RACIAL EQUITY INVESTMENT COMMITTEE REPORT ON COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County
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PURPOSE

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County Racial Equity Investment Committee is developing a long-term comprehensive plan to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in Hillsborough County, based on the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). The five SDoH domains are Economic Stability, Education, Health and Health Care, Neighborhoods and Social/Community Supports.

In February 2021, Vistra assembled groups of business, government, nonprofit and community leaders, to listen to their experiences and insights on each of these domains. By facilitating these virtual Community Conversations in February, we avoided the noise of the election, mitigated the uncertainty of the period between the election and the U.S. presidential inauguration, and safely engaged participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We listened and the leaders shared vital information, which will aid in developing a comprehensive plan to make meaningful and long-term improvements in Hillsborough County.

THE VALUE OF THE REPORT

This report is a resource to help **determine priorities, identify issues** to address, and **inform solutions** as part of the comprehensive plan. It summarizes information gathered during each of the five Community Conversations. It is not a plan or a roadmap for implementing community change, but rather offers insights from experts, leaders, and community members into existing **barriers** and **potential solutions** that could improve the well-being of Hillsborough County communities. We do not recommend implementing these potential solutions outside of a comprehensive plan that has input from affected community members. This report is just the beginning of a larger project to identify **policy changes** and **effective programs** leading to real sustainable change.

OVERARCHING THEMES

Several themes surfaced during multiple SDoH conversations. These concepts should influence the approach chosen to address the identified issues or barriers.

Racial Equity

Racial equity must be at the forefront of evaluating problems and identifying solutions. Disparities due to the result of decades of intentional racially discriminatory and inequitable policies and practices, must be addressed directly.

Collaboration, Coordination, and Cooperation

Public, private, and corporate sectors must invest and work together to foster a healthy and stable community.

Trust

Communities accept new programs and policies only when they trust those providing services. Many people go into communities, build up false hopes and fail to follow up. These "revolving door" programs do not have sustainable positive impact and create mistrust within communities.

Consistent Relationships

Health care providers and educators build trust in the communities through long-lasting relationships and long-term programs, instead of one-time special events.

Holistic Solutions

Solutions should be holistic, individualized (if possible), effective, and adequately supported (through financial investment and other resources) to address the problem. Even a small step forward can have a positive long-term impact.

Prevention

Focusing on preventing rather than reacting to problems, is less expensive and more effective, whether they be health, financial, or social issues.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED GOALS

Based on information gathered, we recommend the following goals for each of the SDoH domains.

Economic Stability

Empower individuals and families to be financially self-sufficient to meet their obligations and enjoy their lives. This includes enabling people to build equity which leads to wealth.

Education and Equity

Empower parents to help and advocate for their children and facilitate parent/educator/business collaboration in the long-term best interest of all students.

Health and Health Care

Enable people to practice healthy habits that prevent negative health outcomes and provide simplified and consistent access to high-quality health care.

Neighborhoods

Promote government policies that empower and protect residents to make neighborhoods safe and desirable.

Social and Community Supports

Improve civic participation and reduce negative long-term impact of engagement with the criminal justice system.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Five 2-hour virtual guided Community Conversations were facilitated by Brian and Maureen Butler on Microsoft Teams, one addressing each of the SDoH domains. Between six and twelve community members participated in each conversation. Questions were crafted to gather pertinent information on each domain useful for structuring an effective plan that makes meaningful improvements in the community. The questions are listed later in this report.

ACTIVITIES
Number of Community Conversations
5
Number of Invitees
124
Number of Conversation Participants
42
Sectors Represented
Nonprofit, Business, Local Government
Industry/Organization Types Represented Business Professional, Entrepreneurship, Banks, Economic Development, Insurance, Education, Foundations, Local Elected Officials, Parents, Social Services, Health, Transportation, Higher Education, Child Services, Legal, Community Members
Resources Provided to Participants
NPR Interview-Richard Rothstein-'The Color of Law'
Tampa Bay Pay Gap and Equity Dividend Report 2020
Tampa Bay Partnership 2020 Regional Equity Report
Hillsborough County Health Equity Profile
HealthyPeople.gov - Social Determinants of Health Overview
Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government 1.20.2021

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

1. Economic Stability

Conversations addressing economic stability tend to focus on financial literacy or understanding and using financial skills such as budgeting and investing. Financial well-being, however, goes beyond understanding concepts and indicates that individuals implement those skills to meet current and ongoing financial obligations, feel secure in their financial future, handle financial emergencies, and make sound financial choices to stabilize and enjoy their lives (paraphrased from Consumer Financial Protection Bureau).

