

Incorporating Community Engagement into the Albemarle County Equity Impact Assessment

*A project completed for Siri Russell, Director of the Albemarle County Office of Equity and Inclusion, and in partial fulfillment of requirements for PLAN 6020: Methods of Community Research and Engagement
Spring 2021*

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Executive Summary

This report examines community engagement as it is incorporated into local government equity impact toolkits. The aim of this analysis is to identify opportunities for the Albemarle County Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) to incorporate community engagement into their existing Equity Impact Assessment tool. We identified and interviewed city officials in Portland, Oregon; Burlington, Vermont; Asheville, North Carolina; and Decatur, Georgia. Based on our analysis of the four interviews and additional background research into the community engagement practices, equity-oriented tools, and assessments used in each city, we have identified the following recommendations for Albemarle County.

1. Make the Equity Impact Assessment/Toolkit a requirement for city policymaking and initiatives via county ordinance or resolution
2. Require community engagement as part of equity impact assessment
3. Become a member of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)
4. Ensure community engagement methods are creative and accessible
 - a. Use various methods (such as postcards, social media, community newsletters) and make meeting times accessible
 - b. Ensure outreach materials and methods are translated to the language needs of the community
5. Follow-up with the public after program implementation/initial engagement

Introduction

To learn and practice community-engaged design and research, our Methods of Community Research and Engagement class connected with various local partners to support their respective equity initiatives with the assistance of our professor, Dr. Barbara Brown Wilson. Project groups were formed based on their noted interest in projects that were introduced to the class early in the semester. This team was formed to collaborate with our community partner, Siri Russell, the Director of Equity and Inclusion at Albemarle County's OEI, to investigate how Albemarle County can incorporate innovative community engagement practices into its newly-created Equity Impact Assessment tool. Specifically, it is anticipated that our project would support OEI's goal to require more robust assessments of policy changes and other County actions that may disproportionately impact marginalized communities. In her capacity as an Albemarle County Public Engagement Specialist, Serena Gruia informed us of Albemarle County's current public engagement processes.

During the initial work session, we worked with Ms. Russell and Ms. Gruia to identify an initial list of potential cities and planned to conduct preliminary research on their respective community engagement strategies. After identifying a list of cities with compelling community engagement practices that were incorporated into their respective equity toolkits, we conducted outreach to contact city officials for semi-structured interviews. At a high level, our goal was to conduct interviews and case study research cities with demographics similar to the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County. Based on the themes we identified across the four interviews and our coding analysis of their content, we have recommended that Albemarle County take steps to

strategically adjust or revise its equity impact assessment to bolster requirements for community engagement, and to standardize the use of the tool across county departments. While our interviews with the cities generated insights into potential engagement methods, future research projects could involve identifying, examining, and testing different community engagement methods and evaluating which methods would best suit the Office's unique needs.

Project Aims

The goal of our project is to generate a set of clear, actionable recommendations for Albemarle County to consider implementing to strengthen the community engagement elements of its newly-created Equity Impact Assessment tool. Albemarle County recently developed this tool as a mechanism for assessing and analyzing the disproportionate impacts of policy changes and County-led actions on diverse and underrepresented communities.

Background and Overview of Albemarle County's Equity Impact Assessment and Engagement Framework

Since our team has spent the past semester learning about community engagement methods, our specific goal was to research how the OEI can more thoroughly incorporate community engagement methods and practices into Albemarle County's Equity Impact Assessment tool. The tool itself provides a lens for detecting potential negative consequences to underrepresented, marginalized, or minority communities. These groups include, but are not limited to, Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, LGBTQIA residents, New Americans, and people experiencing houselessness. If utilized effectively and adhered to by County staff in a standardized way, this tool could help minimize the harm to groups that have been historically marginalized by County policymaking that generally does not consider their interests or input.

Currently, the Equity Impact Assessment guide asks a series of questions, including:

- Who is this policy aimed at serving?
- Who will be directly or indirectly affected?
- How long will the effects of this policy last?
- What are the unintended consequences?
- What opportunities are there to mitigate negative outcomes? (Office of Equity and Inclusion, n.d.)

Once these questions are completed, they can be converted into a Community Impact Statement that will inform local government decisions (Office of Equity and Inclusion, n.d.)

We are cognizant of the fact that Albemarle County already has an Engagement Framework; this has guided our community engagement recommendations. The framework exists to instruct County staff on best practices and processes to employ when engaging with the community in order to seek input or gather feedback. The framework includes steps designed to inform participants about the proposed project and processes for providing input. In addition, the framework ensures that sufficient background information is provided so that the entire community feels welcome and able to provide input. The framework does this by outlining ways

for County staff to improve their processes and outlook on engaging various demographic groups by:

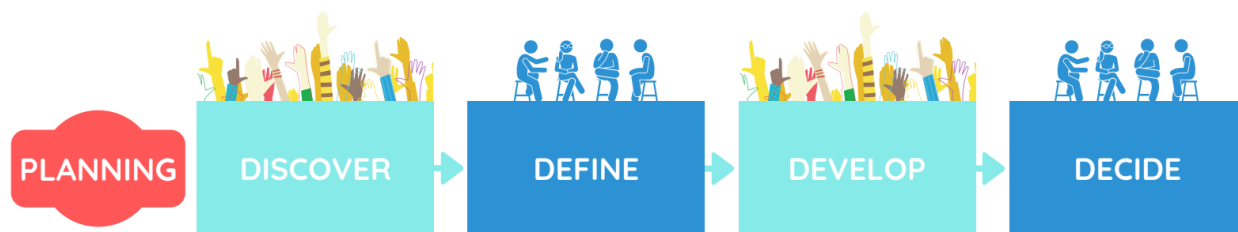
- Encouraging them to take active steps to make it possible for community members to fully participate in town halls and listening sessions
- Giving them actionable recommendations for creating space for these community members to share and understand different perspectives, knowledge, and experiences
- Helping them understand the importance of reducing barriers to participation
- Outlining ways staff can engage in self-learning and self-examination
- Encouraging them to reach out to adjust and revise syntheses and takeaways of feedback based on input, so they are in accordance with community members' desires

Ultimately, the framework aspires to foster a County environment where County staff can create an enjoyable, inviting experience that enables the fullness of the community to participate in the policymaking and program development processes. Full adherence to a goal this significant and far-reaching requires empathy with those involved. As might be expected, this is a key emphasis of Albemarle County's process.

