

Milwaukee County Office of Equity: Improving Quality of Life Through Strategy, Partnership, and Action

The Office on African American Affairs (OAAA), established in 2015, evolved into the Office of Equity (OOE) in 2022. This evolution reflects a broader mission: to ensure every resident—regardless of race, age, gender, geography, ability, or identity—has access to a full, vibrant, and healthy life.

Not unlike the Departments of Administrative Services or Human Resources, OOE is a strategic hub for departments providing capacity building and foundational supports that drive outcomes across the enterprise. This includes creating a culture that maintains our collective focus on equity to achieve Milwaukee County's vision of becoming the healthiest county in WI. It also includes providing tools and best practices that enhance departmental strategies to enable Milwaukee County programs, resources, and care to better meet the needs of residents.

OOE serves as a critical bridge connecting County government with residents, community organizations, and external partners. Our role is to ensure that the perspectives and lived experiences of those most impacted by local decisions—particularly individuals and groups whose voices are often underrepresented—inform strategies and policy decisions. OOE's work is rooted in addressing the upstream and systemic factors that shape community conditions and influence residents' ability to thrive. Through these efforts, we advance three core departmental goals: promoting equity, strengthening civic trust, and increasing resident power and participation in decision-making processes.

OOE carries out its mission through five core strategic service lines:

- 1. Strategic Partnerships**

Strategy: Build cross-sector partnerships that address barriers to economic well-being and foster equity-centered economic development.

- 2. Community Engagement and Connections**

Strategy: Create space for meaningful resident participation and deliver resources through trusted, accessible channels.

- 3. Policy Advocacy and Systems Change**

Strategy: Shape policies and structures that embed equity in governance and ensure responsive, modern systems.

- 4. Technical Assistance & Capacity Building**

Strategy: Equip departments and stakeholders with the tools, skills, and frameworks to embed equity in projects, services, and planning.

- 5. Research**

Strategy: Use data and community-driven research to shape inclusive policies and close equity gaps.

Scope of this Report:

For this report, outcomes related to **one** of the Office of Equity's service lines- Community Engagement will be the focus. This is in response to the following request for information, which was made at the October 9, 2025, Committee on Finance-BUDGET meeting, regarding Item 14.

Org. Unit 109 - Office of Equity (OOE)

Supervisor Rolland requested data and information regarding outcomes of OOE's public outreach efforts.

Public Outreach and Community Engagement:

Public outreach and community engagement are often used interchangeably, but they serve distinct purposes. Public outreach focuses on sharing information with residents—often one-way communication designed to inform the public about government programs, initiatives, or services. Community engagement, on the other hand, is a two-way process that emphasizes listening, collaboration, and shared decision-making. It ensures that residents and stakeholders—especially those whose voices are often overlooked—help shape the policies and practices that affect their lives.

The Office of Equity plays a central role in advancing authentic community engagement across County government. As a trusted source of information and a connector between departments, residents, and community organizations, OOE helps build relationships rooted in transparency and mutual respect. The Office partners with departments and local organizations to design and facilitate engagement sessions that bring diverse perspectives to the table.

In 2024, OOE launched two self-service tools, the Community Engagement Toolkit and the Engagement Planner, (File #24-737) to assist departments in conducting inclusive and effective engagement efforts. Grounded in evidence-based practice, these tools help staff identify, reach, and meaningfully include diverse populations throughout the engagement process. Together, these resources and strategies strengthen the County's capacity to engage the community as true partners in shaping equitable policies and outcomes.

- OOE's community engagement capacity is expanded through the addition of an unfunded Information & Outreach Coordinator position, enabling stronger outreach and more inclusive communication.
- The County demonstrates measurable progress in cross-sector collaboration and coordination, improving its ability to leverage resources and deliver equitable outcomes.
- County departments show improved responsiveness to community feedback collected through radio segments, outreach events, and engagement initiatives.
- Milwaukee County strengthens public trust and transparency, advancing a more just, restorative, and equitable local governance system.