An economically stable individual has the freedom to afford things they desire and freedom from the stress of making tough choices about how to pay for basic living costs such as housing and food. Economic stability reduces stress and results in individuals being able to use their resources, abilities, knowledge, education, and motivation to create opportunities for reaching their intellectual and economic potential.

We recommend that goals for economic stability focus on empowering individuals and families to be financially self-sufficient to meet their obligations and enjoy their lives. This includes enabling them to build equity which leads to wealth.

Questions Posed to Participants

- What is economic stability?
- How is economic stability related to education, health, neighborhoods, or social/community supports?
- What are barriers to economic stability?
- What are actions that could improve economic stability?
- What else should we be thinking about to have an impact on economic stability?

Barriers to Economic Stability

- **Race**
  - Systemic **racism, biases, stereotyping**
  - **Segregated** communities
  - **Low performing schools** concentrated in low income and neighborhoods of color
  - Concentrated **poverty** — if people do not see anyone prospering, they are satisfied with the status quo

- **Policies**
  - Government program **penalties** for making advances in economic stability
  - **Housing** policies (lot sizes, environmental impact, etc.)
  - Criminal justice policies and unintended consequences; privatization of prisons; rights of felons

- Foster care system challenges – case managers are overloaded; disparities in number of Black/ Brown children removed from homes vs. white children; systemic challenges of reuniting families (jobs, housing, poverty, judicial actions are all linked, and it is difficult to break the cycle)

- **Access**

  - **Financial**

    - Credit – lower credit scores, higher fees and interest rates, home ownership barriers, denial of credit, predatory mindset and practices

    - Racial bias in grantmaking and lending to nonprofit organizations according to organization leadership and disparities in nonprofit capacity

  - **Education** — Children outside of Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) system often lack access to quality early learning

  - **Transportation** — Inadequate options to connect people to economic opportunities

- **Attitudes**

  - **Fear** of change

  - People do not feel empowered (worthy or equipped) to maximize **potential**

  - **Disconnected** youth (18-24 years of age, not enrolled in school, unemployed); often have college degrees but may not have skills or experience

Potential Solutions

- **Resources**

  - Provide **Financial resources** to organizations with expertise at solving the problems

  - Identify and capitalize on assets in **neighborhoods** rather than focusing only on negative aspects of neighborhoods

  - Facilitate access to **Wi-Fi** and **technology**

  - Provide more effective and efficient **transportation** options

  - Develop vacant **land** in communities

  - Equity in **education** from beginning to end and for all students

  - **Private sector investment** – supplier diversity, corporate foundations, employee benefits

  - **Employer** initiatives to hire, retain, grow, pay, provide opportunities

  - **Supplemental wages** in target areas

- **People**

  - Consider one-to-one or **individualized** interventions rather than mass approach in some cases

  - Raise awareness without causing people to **feel threatened**

  - Understand the **culture and mindset** of people being served — families/youth — get into heart and mind of people we want to serve; programs need to align with needs of people — meet them where they are; grass roots — who are community leaders/voices to partner with; develop relationships and show compassion to serve more effectively; not everyone wants to go to college — recognize other pathways to economic stability; capacity building and coaching for small businesses to scale and innovate to help build community

- **Expunge records** of non-violent juvenile offenders
- **Career** pathways — identify entry points, career progression and associated wages
- **Financial well-being** — financial literacy, budgeting, help to live within their means, individuals may be cut off from social safety net if advances are made, minimum wage
- Begin with ourselves — eliminate **biases**, change mindset, advocate, love neighbors
- **Life coaching** for parents of children in foster care and others trapped in a cycle of poverty in addition to case management (hands-on individualized help and guidance vs. referrals to agencies)

- **Collaboration**
  - **Public private partnerships**
  - Cross-sector collaboration – **innovative models** to collaborate and find sustainable solutions that are multi-dimensional
  - Build a culture of **community**

2. Education and Equity

Community support for quality education begins at birth and continues through career support after high school. "Education is the true equalizer for families." Education is affected by digital access, investments in teachers, transportation and basic needs of students and their families. Equity in education requires access to early learning teachers and investments in resources that help all students overcome deficits and roadblocks. It also requires support from nonprofits, businesses and governments collaborating to achieve a common vision. Dysfunction and trauma experienced by students outside of school, as well as health issues must be overcome for students to learn.