Building on all of these principles and objectives, Albemarle County currently recommends (but does not require) a five-step community engagement process for city staff to engage with the community, as seen in Figure 1.

1. Planning
2. Discovery
3. Definition
4. Development
5. Decision-making

Figure 1: Albemarle County Community Engagement Process



Source: Gruia, 2021

Albemarle County has identified that, for engagement to truly be effective, it should include multiple stakeholders, including observers, contributors, ambassadors, technical experts, and workgroup members (Gruia, 2021). Our recommendations constitute our best efforts to build onto and bolster the important work already begun in this space, and identify best practices in the cities we identified that can add to and support what Albemarle County is already doing.

Methods

In order to identify best practices in place around the country and craft a framework with which to propose a set of creative recommendations for Albemarle County, we decided to reach out to

other cities and conduct interviews. Our community partner, Ms. Russell, Director of Albemarle County's OEI, requested that we identify other cities on the basis of their peer status relative to Albemarle County or based on identified community engagement best practices. Once these potential cities were identified, Ms. Russell requested that we connect with and interview their directors of equity and inclusion, or similar offices, to learn about their best practices and propose recommendations tailored to Albemarle County. As outlined in our Memorandum of Understanding (which we have included below as *Appendix A*), this project took place from February to May 2021. During this time, we researched best practices in other cities, conducted interviews, and prepared a final presentation and report tailored to Albemarle County's needs relative to its existing community engagement practices and its equity impact assessment.

City Selection

Our research began with an introductory meeting with our community partner, Ms. Russell, and Albemarle County Public Engagement Specialist, Ms. Gruia. At this meeting, Ms. Gruia gave a presentation that described Albemarle County's interpretation of community engagement, allowing us to tailor our recommendations to the project. Ms. Russell recommended four cities (identified as best practices jurisdictions) for us to begin our case study research, including: Tacoma, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Athens, Georgia, and San Antonio, Texas. Of these cities, only Portland responded to a request for interviews. Our team conducted further analysis to identify smaller cities (prioritizing other cities in the Southeastern United States), which were anchored around a higher education institution and which had ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and, more specifically, an equity impact assessment tool in place. Our team identified Burlington, Vermont and Asheville, North Carolina. At the same time, team members identified Decatur, Georgia as a potential substitute for Athens, Georgia. Each team member conducted desk research to understand the equity tools for each of these cities. We then reached out to each city to conduct interviews with their respective offices of equity and inclusion to better understand their engagement methods. While we reached out to each of these cities, unfortunately, we did not receive a response from Tacoma or San Antonio. Therefore, our interview data is based on in-depth interviews with Portland, Oregon; Burlington, Vermont; Asheville, North Carolina; and Decatur, Georgia.

Table 1 and Table 2 below provide an overview of the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County demographics to assess similarities and differences between the four cities and Albemarle County.

Table 1: City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia Demographics

	Total Popu- lation	Median HH Income	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate	Population Growth (Y/N)	Anchor Higher Education Institution(s)? (Y/N)
Charlottes- ville City	47,096	\$59,471	4.8% (February 2021)	24.1%	Y (since 2010 Census)	Y
Albemarle County	107,405	\$79,880	4.4% (February 2021)	9.1%	Y (since 2010 Census)	Y

Sources: Census--Geography Profile (Albemarle County, VA), n.d.; Census--Geography Profile (Charlottesville City, VA), n.d.; Charlottesville, VA Economy at a Glance, n.d.; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021a.

Table 2: City of Charlottesville, Virginia Racial and Ethnic Composition

Percentage of Population by Race and Ethnicity		
Demographics	Charlottesville City	Albemarle County
White	70.6%	81.8%
Black	18.8%	9.5%
American Native/Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.3%
Asian	7.1%	5.2%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%
Two or More Races	2.9%	0.8%
Hispanic or Latino	5.5%	5.8%

Sources: Census--Geography Profile (Albemarle County, VA), n.d.; Census--Geography Profile (Charlottesville City, VA), n.d.

Rationale for Portland Selection

The City of Portland, Oregon, was selected based on the recommendation of our community partner because the City was identified as having best practices. Portland's population of about 655,000 (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Portland*, n.d.-c) is larger than that of Albemarle County. Tables 2 and 3, shown below, provide an overview of the demographic data for Portland, Oregon.

Table 2: City of Portland, Oregon Demographics

Total Population	Median HH Income	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate	Population Growth (Y/N)	Anchor Higher Education Institution(s)? (Y/N)
654,741	\$71,005	13.4% (June 2020, Multnomah County)	13.7%	Y (since 2010 census)	Y

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Portland, n.d.-c.; Unemployment in the Portland Area, n.d.

Table 3: City of Portland Oregon Racial and Ethnic Composition

Percentage of Population by Race and Ethnicity	
White	77.4%
Black	5.8%
American Native/Alaskan Native	0.8%
Asian	8.2%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0.6%
Two or More Races	5.3%
Hispanic or Latino	9.7%
White (not Hispanic or Latino)	70.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-c.

Rationale for Burlington Selection

The City of Burlington, Vermont, was selected after doing a national scan of mid-sized U.S. cities that were anchored around a public university and were surrounded by a relatively rural area. Once the list of cities was identified, a quick scan was conducted to assess which cities had offices or city departments focused on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Burlington's population (estimated at nearly 43,000 people) is similar in size to that of Charlottesville (roughly 47,000). Both Burlington and Asheville were selected to ensure that our report's best

practice comparisons included Charlottesville’s similarly-sized peer cities. This is in contrast to only focusing on large, progressive cities often seen as leaders of equity and inclusion efforts. Demographic information for Burlington, Vermont, is presented in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4: City of Burlington, Vermont Demographic

Total Population	Median HH Income	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate	Population Growth (Y/N)	Anchor Higher Education Institution(s)? (Y/N)
42, 819	\$51,394	2.8%	24.7%	Y	Y

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Burlington city, Vermont, n.d.-a; Burlington-South Burlington, VT Economy at a Glance, n.d.