A notable example of the Community Engagement Toolkit being applied to an enterprise-wide initiative that impacts all of Milwaukee County residents is the Investing in Justice Courthouse Project. Leaders were empowered with information, tools, and best practices that influenced the infrastructure of projects through the addition of two working groups (Community Engagement and Justice Policy & Programs). This is based on the need to improve the justice system while actively engaging community members to participate in the visioning and building process.

Other examples of Community Engagement Activities Conducted by the Milwaukee County Office of Equity:

- Community outreach booths
- Wellness and information sessions
- Civic trust forums
- Focus Groups
- Community Trainings/Civic Trust
- Door-to-Door Canvassing and Interviews
- Listening Sessions
- Live Radio Segments
- News announcements
- Collaborative partnerships with local organizations

Outcomes:

For this report, outcomes can be defined as “the changes or benefits experienced by people *as a result of* our collective efforts.” In alignment with the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework, outcomes can be used

to answer the question: “Who’s better off?” This focus helps ensure that our work is centered on improving the well-being and quality of life of residents.

Who’s Better Off?

Residents

- **Community Needs Being Addressed:** Many residents have experienced limited access to information, decision-making opportunities on issues that impact them, and public resources due to systemic barriers such as discriminatory policies, language inequities, and a lack of trust in government institutions. These inequities created gaps in civic participation and awareness of available services, leaving some communities disconnected from systems designed to serve them.
- **Outcomes:**
 - As a result of transparent communication and inclusive engagement processes, residents experience clearer decision-making, improved access to information, and increased trust in local government.
 - As a result of coordinated outreach and engagement, residents have greater awareness of available services and more opportunities to participate in County programs and initiatives.
 - As a result of intentional collaboration across departments, residents benefit from services that are more accessible, responsive, and centered around their needs.
 - As a result of community-informed policy development, neighborhoods are supported by initiatives that prioritize housing affordability, prevent displacement, and elevate local voices in shaping community development.

Small Business Owners

- **Community Needs Being Addressed:** Milwaukee County currently experiences hypersegregation as a result of historic redlining and housing discrimination. This has had lasting economic consequences for many small business owners. These policies restricted where families could live, limited access to mortgage financing and investment, and led to widespread neighborhood disinvestment. As property values declined and infrastructure deteriorated, opportunities to build intergenerational wealth were limited, resulting in a wealth gap.

100% of participants who attended contracting workshops reported increased efficacy in getting access to contracting information.

Many small business owners who operate in historically disinvested areas face greater challenges accessing startup and growth capital, obtaining government contracts, securing loans, or attracting investors. These structural inequities—rooted in exclusionary policies and unequal capital flows- restrict business development and economic mobility.

- **Outcomes:**
 - As a result of small business engagement initiatives, business owners have built stronger relationships with County leaders and gained greater knowledge of how to access County contracts and economic opportunities. Small business owners also have increased access to information about County contracting opportunities through platforms like Bonfire.

Community Organizations & Leaders

- **Community Needs Being Addressed:** Inequitable systems, policies, and practices have limited the ability of community-based organizations, small businesses, and local leaders to participate fully in meaningful decision-making, which has, in turn, limited access to County resources. Historically, trust between community leaders has also been compromised by underinvestment, fragmented partnerships, and a lack of recognition of community expertise. This has weakened the collective capacity to address disparities related to economic determinants of health. It has also led to siloed efforts, inefficiencies in service delivery, and missed opportunities to advance equitable outcomes.

- **Outcomes:**
 - As a result of collaboration with the Office of Equity, organizations and community leaders are recognized as credible and innovative partners in reducing disparities across the social determinants of health. Milwaukee County has also received national recognition for its efforts, strategies, and tools.
 - As a result of increased visibility and stronger partnerships, community-based organizations have expanded their influence, deepened their impact, and sustained equity-driven initiatives that improve residents' wellbeing.
 - As a result of intentional cross-sector collaboration, partnerships between Milwaukee County departments, community groups, and local businesses have been strengthened, supporting more coordinated efforts, allowing leaders to maximize limited resources and develop approaches to financial empowerment and community wellbeing.