We recommend Education and Equity goals concentrate on policies and programs designed to empower parents and facilitate parent/educator/business collaboration in the long-term best interest of all students.

Questions Posed to Participants

- What is equity in education?
- How is education related to economic stability, health, neighborhoods, or social/community supports?
- What are barriers to education or equity in education?
- What is needed from businesses or the government to effect real change in education?
- What are actions that could improve education or equity in education?
- What other thoughts do you have?

Barriers to Education or Equity in Education

- **Digital Access**
  - Students without digital access cannot fully participate in learning (homework, advanced knowledge)
  - Parents without digital access cannot fully engage with the school and communicate effectively or access employment opportunities
  - **Internet access, devices** and ability to use (students and parents)

- **Investment in Teachers**
  - **Cultural competency** of teachers for students and home environments
  - Lack of teacher planning/preparation **time**
  - Low **wages** of early learning teachers
  - Teachers leaving for higher pay and better career opportunities – **Teachers are exhausted**

- **Transportation**
  - Inability to participate in **after school or summer programs**
  - Difficulty taking advantage of **school choice** options – travel time due to size of county or inability to provide transportation
  - Inability of parents' to be fully **engaged with school**

- **Basic Needs**
  - Limitations in parents' abilities and time to **read, speak, and care** for student or to be involved with school
  - Limitations on parents' employment, ability to stabilize family, and to provide **necessities such as food and shelter**
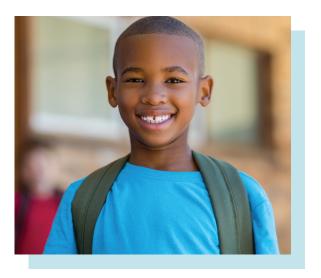
Potential Solutions

- **Funding**
  - **Businesses** provide and connect to resources and expertise for teachers, playground, food pantries, etc.
  - Educate taxpayers that **tax dollars** are not enough to provide highest quality education to encourage business and individual donations
  - Higher **salaries** to retain teachers leaving for higher pay and better career opportunities
  - Scholarships for early learning educators

- **Resources**
  - **After school program** availability for all
  - **Free Lunch** provided for all students
  - **Transportation** options for families and students

- **Policies and Advocacy**
  - "Every decision should be made as if the child is yours."
  - Hold **high expectations** for students and emphasize education beyond academics
  - Business leaders can **advocate** for increases in state education budgets to best serve students
  - Encourage businesses to define and measure **social responsibility** actions tied to schools
  - Help **legislators** make more informed decisions by recommending they spend a day as a student
  - Starting in elementary school, find ways to partner with businesses to produce **workers** businesses need
  - **Expunge criminal records** for youth
  - **Transparency** in quality early learning (https://cares.myflfamilies.com/publicsearch)

3. Health and Health Care

Health includes physical and mental health. Health care should focus on the whole person — mind, body, and spirit. Prevention should be prioritized. All people should have access to reliable high-quality care when they need it, provided by friendly and competent providers, without fear of cost, and free from cultural or other barriers to being heard and understood. Our current health-care system is overly complicated and burdensome for disadvantaged people to navigate and could be viewed as being designed for providers and payors rather than for people who need care.

We recommend health and health care goals focus on enabling people to practice healthy habits that prevent health issues, and providing simplified and consistent access to high-quality health care.

Questions Posed to Participants

- What should all people in our community expect regarding access to health care?
- What aspects of health should a community initiative address?
- What are barriers to health or health care?
- How are health and health care related to economic stability, education, neighborhoods, or social/community supports?
- What actions could improve health or health care?
- What other thoughts do you have?

