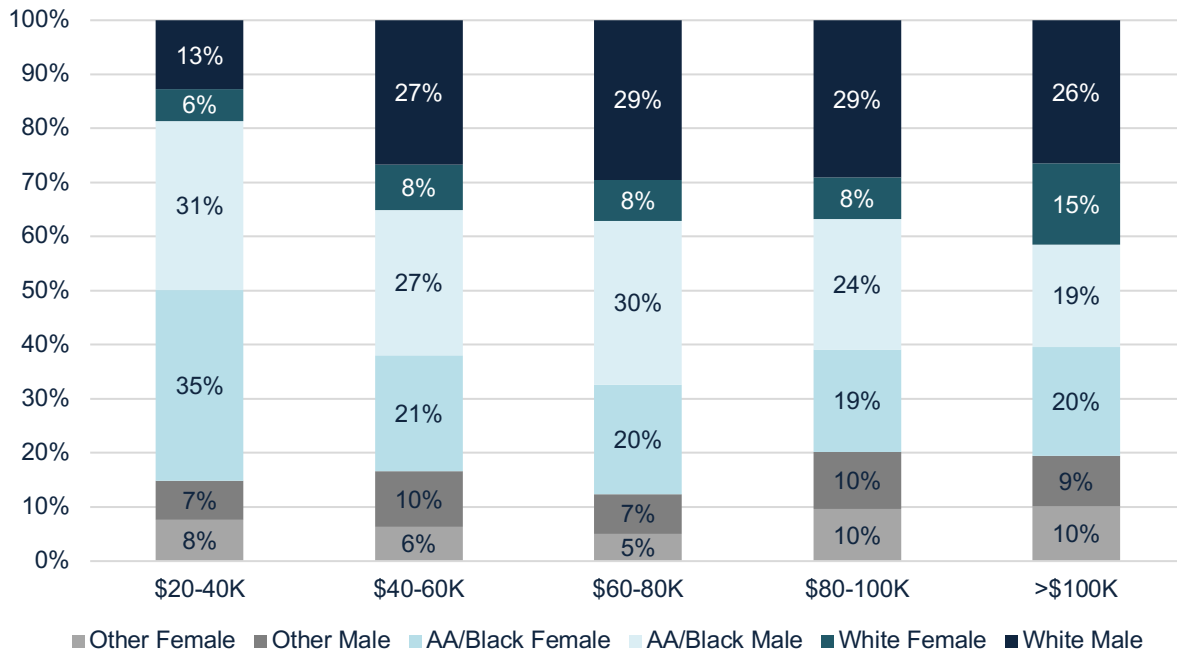
- African Americans hold lower wage jobs than their white counterparts. Although 60.51% of all City employees, they make up 64% of all employees in pay grades with minimum annual salaries of *less than* \$36,000 (1,278 individuals), but only 47% of all employees in grades with minimum salaries *above* \$36,000 (3,467 individuals). The following represent a few examples of the lowest paying departments with a majority African American employee base:
  - NORDC (\$15.45/hour) - 91% black and 4% white
  - Sanitation (\$15.85/hour) - 81% black and 3% white
  - Summer program (\$16.50/hour) - 100% black
  - Criminal District Court (17.73) - 88% black and 3% white
  - Human services (\$17.38/hour) - 93% black and 5% white

The following represent a few examples of the highest paying departments with a majority white employee base:

- Inspector Gen (\$60.21/hour) - 67% white and 20% black
  - Health EMS (\$25.01/hour) - 66% white and 18% black
  - Yacht Harbor (\$34.94/hour) - 67% white and 33% black
- African American women who are non-exempt employees earn 10¢ less than non-exempt white men, while those who are exempt employees earn 7¢ less. Among exempt employees, Asian, Hispanic and white women have equal or greater pay ratios than white men (equal at \$1.00 for both Asians and Hispanic women; \$1.01 for white women).

The following chart highlights several key findings in pay disparities that are notable in the City. Among the lowest pay band, the total African American / Black employee % is 67% versus 39% among the highest pay band. Comparatively among white employees, there are 19% in the lowest pay band versus 42% in the highest pay band.

## Pay Bands by Race and Gender



### Considerations

The findings from the pay study highlight a notable lack of parity among employees between the top and bottom pay bands. This is both a matter of historical injustice and current policy gaps that have perpetuated this disparity. Combined with direct perspective data from individuals, this pay study highlights the need to put forward an equity agenda across the City both in commitment and in policy execution.

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The third key data source for this analysis was key informant interviews. These interviews provide powerful confirmation on the data collected above and indicate both significant need but also significant desire for improvement.

### Background and Methodology

The key informant interviews were conducted with City employees who were introduced by the Office of Human Rights and Equity. Staff were from different departments to ensure adequate perspectives on racial equity as well as from a range

of fields and expertise. Open-ended questions focused on gathering participants' insights into and experiences with racial equity work in the City.

## ***Findings***

Participants were asked to rate the degree to which the City of New Orleans demonstrates a commitment to racial equity for the workforce and for families served on a scale of 1 to 10. Although the majority of interviewees responded with a rating of a 6 or 7, they spoke of how racial equity appears to be a priority on the surface but feel that insufficient action has been taken to bring about meaningful change. While interviewees noted that they have participated in discussions during which they are encouraged to view things through an equity lens, more concrete initiatives and activities should be implemented. Additionally, interviewees underscored how important it is for this commitment to racial equity to come from leadership in order for it to be seriously considered among staff throughout the City.