Table 5: City of Burlington, Vermont Racial and Ethnic Composition

Percentage of Population by Race and Ethnicity	
White	85.3%
Black	5.7%
American Native/Alaskan Native	0.2%
Asian	5.8%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0%
Two or More Races	2.8%
Hispanic or Latino	3.1%
White (not Hispanic or Latino)	82.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Burlington city, Vermont, n.d.-a

Rationale for Asheville Selection

Asheville, North Carolina was also selected as part of the same national scan of mid-sized U.S. cities anchored around a public university and surrounded by a relatively rural area. In addition

to meeting these characteristics, Asheville’s relatively new Office of Equity and Inclusion focuses on these issues for the City. Asheville’s population is slightly larger, at over 91,000. Demographic information for Asheville is presented in Tables 6 and 7 below.

Table 6: City of Asheville, North Carolina Demographics

Total Population	Median HH Income	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate	Population Growth (Y/N)	Anchor Higher Education Institution(s)? (Y/N)
91,560	\$49,930	5.1%	13.8%	Y (since 2010 census)	Y

Sources: Census--Geography Profile (Asheville, NC), n.d.; Asheville, NC Economy at a Glance, n.d.

Table 7: City of Asheville, North Carolina Racial and Ethnic Composition

Percentage of Population by Race and Ethnicity	
White	84%
Black	11.2%
American Native/Alaskan Native	0.4%
Asian	1.7%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0.3%
Two or More Races	1.9%
Hispanic or Latino	6.9%
White (not Hispanic or Latino)	70.6%

Source: Census--Geography Profile (Asheville, NC), n.d.

Rationale for Decatur Selection

While a majority of the cities selected for our overall case study were selected based on size or preexisting equity programs, Decatur, Georgia was selected because of its connection to the Athens, Georgia Inclusion Office. Athens was the original selection on the recommendation of our community partner due to its many similarities to Charlottesville in both size and its role as a university town. While attempts to speak with the Athens Inclusion Office were unsuccessful, their “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report” listed Decatur as a model they wished to emulate, so the focus was shifted to Decatur. Decatur has many similarities to Athens and Charlottesville. In addition to being a city in the South, it has a college; and while it is a part of the greater Atlanta Metropolitan Area, Decatur itself is not a large city. Perhaps the greatest similarity is in its commitment to providing a welcoming, equitable environment for all its visitors and citizens.

As seen in Tables 8 and 9, Decatur does not have a very large population, and its demographics are largely made up of white residents and Black residents. Although Decatur does not yet have its own Office of Equity and Inclusion, they strive to implement those values through their “Better Together Advisory Board.”

Table 8: City of Decatur, Georgia Demographics

Total Population	Median HH Income	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate	Population Growth (Y/N)	Anchor Higher Education Institution(s)? (Y/N)
25,696	\$106,088	3.5%	8.4%	Y	Y

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Decatur City, Georgia, n.d.-b; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021b.

Table 9: City of Decatur, Georgia Racial and Ethnic Composition

Percentage of Population by Race and Ethnicity	
White	66.5%
Black	20.1%
American Native/Alaskan Native	0.3%
Asian	3.5%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0%
Two or More Races	5.9%
Hispanic or Latino	4.0%
White (not Hispanic or Latino)	66.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: City of Decatur, n.d.-b.

Interview Analysis

Each interview was conducted over the Zoom video conferencing platform using the same set of interview questions. While the question set was kept consistent, the interviews were semi-structured as each interviewer asked different follow-up questions. ***Appendix B*** contains the full interview guide outline. The interviews were conducted as teams so that one team member asked the questions while another took notes. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim so that they could be coded. To analyze the interviews, our team came up with a set of common themes that we used to code the interviews. Our codes included various topics such as *equity impact assessment requirements*, *engagement methods*, and *buy-in from city council*, among many others. A full list of codes can be found in ***Appendix C***.

The data analysis software Dedoose was used to code the interviews. Dedoose is a platform that allowed our team to collaboratively code the interviews and generate a report showing each quote that was identified by a specific code and the frequency of each specific code across interviews. Each interview was reviewed by two team members who did not participate in the interview itself for inter-rater reliability and to prevent bias. Specific quotes that aligned with the themes were highlighted to denote the corresponding theme. The quotes were then organized into an excel spreadsheet by their code. We used this data to make recommendations for Albemarle County, using the frequency of the method proposed and applicability to Albemarle County as our main criteria.

Case Studies

The following section explores the key takeaways from each of the four cities that we interviewed.

I. Portland, Oregon

Portland has a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) that includes a community engagement component (*Racial Equity Toolkit*, n.d.). The City also has a new RET in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021). Portland's RET includes seven steps to analyze the impact of policies and programs on racial equity (Office of Equity and Human Rights, n.d., p. 1). Step four of the RET is to "Engage Those Most Impacted" (Office of Equity and Human Rights, n.d.). According to the RET, this includes "[committing] to more meaningful strategies for engagement, [identifying] which communities of color may be impacted by the proposal, and [engaging] impacted communities in decision-making and [developing] community ownership of the proposal" (Office of Equity and Human Rights, n.d., p. 1).

The City's RET worksheet asks government officials to identify which communities will be impacted by policies and includes prompts to outline an engagement strategy and report results from the engagement process (Office of Equity and Human Rights, n.d.). Dr. Markisha Smith, Director of the Office of Equity and Human Rights, explained that government bureaus are not mandated to go through the RET's process before they implement new proposals or projects (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021). The City does, however, have a required Equity

Budget Tool that includes a community engagement component (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021).