County Representatives & Staff

- **Community Needs Being Addressed:** County systems have historically lacked sufficient staff capacity and representation from the communities they serve, limiting meaningful engagement and understanding of resident needs. This has led to fragmented services, inequitable access to resources, and missed opportunities to build trust and deliver responsive, resident-centered support.
- **Outcomes:**
 - As a result of direct interaction with residents, County staff gain a deeper understanding of community needs and are better able to provide responsive, resident-centered services.
 - As a result of OOE's implementation of the "No Wrong Door" approach, County staff deliver more efficient and coordinated outreach services across departments, improving overall service accessibility for residents.
 - As a result of strengthened cross-departmental collaboration, County staff experience increased opportunities for joint initiatives, resource sharing, and coordinated community engagement efforts.

OUTPUT (ACTIVITY/DATA)	WHO IS IMPACTED?	Strategic Alignment to County / Office Goals
Public Outreach 23 Community Events 323 Participating Organizations 7 County Departments 105,667 attendees (June-Sept. 2025)	<p>Residents throughout Milwaukee County have experienced significant improvements in their quality of life thanks to community-centered initiatives. These initiatives, developed in collaboration with various county departments, community organizations, and local businesses, have provided essential resources such as food, housing services, clothing, and household goods, thereby alleviating the burden of everyday living expenses.</p> <p>Community events have celebrated cultural heritage while</p>	<p><i>OOE Goals Scorecard KPI #2: Strategic Partnerships and KPI #3: Sustainability Plan CEX Focus: Health, Safety, and Economic Stability. Milwaukee County Strategic Goals 2B: Break down silos across county departments. 3A. Invest Upstream to address root causes of health disparities. 3C. Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.</i></p>

OUTPUT (ACTIVITY/DATA)	WHO IS IMPACTED?	Strategic Alignment to County / Office Goals
	<p>offering educational workshops, health screenings, and wellness activities, all designed to connect residents with critical county services that promote health, wellness, and social well-being. These collective efforts have not only strengthened trust within the community but also encouraged civic participation and expanded access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and mental health services.</p>	
<p>Conducted four focus groups with community members regarding county services and OOE messaging</p> <p>71% of participants were Black or African American 14% were Hispanic or Latino 7% were two or more races</p>	<p>OOE gained vital information regarding the delivery of county services, and our communication strategies.</p> <p>Residents gained helpful strategies for engaging with county services and learned more about what services are available to them.</p> <p>OOE re-vamped its website, incorporating recommendations from participants for improved information sharing and community engagement</p>	<p>OOE Scorecard KPI #4: Community informed media and outreach activities. CEX Focus: Health, Economic Stability, and Safety Strategic Plan Focus: 2B: Break down silos; 2C: Racial Equity Lens; 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities</p>
<p>CITYSTART (File #25-448) 54 Stakeholders engaged across 7 roundtables, 19 stakeholders interviewed, 9 County Department Partners, 11 Community Partners, 250 community residents engaged April 2025 - December 2025</p>	<p>CityStart activities so far have strengthened the County's strategic partnerships with businesses and community organizations. This partnership will allow us to maximize and leverage resources across organizations working to increase access to financial empowerment resources for residents.</p>	<p>OOE Scorecard: KPI #2: Strategic Partnerships, CEX Focus: Economic Development, Strategic Plan Focus: 2C: Racial Equity Lense to Decision Making & 3C: Reducing Barriers</p>

OUTPUT (ACTIVITY/DATA)	WHO IS IMPACTED?	Strategic Alignment to County / Office Goals
<p>Government Contracting Workshop - 99 businesses registered, 50 attended, 1 County Partner, 1 Community Partner, 3 governmental partners February 2025</p>	<p>Government contracting workshops have increased businesses, particularly knowledge of what services are needed, how to find out about contracting opportunities, and the application process. Businesses also had an opportunity to provide feedback to the government, increasing trust in the government. Partners were also able to provide live technical assistance, attendees formed relationships with each other to share knowledge and resources.</p>	<p>OOE Scorecard: KPI: #2, CEX Focus: Economic Development, Strategic Plan Focus: 3C: Reducing Barriers</p>
<p>Gentrification Workshop - 12 attendees (3 community partners and 9 County representative), 60% of survey respondents reported learning new information that applied to their work May 2025</p>	<p>After a workshop on race and gentrification, local government staff and community leaders gained insight into how neighborhood changes affect residents, particularly communities of color. The session promoted inclusive, equity-focused policy making, leading to increased transparency, enhanced community engagement, and initiatives that prioritize affordability, prevent displacement, and amplify local voices.</p>	<p>OOE Scorecard: KPI #2: Strategic Partnerships, CEX Focus: Economic Development, Strategic Plan Focus: Reducing Barriers,</p>