Barriers to Health and Health Care

- **Complexity of System**
  - Navigating the **health-care system** is fragmented, costly, complicated, and overly burdensome (providers, insurance, assistance programs, employer benefits, co-pays and deductibles, etc.)
  - Lack of access to **technology** for accessing health systems and telehealth

- **Environment**
  - Limited **transportation** options to access health care
  - Lack of access to affordable healthy **food** as well as safe and healthy **living conditions**
  - Lack of sidewalks, parks, and open spaces to **exercise and engage in community**

- **Care that Meets Needs of Community**
  - **Mental health** is stigmatized and often not properly addressed
  - Care is reactionary rather than **preventative**
  - Telehealth may not provide best care in some cases
  - Lack of access to therapies (e.g., behavioral, speech, etc.), water safety training, and proper infant sleeping practices for **children from birth**
  - **Stress** created by lack of access to sustainable economic opportunities; health and wealth are linked
  - **Racial, cultural, and language barriers**, and policies that induce fear, mistrust, and inhibit access to health care

Potential Solutions

- **Quality of Care**
  - **Consistent provider relationships** with patients that are respectful, based on trust and include clear communication
  - Prevent frequent provider turnover in clinics and limit one-time events that impede long-term relationships between providers and patients
  - Focus on **mental health** and **stress** through trauma-informed care, normalizing therapy, family mediation, etc.
  - Initiate a campaign to reduce mental health stigma

- **Policies**
  - Improve **accessibility to healthy resources** through community planning that centralizes health care, food, schools, libraries, banks, etc., in walkable areas
  - Simplify the process of accessing health care
  - **Long-term view of policies** to address issues rather than focusing only on current issues
  - Shift focus from insurance accessibility to direct **health-care delivery**

- **Initiatives**
  - Develop a campaign to reduce mental health stigma
  - Make water safety training available
  - Ensure parents know proper infant sleeping practices for children from birth
  - Engage **health-care navigators** to help people

4. Neighborhoods

Participants identified the following as characteristics of a desirable neighborhood:

1. Safe and well-lit
2. Beautiful
3. Walkable
4. Accessible to transportation
5. Parks or green spaces
6. Sidewalks and places to walk/run and bicycle
7. Close to school
8. Welcoming environment
9. Working infrastructure including technology
10. Connected residents

Lack of investment by government and businesses as well as discriminatory policies and practices, have had long-lasting negative effects on neighborhoods, even to this day. Examples of these discriminatory policies and practices include:

- Redlining
- Blockbusting
- Racially restrictive deed covenants
- Denial of renting or selling based on race
- Denial of GI Bill benefits to Black veterans (education, low-cost mortgages and unemployment insurance)
- Owners' failure to maintain housing rented to ethnic minorities

We recommend goals related to neighborhoods focus on government policies that empower and protect residents and that make neighborhoods safe and desirable.

Questions Posed to Participants

- What are attributes of a desirable neighborhood?
- Why do some neighborhoods lack those attributes?
- How are the SDoH influenced by your neighborhood? Economic stability, education, health and health care, or social/community supports.
- What are some long-lasting effects of discriminatory laws and policies in our neighborhoods?
- How do we improve neighborhoods that are filled with systemic challenges?
- What other thoughts do you have?
- What should we do now to make our neighborhoods viable over the next 50 years?

Factors Contributing to Neighborhood Challenges

- **Financial Investment**

  - **Gentrification** can increase property values and address code enforcement issues, but it displaces people

  - Lack of **government investment** in neighborhoods

  - Lack of **business infrastructure** including grocery stores, health clinics, pharmacies, and transportation portals

- **Policies and Regulations**

  - Lack of **homeownership**, a legacy issue of redlining and other discriminatory housing practices that limited opportunities for homeownership for Black people; this has contributed to less generational wealth for Black families

  - Disparate **policing of neighborhoods** and **criminal justice system** fines and fees cycles that are almost impossible for people to overcome

  - Properties developed before building requirements established

  - **Code enforcement** can be an unbearable burden for some people

- **Influence**

  - Barriers of **participating in the civic process** of speaking to government bodies (knowledge of process, confidence of being heard, lack of power, meetings during work hours)

  - Neighborhoods distant from "important" areas lack financial support and other conveniences

Potential Solutions

- **Innovation and Investment**

  - "Go against the grain, do things differently"

  - Invest in infrastructure, businesses, transportation, childcare, grocery stores, green spaces, gardens, education, etc.