Each government bureau in Portland also has a community advisory group (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021). For example, there are budget advisory groups composed of community members that make recommendations concerning the budget (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021). There are also other community advisory groups beyond the budget, such as a commission that represents the immigrant and refugee communities (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021). Additionally, the City of Portland utilizes resources from GARE (M. Smith, personal communication, April 6, 2021).

II. Burlington, Vermont

One major highlight of our interview with a Burlington City official was the City's instrumental use of an executive order to require the use of the RET to evaluate the equity impacts of any proposed policy, practice, or budget item. The order mandates that all department heads and their employees meet the standard of commitment to equity and inclusion for all communities by using the RET anytime they are working on developing a new policy or assessing the impact of an existing policy. As a matter of policy, the City Council does not review any item that has not had an equity toolkit template filled out as part of its evaluation process.

The current toolkit comprises eight steps, including an assessment worksheet, an outcomes-setting exercise, an outcomes-determining exercise, a prompt to assess racial equity domains (environment, economy, health, housing, justice), and a requirement that City staff evaluates impacts on the City by geographic area. Staff is required to analyze the potential impact the policy or project may have on specific geographic areas by engaging and consulting with the respective communities living in those areas. After several cycles of re-evaluation, a racial equity benefit analysis is developed to fully incorporate the City's most robust understandings of racial disparities and their causes in the evaluation of new policies in order to maximize equity and minimize harm. The City maps areas by ward, income, race, and where they live in proximity to whiteness. Overall, the executive order places a strong emphasis on community-centered engagement as a component of equity, though no specific community engagement method came up during the course of the interview (T. Green, personal communication, April 7, 2021).

Another highlight of Burlington's Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging was its deep commitment to empathy and the promotion of human dignity in their work. Ms. Tyeastia Green, Director of the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, expressed the need to readily address systemic issues rather than implementing "band-aid" solutions for the challenges faced by vulnerable communities. She anticipates that the toolkit will be instrumental in helping staff build emotional intelligence and cultural competency towards systemic issues that harm humanity – challenges that span across racial justice, social justice, and human rights (T. Green, personal communication, April 7, 2021).

The City's RET was developed from Ms. Green's prior work experience with GARE while working for the City of Bloomington, Minnesota (T. Green, personal communication, April 7,

2021). There, she developed the Start Seeing Color campaign and anti-racism curriculum for municipal employees (LaVecchia, 2020).

According to the interview and prior background research, Burlington's racial equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives are mostly in the strategic planning phases. The City of Burlington Diversity and Equity Strategic Plan includes 33 findings, 31 recommendations, and 49 action steps. Specific to community engagement, apart from internal training operations, is the creation of a resident feedback portal and translating key service information in the City's main spoken languages (Weinburger, 2014). Their public engagement process is mainly holding multi-day workshops with the community. Community goals and objectives are identified and incorporated into the overall plan(s) (The City of Burlington, Community and Economic Development Office, 2017).

III. Asheville, North Carolina

The interview with Asheville confirmed that there is an equity impact assessment the City uses to evaluate the impact of key policy changes or development projects on diverse communities within the City's jurisdiction (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). When City departments take the initiative, or are required to utilize the City's RET, Asheville's Office of Equity and Inclusion staff, staffed solely by Ms. Yashika Smith, leads them through the RET developed by GARE (Nelson & Brooks, 2016). The toolkit is used to inform the development and community engagement aspects of some City initiatives and not others. There is no uniform requirement that City departments use the toolkit, that they ask for feedback from the Office of Equity and Inclusion, or that they engage diverse stakeholders in the process of garnering input (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021).

In terms of community engagement, the toolkit specifically prompts departments that use it (and assisting staff from the Office of Equity and Inclusion) to gather data to support any conclusion about communities that would or would not be heavily impacted (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). If a City department is being advised by the Office of Equity and Inclusion, Ms. Smith would recommend that a full engagement strategy is necessary to fulfill these data-oriented prompts in the toolkit (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). The prompts specifically ask staff to consider who they missed, or who did not attend outreach events or respond to outreach communications as part of their efforts, and to make additional efforts to reach out to and incorporate feedback from those missing stakeholders as part of the required engagement (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Data-gathering and consideration of who might be missed as part of engagement efforts allow staff to answer the three fundamental questions of the toolkit:

- 1) Who will benefit from this proposed change?
 - 2) Who will be burdened by this proposed change?
 - 3) What efforts are currently being made to mitigate unintended consequences?
- (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021.)

Most of the key takeaways from Asheville's efforts revert to specific methods Ms. Smith uses to advise City departments on engaging with the community (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Ms. Smith noted in the interview that she always recommends that City departments first map who they are trying to engage, and ask for feedback from the Office of

Equity and Inclusion (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). The evaluation process itself prompts staff to re-evaluate and adjust accordingly to community stakeholder needs even after a policy has been implemented, something Albemarle County might consider incorporating regularly into their own process. Answering the three fundamental questions given above with hypotheses usually helps staff to identify core beneficiaries and individuals who are burdened by proposed policy changes or development (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). After mapping the diverse communities, Ms. Smith advises departments on how to craft a unique, project-based engagement strategy that will meet individuals where they are and effectively engage them (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Ms. Smith noted that it is essential to triangulate the results of the mapping exercise with any City data available, as well as with community-lived expertise (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Having staff with deep roots in the community serve in the Office of Equity and Inclusion is essential for this reason. Ms. Smith noted that it is essential to:

- Provide food at events
- Consider paying attendees or providing gift cards for their time
- Provide information in multiple languages and with sign language interpretation
- Consider timing based on work schedules
- Provide child care
- Consider engagement efforts that use multiple approaches to reach people where they are (e.g., mail, phone, online surveys, in-person or door-to-door interviews)

Ms. Smith stressed that none of this would be possible without the City's commitment to making equity core to its mission. If equity is always thought of as a secondary priority, it will continue to be deprioritized, and equity and inclusion efforts will continue to be under-resourced (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Unless equity is the "main ingredient" in how a city conceives of and develops its policies and priorities, underrepresented communities will continue to be disproportionately burdened by city policymaking and left out of key decision-making conversations (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Ms. Smith also mentioned that it was essential for staff at city equity and inclusion offices to think about how they can actively *incentivize* city departments to think about equity-related impacts of their work and how they can better engage with the community (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). In Ms. Smith's opinion, "new doesn't have to mean hard" when it comes to rolling out or standardizing the use of something like a RET (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Especially in cities and localities where there is no requirement to use a toolkit or equity impact assessment, the buy-in of city staff at all levels is essential (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Focusing on the positive aspects of engagement and thinking about how to truly build these tools so that city staff has natural incentives to use them is crucial to their success (Y. Smith, personal communication, March 31, 2021).