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WNOV Segments - 12, one-hour segments during "Say Something Real with Michelle Bryant"; estimated 106,800 listeners per month.	Listeners received valuable, direct insights from our featured guests from Milwaukee County. A couple of examples are MCTS MOVE 2025 and Child Support Services. Both actively engaged with listeners, gathered feedback and addressed concerns. Child Support Services received such an overwhelming response from its appearance on OOE's segment, the division now hosts a regular hour-long segment each month on the station.	OOE Scorecard KPI #4 Community Informed Media and Outreach Activities, CEX Focus: Health, Safety and Economic Stability; Strategic Plan Focus: 3C Reducing barriers
WISN 12/Project CommUNITY	OOE collaborated with WISN 12 News and No Studios MKE for a special episode of "Project CommUNITY" featuring Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley and Milwaukee County Department of Health & Human Service's Deputy Director David Muhmmad about DHHS's "Credible Messengers Program." Viewers learned about how Milwaukee County is rethinking youth justice.	OOE Scorecard: KPI #2: Strategic Partnerships; CEX Focus: Safety; Strategic Plan Focus: 2C: Racial Equity Lense to Decision Making & 3C: Reducing Barriers
54 th Annual Juneteenth Day Celebration - 14 County Departments and Divisions actively participating as vendors with access to more than 50,000 residents	County representatives and guests were able to connect with each other have direct and immediate assistance with enrollment for services and questions. The event was a real-time practice of the No Wrong Door concept.	OOE Scorecard KPI #4 Community Informed Media and Outreach Activities, CEX Focus: Health; Strategic Plan Focus: 2B Break down silos

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Milwaukee County Health Equity Champions Awards - 32 nominations, 14 awards given	In the program's second year, it recognized those who have demonstrated a strong commitment to equity by reducing disparities in one or more social determinants of health within their communities, and whose efforts have had a positive impact in their communities. More organizations and individuals were recognized for their efforts to reduce disparities in one or more social determinants of health within their communities. The awards program "equity in action" focus addresses collective impact on CEX's goals and County vision.	OOE Scorecard KPI #4 Community Informed Media and Outreach Activities, CEX Focus: Health; Strategic Plan Focus: 2B Break down silos
<p>McGovern Senior Housing Project w/ DHHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 52 participants at listening sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 35 surveys were completed 209 homes visited through door-to-door canvassing 	<p>Demonstrates the County's commitment to elevating community voices and ensuring that resident perspectives inform policies and programs.</p> <p>Implements inclusive platforms and opportunities for community members to actively participate in decision-making processes.</p> <p>Encourages residents to take proactive roles in shaping solutions and decisions that directly impact their neighborhoods and quality of life.</p>	OOE Scorecard KPI #2 & #3, CEX Focus: Health; Strategic Plan Focus: 2B, 2C, 3C

Additional Outreach Metrics:

Metric	Total
Residents Reached (YTD)	708,000
Residents Connected to Direct Services	1,379 (2025 YTD) / 2,432 (Jan 2024)
Residents Engaged in Civic Trust	2,494 (2025 YTD) / 566 (2024)
Training Participants	122 (2025, YTD)/196 (2024)
SDOH Surveys	/298 (2025, YTD) /1,385 (2024)
Marketing and Media Advertisement	708,097 Audience Reach (2025, YTD)/8,684 Audience Reach (2024)
External Committees and other functioning workgroups	Community Engagement Collaborative Practice w/ Kyle Ashley and SBP
OOE Outreach	Public Outreach 23 Community Events 323 Participating Organizations 7 County Departments 105,667 attendees (June-Sept. 2025)
QPOC Surveys	416 (2024), 200 (2025, YTD)