  - Uncover **strengths of communities** and build upon those, engaging natural community leaders for grassroots, holistic, and self-determined solutions

  - Understand and respond to impact of climate change and advanced technology on jobs

  - Seek social and financial return on investments

  - Target and maximize utilization of school buildings

  - Take supports to families in neighborhoods

- **Housing**

  - Create more **diverse neighborhoods** by having different rates for the same housing (e.g., Charlotte, NC)

  - Identify and engage champions in leased housing

- **Laws and Policies**

  - Current laws, policies, and practices need to offset the damages of **decades of racial discrimination and inequity in the system**

- Review and enforce laws and policies pertaining to **investor property owners** in disadvantaged neighborhoods

- Enable **owner-occupied homeowners** to meet codes through assistance and guidance

- Allow for **evictions** to be expunged

5. Social and Community Supports

Hillsborough County has many attributes that make it a great place to live. The attributes identified by participants include:

1. Weather
2. Family and community ties
3. Recreation/outdoor and social resources
4. Strong nonprofits
5. Strong university-community partnerships
6. Strong medical community
7. Diversity of people, thought, economy, cultures, environment, and
8. Work-life balance

Overshadowing the effectiveness of social and community supports are structural racism, a focus on charity rather than justice, and reacting to problems rather than preventing them.

We recommend goals related to social and community supports focus on improving civic participation and reducing the negative long-term impact of engagement with the criminal justice system.

Questions Posed to Participants

- What makes Hillsborough County a great place to live?

- What is keeping it from being a great place to live for all residents?

- What are barriers to civic participation?

- What programs or policies protect some in our community while placing others at a disadvantage?

- How do interactions with the criminal justice system or incarceration affect or limit opportunities of people in our community?

- Social cohesion is about relationships: What can be done to facilitate, promote, and encourage relationships in communities?

- What should we do now to make our community viable over the next 50 years?

- What other thoughts do you have?

Factors Contributing to Disparities Experienced by People Living in Hillsborough County

- **Access**

  - Access to **medical resources, recreation, and cultural activities**

  - **Transportation** barriers — inability for students to participate in sports and other after-school programs

- Disparities in **employment, pay, and education** (kindergarten readiness, scholarships, and support for college students)
- **Affordable housing** — Policies affecting where people live, predatory lending and excessive interest rates that perpetuate poverty and housing problems
- **Barriers to participation in social programs** designed to reduce access and effectiveness (e.g., food stamps)
- **Technology** required for education, work, applying for benefits — quality internet access, equipment and maintenance, computer skills

- **Civic Participation**
  - People are overwhelmed with meeting essentials like rent and utilities rather than thinking about civic participation
  - Participation in civic activities competes with work schedules
  - People do not believe their **voices** will be heard or make a difference
  - Lack of **knowledge** of government operations and how decisions are made, lack of trust in government
  - Competing views of lack of interest in or time for civic activities vs. reason for living in U.S. is to exercise civic rights

- **Criminal Justice System**
  - Failure to **expunge juvenile records** disproportionately affects minorities
  - Requiring fees to be paid before **restoring voting rights** disadvantages those without money
  - Disparities in **legal** representation and entry into criminal justice system due to socio-economic status and "excessive entrenched implicit bias"
  - Involvement in **criminal justice system** negatively affects finances, jobs, housing, car insurance costs, relationships, and family members, and is inextricably linked to poverty (e.g., cycle of fines and fees, time off from hourly wage jobs, suspension of driver license is difficult to escape)
  - Inattention to **mental health** status

Potential Solutions

- **Communicate using traditional methods** such as flyers, community organizations, and churches
- Address **structural racism**, systemic racism, inequities, personal and professional bias, and voter suppression legislation
- Build **relationships** with elected officials and law enforcement; hold them accountable
- Provide additional **training** to law enforcement officers related to the arrest disparity among minority citizens
- Improve **accessibility to civic events** by making hours more participant friendly and providing childcare on site
- Evaluate policies and procedures through **a race equity and social justice** lens with an understanding of the historical factors leading to our current situations, including the fact that disparities did not just happen, they were intentional
- Grow accustomed to taking supports to families
- Offer robust **volunteer legal representation**

RECOMMENDED WAY AHEAD

Phase 1
- Develop Community Conversation Program
- Coordinate invitations, reservations
- Hold Community Conversations
- Report information gathered

Phase 2
- Identify Underwriters for Phases 2 and 3
- Hire Project Director
- Establish Priorities (Community Committee)
- Identify Issues to Address (Community Committee and Racial Equity Investment Committee)
- Communicate with Conversation Invitees

Phase 3
- Form Work Groups to develop plan to address each issue selected
- Draft and finalize comprehensive plan
- Communicate plan to community and Conversation Invitees
- Identify underwriters for Phase 4 of the Project

Phase 4
- Implement Plan
- Monitor and Modify
- Report
- Continuously communicate with community

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