IV. Decatur, Georgia

The Better Together Advisory Board is made up of community volunteers and was created in 2016 after the collaboration of about 800 citizens and approximately 1,300 hours of work to create the "Better Together Community Action Plan for Equity, Inclusion and Engagement." The Better Together Advisory Board has many functions, but the most important for the purposes of the Albemarle County OEI is their efforts "assisting city staff with public education and outreach

activities that promote equity, inclusion and engagement” (The City of Decatur, n.d.). The Board also plays a fundamental role in assisting equity efforts by “supporting established programs and organizations in the community working to promote a more just, welcoming, inclusive, equitable and compassionate city,” “Assisting in the development of a strategic, integrated outreach plan in order to involve a broad spectrum of community members in city life,” as well as “providing recommendations in all subject areas of equity, inclusion, and engagement” (The City of Decatur, n.d).

As previously mentioned, though Decatur does not have a dedicated Office of Equity and Inclusion, our conversation with Ms. Renee Madison, Decatur’s Communications Manager and Public Information Officer, yielded many valuable suggestions for community outreach and engagement. Perhaps one of the most important suggestions came when Ms. Madison stressed the importance of becoming involved with GARE. Another suggestion was the Decatur 101 class (R. Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2021). This class is a promising example of city outreach designed to bring people into the inner workings of the City. It is designed to help people learn how the local government operates so that they can get involved, and so the local government can connect with a wide range of community networks. Ms. Madison also mentioned various outreach strategies they have employed, such as having a social media campaign, posting flyers, and setting out yard signs in popular areas of the City. In addition to these strategies, the City of Decatur recently sent out postcards to all of the homes and businesses within the City limits, inviting residents and business people to the City’s first Strategic Plan meeting as well as an anti-racism speaker series. In addition to increasing outreach to encourage community engagement, the City also conducted a communications audit to ensure that their engagement methods were working and to find out which of their methods were most effective. A crucial piece to the postcard engagement in soliciting community feedback was that they made sure to have return postage already paid for so there were no barriers to community responses. Repeatedly throughout the interview, Ms. Madison returned to the notion that engaging with as much of the community as possible was the key to planning and building a more inclusive and equitable community. (R. Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2021).

Analysis & Key Takeaways

Results of Coding from City Interviews:

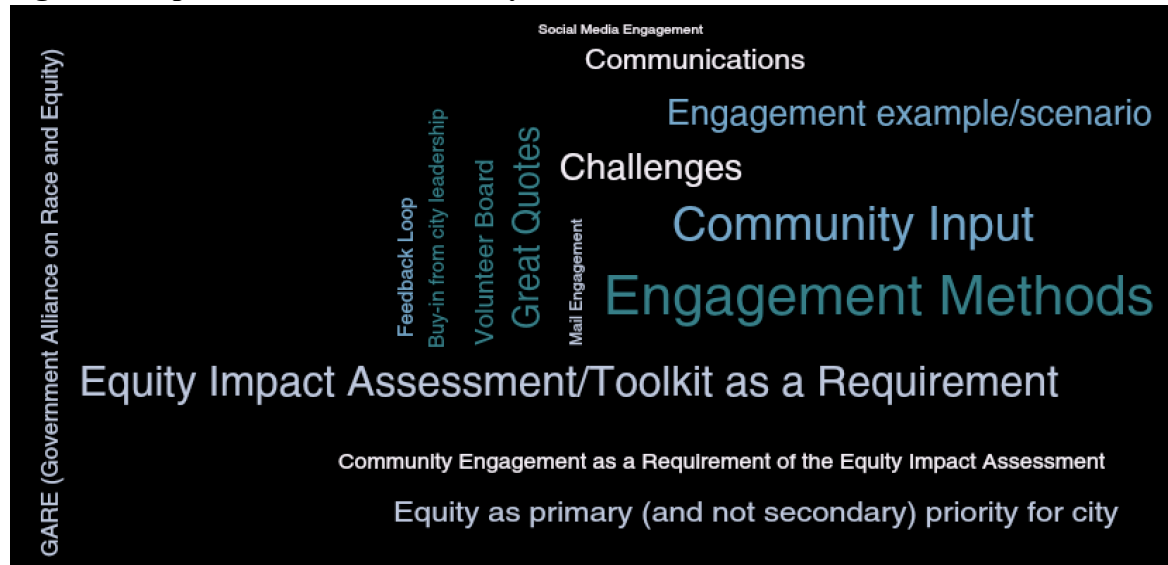
As mentioned above, we took detailed notes in each of our interviews and transcribed each. We then had two team members code each of these interviews, looking through the transcripts for themes grouped into a set of common codes. The most common codes for each of the four interviews are outlined below:

- For the Portland interview, the four codes that we identified most frequently during our coding analysis were: *community input*, *equity impact assessment/toolkit as a requirement*, *engagement methods*, and *challenges*.
- For the Burlington interview, the most frequent codes that came up were *engagement methods*, *equity impact assessment/toolkit as a requirement*, *equity as a primary priority for the city*, and *great quotes*.