When discussing racial inequities in the City, participants highlighted various issues of concern. One that resonated across all interviews pertained to compensation and promotion, with participants describing how salaries and opportunities for advancement continue to be notoriously inequitable. Additionally, general accessibility was noted as a significant racial inequity, whether it be small minority business owners encountering challenges obtaining business contracts or disenfranchised neighborhood residents negatively impacted by construction projects and unaware of where to seek out help.

Upon being asked to identify ways in which the City is working towards racial equity in

***Participants recognized the establishment of the Office of Human Rights and Equity as a key initiative in which the City is working towards racial equity in the workplace.***

the workplace, one interviewee noted that “...it is very difficult because we have been stymied by so much.” A few participants recognized the establishment of the Office of Human Rights and Equity as a key initiative, while one mentioned the enforcement of local hiring practices. Another participant spoke of salary adjustments being made

due to significant disparities identified, which was echoed by one interviewee who described hearing of efforts to bring more parity to positions equivalent in service.

It was challenging, however, for participants to describe how racial equity issues are integrated in learning opportunities, trainings, or professional development opportunities. While some mentioned a diversity training that takes place during orientation, others noted that there isn't anything formally developed or implemented which specifically focuses on racial equity. Two participants spoke of being afforded such opportunities through grant-funded work, with one interviewee recalling that a racial equity training solely implemented with New Orleans Police Department should be offered citywide.

None of the participants knew of any practices or structures that the City has in place to support employees of color, such as mentoring, employee support groups, or comprehensive orientations. Similarly, no one interviewed could identify any supports in place for employees of color to move into positions with low diversity. Most participants also stated that it is not clear to employees what channels or resources are available to support them or to report racial inequities. One noted that although employees can file a grievance, it will likely never be fully addressed or resolved, while two participants mentioned that contacting the Office of Human Rights and Equity could be an option.

The majority of interviewees could not name specific tools or resources available to them or their department to address institutional racism. One participant highlighted the need for anti-racist and cultural competency workshops as well as decision-making tools and a racial equity impact assessment, while another emphasized the need for comprehensive racial equity policies. A few interviewees described how they have had to search for resources on their own because they wanted to better understand how to truly examine and address issues through a racial equity lens.

Participants described several barriers to comprehensive racial equity work in the City, including biased policies, racist practices, and the overwhelmingly fiscal nature of city government. One interviewee spoke of class polarization between rich and poor in New Orleans, and the lack of acknowledgement that racial equity is an issue. These observations underscored the need to have open and honest conversations internally and externally. Another interviewee identified the importance of having a seat at the table to genuinely feel like they could make a real impact, noting that leadership needs to set an example and lead the charge towards achieving racial equity. This sentiment was echoed by

one participant who discussed raising more awareness of racial equity and allowing people to be freer to recognize and discuss it.

### ***Considerations***

The findings from the interviews highlight a dual nature to the current state of equity in the City and reinforce data from Employee Assessment. City employees both indicate significant opportunities for improvement as well as a desire for tools and resources to close that gap. Employees vocalized that they do not yet have the toolkits and resources and have not been given a voice to participate. This adds to the Assessment findings in that not only does the City need to continue to build and communicate its commitment to equity, but that this needs to be supported with tactical steps and resources. The interviews anchor the continued need for the Office of Human Rights and Equity in bridging commitment to implementation.

## **PATH AHEAD**

Racial injustice and inequality are pressing issues in New Orleans, especially as it relates to how residents interact with City government. The Office of Human Rights and Equity is situated to assist the analysis and action required to achieve an equitable process and improve quality of life for residents of color, to ensure all New Orleanians can thrive. Funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided the Office of Human Rights and Equity with the opportunity to assess the current state of equity among City employees, gain historical insight, and determine next steps towards improving racial equity.

The Employee Assessment for Advancing Racial Equity uncovered important perspectives among a sample of City employees across their own experiences, in their departments, within the community, and in their city as a whole. While the vast majority of responding staff acknowledged the significance of discussing race and understanding racial equity, only one in four respondents noted that they had the tools and resources to address institutional racism at work. Additionally, most staff also believed that their departments are not explicitly working enough towards achieving workforce equity or increasing racial equity in the community. These same sentiments were echoed in the key informant interviews, during which participants considered



racial equity to be a priority but believed that they were ill-equipped to resolve issues of racial equity and institutional racism in the workplace. Similarly, interviewees were unaware of ways in which the City supports employees of color, how to report racial inequities, or if racial equity issues are integrated in trainings or professional development opportunities. Participants also spoke of salary disparities as one of the most glaring racial inequities in the workplace, which is supported by findings from the pay disparity study that found a noteworthy absence of parity among City employees in the top and bottom pay bands.

This report highlights both the historical challenges to racial equity in the City of New Orleans as well as the hope ahead in the desire among employees for greater resources to address these historic disparities. Thus, there are several key recommendations this report posits to continue to forward equity among the 4,000+ City employees:

- Enhance the communication of the City's equity commitment and ensure it is cascaded throughout all department leadership;
- Address pay disparities and pay policy among lowest pay band including recruitment and hiring processes;
- Provide broader tools and resources to all employees on equity;
- Foster and continue to build an equitable voice among all employees in equity based dialogue and policy; and
- Enhance the role of the Office of Human Rights and Equity and provide continued and greater funding to support its efforts in both equity research and facilitation of trainings and workshops among employees.

By enabling progressive and appropriate policy from hiring through continued learning/development, the Office of Human Rights and Equity can continue the journey of building a more equitable City government internally and externally for the people of New Orleans.