- For the Asheville interview, the four codes that were most frequently attributed were: *engagement examples/scenarios*, *equity impact assessment/toolkit as a requirement*, *engagement methods*, and *challenges*.
- For the Decatur interview, the top four most frequently used codes to be *engagement methods*, *community input*, *engagement example/scenario*, and *communications*.

Figure 2 below gives a visual representation of the top codes that came out of our four interviews with city equity and inclusion officials.

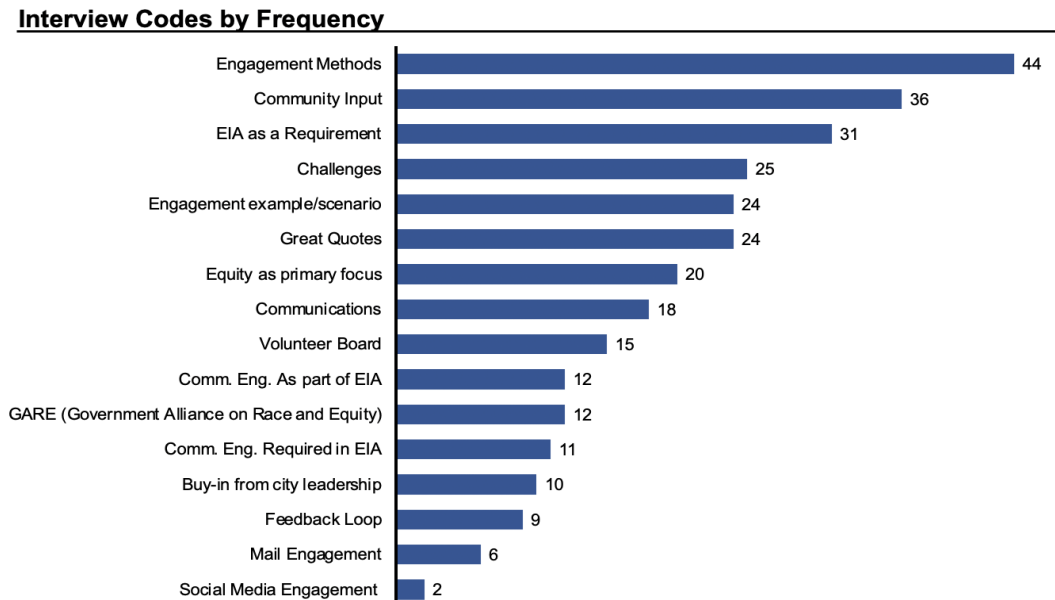
Figure 2: Top Codes Identified in City Interviews



Source: Dedoose, 2018; Team analysis of interviews

Figure 3 below gives a visual representation of the frequency of the top codes that came out of our four interviews with city equity and inclusion officials. A summary of the full coding output can also be found in *Appendix D*.

Figure 3: Frequency of Top Codes Identified in City Interviews



Source: Dedoose, 2018; Team analysis of interviews

Key Interview Themes:

In synthesizing the key themes from our interviews, we arrived at the following set of key takeaways that we believe are essential for Albemarle County, as it seeks to formally incorporate community engagement components into its Equity Impact Assessment.

- First, our interviews emphasized the importance of **equity being a top priority for local government**. Too often, city leadership (i.e., elected officials, community leaders, career city staff) commit a city or locality to equity-oriented goals or principles, but do not set government up for long-term success because they do not actively buy in to the policy or programmatic changes needed to make these goals reality. In addition, local leaders often fail to fully commit the resources or offer staff the support they need to follow through on equity-based goals. In these situations, staff are often left with the mandate to implement lofty objectives without the support or resources they need. Localities must make equity a top priority and empower city staff to do what they need to in order to follow through; otherwise, the locality will only end up doing lip service to its goals.
- **Equity impact assessments themselves** are reinforced and ultimately most effective when they are a **required component of policymaking**. This is not necessarily an easy step to take. There will often be pushback from local government staff that see their roles or authority as routine and do not feel it is necessary to take the time to go through the effort of conducting an assessment complete with community engagement efforts. Staff at a local office of equity and inclusion must work to secure buy-in from these various divisions of local government, encourage local government staff in various divisions of

the importance of conducting an equity assessment for every policy or programmatic change with fidelity, and incentivize to conduct the assessments well.

- Our interviews confirmed that all too often, **local governments traditionally expect community members to take their own initiative in offering input** on policy changes. Our interviewees emphasized that this mindset must be reversed in order for community engagement and equity and inclusion-oriented efforts to be truly effective. This approach inherently privileges certain community members who have more time and resources to seek out opportunities to provide input and it excludes already-disadvantaged or underrepresented community members who are not as able to independently make an effort to engage with an obtuse policymaking process.
- Because of these considerations, our interviewees explicitly emphasized the importance of **creatively structuring community engagement methods**. Our interviewees recommended paying special attention to meeting community members where they are with engagement methods. This included **varying the time, place, and manner of engagement efforts** and accounting for factors such as food, childcare, and the importance of using multiple venues (e.g., online, phone, paper, in-person), times, and methods to engage with underrepresented groups.

About the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE):

One of the concepts referenced frequently in our coding of interview themes was the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). We wanted to take this opportunity to provide a brief overview of what GARE is and what its core mission and focus areas are. GARE is a network of local and regional government entities who collaborate and aspire to attain racial equity and open opportunities for all members of their communities (Nelson & Brooks, 2016). Together, the organization's 80 member governments and organizations collectively commit to work toward racial equity in their communities, share resources and information, work together to influence decision-makers and policymakers in their jurisdictions and institutions, and advocate for issues of shared interest that will have a positive, widespread impact on their policy objectives, nationally and in each of their communities (Nelson & Brooks, 2016; *Membership Network*, n.d.). The organization provides seminars, workshops, conferences, and written materials (including policy, program design, training, and equity impact assessment toolkit templates) to help its members achieve their goals. GARE has done advocacy and support work in nearly 300 local and regional communities across the nation (*Membership Network*, n.d.).

Recommendations

Based on the interviews and background research on equity impact assessments and community engagement in Portland, Burlington, Asheville, and Decatur, we propose the following recommendations for Albemarle County.

1. Make the Equity Impact Assessment/Toolkit a requirement for County policymaking and initiatives via county ordinance or resolution
2. Require community engagement as part of equity impact assessment

3. Become a member of GARE¹
4. Ensure community engagement methods are creative and accessible
 - a. Use various methods (such as postcards, social media, community newsletters) and make meeting times accessible
 - b. Ensure outreach materials and methods are translated to the language needs of the community
5. Follow-up with the public after program implementation/initial engagement

Conclusion

The process for conducting this project was fairly open-ended and our community partners possessed full ability to adjust and alter the project work plan as they saw fit based on the initial findings of the preliminary case study research. The team worked with our community partner Ms. Russell to identify best practices of community engagement in equity impact assessments in other cities. Though OEI currently has an Equity Impact Assessment framework in place that it can recommend County departments use when they are contemplating potential policy changes, there is still a need to think about ways to enable greater enforcement of the use of this tool. As we recommended, one way to do this may be to require an equity impact assessment as part of community engagement efforts.

Our study was not without its limitations. Since we were unable to reach a representative from Tacoma, Washington, Athens, Georgia, and San Antonio, Texas to discuss their respective community engagement processes, our findings and recommendations are limited to the cities that were available to be interviewed. Other limitations that may warrant further in-depth analysis include the factor that multiple codes can be interpreted in different ways and future project teams might choose to synthesize or categorize differently. Our team did experience a learning curve in terms of learning and acquiring new skills in qualitative analysis coding software (i.e., Dedoose). Teams already proficient in software like this may reach different results. In addition, connecting and communicating with officials in multiple cities was likely affected by the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, although it could be argued that the use of video conferencing platforms made it easier to engage with and interview city officials outside of Virginia.

For further analysis, future reports could include additional case studies that have concrete examples of incorporating community engagement as a requirement in equity impact assessments or requiring equity impact assessments themselves in city or county policymaking. Community outreach could include asking the community what methods of engagement they prefer to see in the future to remain engaged. Additional case studies should involve cities with similar demographics to that of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia, or should at least reference why the case study is deemed applicable if the jurisdiction in question possesses

¹ Albemarle County officials may want to carefully consider this recommendation from their own vantage point. Our interviews were with city officials or stakeholders who all were members of GARE or had interacted with or benefited from their resources. While we believe GARE's resources and network would be beneficial for the County, it is worth noting the fact that most of GARE's members are larger, urban localities and the resources made available may not translate easily into a locality with substantial rural areas or populations. In light of this, Albemarle County could consider attending workshops or conferences as a participant to test out the relevance and applicability of GARE's resources before deciding whether or not to join as a full member.

significantly different demographics. Future projects could include testing out different community engagement methods in conjunction with Albemarle County's community engagement van and then evaluating which methods would best suit the needs of the OEL.

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Appendix A: MOU

Memorandum of Understanding

University of Virginia Equity Impact Assessment Engagement Plan Team and Ms. Siri Russel, Director of the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

Spring 2021

This document serves as a memorandum of understanding (“Memorandum”) between the University of Virginia Student Team, comprised of Ansley Heller, Naitong Hu, Christine Le, Katarina Naworol, Landon Webber, and Anna Drumheller (“Student Consultants”), and Ms. Siri Russell, Director of the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

A. Definitions

In this Memorandum, unless the context implies otherwise, “Student Consultants” refers to the University of Virginia students providing in-kind technical assistance to Ms. Siri Russell. “Community Partner” refers to Ms. Siri Russell, who will work in partnership with the Student Consultants.

B. Scope of Work

This project will support the Albemarle County Office of Equity and Inclusion in its goal to create community engagement tools that would assist local leaders seeking to apply equity impact assessments to their initiatives. Additionally, we hope to assist leaders with incorporating more representative, lived-experiences in the decision-making process. This project will take place from February to May, 2021. We will respect the community partners’ desire to keep our study flexible and our scope broad to increase effectiveness across multiple community projects.

The Student Consultants will provide the following services:

1. Research similar initiatives in Tacoma WA, Portland OR, Athens GA, and San Antonio TX, and highlight best practices.
2. Interview available representatives that could reflect on their best practices and learned experience from their own engagement initiatives.
3. Test run the Equity Mobility Van to understand what needs to be improved upon for the future actions, depending on COVID-19 restrictions.
4. Identify potential risks, limitations, and opportunities that may be imposed on community engagement methods due to COVID-19, and provide recommendations.

C. Responsibilities of the Community Partner

The Community Partner will recognize and adhere to the following responsibilities:

1. Provide all relevant and necessary information and guidance for Student Consultant analysis.
2. Respond to the student consultant email inquiries within a reasonable amount of time, not to exceed four business days.
3. Convey status updates as necessary through email on developments or other information relevant to the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

D. Deliverables

The consulting process will result in the following outputs:

1. Research report on best practices

Team members will review an in-depth literature analysis on similar projects in various locations. Research and best practices will be compiled into an annotated bibliography and final report to be presented to the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Special attention will be paid to those sites most similar, and actions most similar to the mobile engagement van in Albemarle County.

2. Recommendations

Upon reviewing the available research on best practices, team members will assemble tailored recommendations for the Albemarle County Office of Equity and Inclusion.

3. Final Presentation

Team members will create a final presentation reviewing our recommendations and findings from the research. Date of the final presentation is still to be determined.

E. Costs

No financial support is required of either party. The Community Partner is responsible for the purchase of any event materials or other outside services necessary to carry out the agreed-upon scope of work with the Student Consultants.

F. Warranty

Nothing in this Memorandum shall be construed as consent by either party to enter into a contract, subcontract or other business relationship. Activities (if any) in which the parties wish to engage pursuant to this Memorandum will not be binding unless agreed to in a separate written document executed by an authorized representative of each party, including an authorized signatory in the University of Virginia Office of Sponsored Projects. Neither

party will be liable for any incidental, consequential or special damages under this Memorandum.

G. Intellectual Property

Any intellectual property, materials or other work product jointly created by a Student Consultant and Ms. Siri Russell (such that they would be joint inventors or joint copyright holders under relevant intellectual property law) will be singularly owned by Ms. Siri Russell at the completion of this project, for use by the Student Consultants with appropriate citation only.

H. Primary Contact Information

STUDENT CONSULTANTS PRIMARY CONTACT

Anna Drumheller
ald2vy@virginia.edu
(434) 944-4996

ALBEMARLE COUNTY OFFICE OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION CONTACT

Ms. Siri Russell
srussel@albemarle.com
(434)-296-5841
I. Effective Date

This memorandum of understanding will be effective as of the date it is signed by the Community Partner.

Community Partner

Signature, Ms. Siri Russell, Albemarle County OEI

Date

Student Consultants

Ansley Heller

2/25/2021

Signature, Ansley Heller

Date

Christine Le

02/25/2021

Signature, Christine Le

Date

Katarina Naworol

02/25/2021

Signature, Katarina Naworol

Date

Landon Webber

2/25/2021

Signature, Landon Webber

Date

Anna Drumheller

2/25/21

Signature, Anna Drumheller

Date

Naitong Hu

2/25/2021

Signature, Naitong Hu

Date

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Brief introduction to the project:

We are a group of UVA students taking a class on community-engaged research and learning about different methods and how to conduct this kind of research in a way that is respectful, uses up as few resources as possible, and centers community and equity-based approaches. We are part of a group that is partnered with Siri Russell, who is the Director of Equity and Inclusion for Albemarle County. We are specifically interested in learning from other cities about the extent to which their current equity-based policymaking tools incorporate some kind of community input or community engagement process. Your city was identified as a place that might be similar to Charlottesville/Albemarle County and have some best practices to share.

Brief explanation of the interviews we are doing for this project:

Interviews will be held with 1-2 staff members in each city's office of diversity, equity, or inclusion to talk about how equity impact assessments or other tools incorporate community engagement and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered when an equity assessment of a proposed policy or project is conducted. Interviews will be semi-structured, meaning follow-up questions are likely and encouraged. Below is a list of the cities we are interviewing/engaging with as part of this project:

- *Asheville, North Carolina*
- *Burlington, Vermont*
- *San Antonio, Texas*
- *Portland, Oregon*
- *Tacoma, Washington*
- *Decatur, Georgia*

Interview Guide:

We envision that our questions should not take longer than 45 minutes.

Do you mind if we take detailed notes and record this interview, just so we can share as much as possible what comes out of this conversation with our community partner?

Before we get started, is there anything you'd like to know or have questions about?

1. Would you mind giving a brief introduction of yourself and how you came to this role?
2. Could you also give us a bit of brief background on your division/office? How long has it been in existence? What is your primary focus?
3. Does your city require an equity impact assessment when policy changes or projects are proposed? If so, what does this process look like? Who is responsible for conducting this assessment?
4. To what extent is community input required as part of this assessment or exercise, if at all?

5. [Optional, only if additional follow-up is needed] How are community members incorporated in the process and encouraged to participate?
6. [If applicable - if a community engagement requirement exists as part of the equity impact assessment] How do you prioritize perspectives to meet a community engagement requirement?
7. [If applicable] What kind of partnerships/collaborations are used to fulfill such requirements? (communications, a public liaison, or community engagement team or department)
8. [If applicable] How do you or the community engagement team ensure diverse perspectives are included in your process?
9. [If applicable] What insight or lessons have you found most invaluable when engaging with the public and incorporating diverse perspectives into an equity impact assessment?
10. What kind of advice or assistance do you typically seek from partners when planning outreach methodologies?
11. Is there something we should have covered in this interview, that we haven't asked about?
12. Would you mind if we contact you by email with any follow-up or clarification questions we might have?

Appendix C: Codes

- Community input
- Communications
- Challenges
- Best Quotes (to denote quotes that we might want to focus on for our paper/presentation)
- Volunteer board
- Engagement example/scenario
- Engagement methods
- Mail Engagement
- Social media engagement
- GARE (Government Alliance on Race and Equity)
- Whether or not an equity impact assessment is *required* for new policies and initiatives
- Whether or not community engagement is *required* to complete the equity impact assessment
- *How* community engagement factors into the equity impact assessment
- Buy-in from city leadership
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion as primary (and not secondary) priority for city
- Feedback loop (getting feedback from community on policies already implemented)

Appendix D. Code Application Chart

	Buy-in from city leadership	Challenges	Communications	Community Engagement Specifically as Part of an Equity Impact Assessment	Community Engagement as a Requirement of the Equity Impact Assessment	Community Input	Engagement Methods	Engagement example /scenario	Equity Impact Assessment/Tool kit as a Requirement	Equity as primary (and not secondary) priority for city	Feedback Loop	GARE (Government Alliance on Race and Equity)	Social Media Engagement	Mail Engagement	Volunteer Board	Great Quotes	Totals
Portland (Landon Webber)	6	8	6	6	8	18	13	4	9	10	5	2	0	0	9	7	111
Portland (Naitong Hu)	1	5	1	6	2	3	2	3	8	0	3	2	0	0	1	0	37
Decatur (Katarina Naworol)	0	4	8	0	1	6	11	10	0	0	0	2	1	2	3	0	48
Burlington (Christine Le)	0	4	0	0	0	0	9	1	5	7	0	3	0	0	0	10	39
Decatur (Ansley Heller)	1	0	2	0	0	9	6	0	1	0	0	2	1	3	2	0	27
Asheville (Ansley Heller)	1	3	1	0	0	0	3	4	4	1	1	1	0	1	0	7	27
Burlington (Anna Drumheller)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8

Asheville (Anna Drumheller)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Totals	10	25	18	12	11	36	44	24	31	20	9	12	2	6	15	24	0