

WASHTENAW COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE

Racial Equity Focus Group Findings Report

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OFFICE OF COMMUNITY &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Collaborative solutions for a promising future

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Executive Summary

In the Fall of 2019, the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED) held a series of peer-facilitated focus groups to better understand how Black and African American clients experience the local homelessness response system and explore racial inequities in CoC programs and services. Seven focus groups were held, with a total of 24 participants. Focus group discussions identified several areas where racial inequities exist, including, but not limited to, diversity of agency staff and appropriateness of products, services, and programs for people of color. Based on OCED's analysis of the focus group discussions, a series of short- and long-term recommendations are made to address both the direct suggestions made by participants and the inequities identified in the focus group analysis. The recommendations will inform a systems-level Racial Equity Action Plan, which will outline concrete steps to promote racial equity across the CoC.

Introduction

Histories of racial bias and discrimination have long impacted communities of color, perpetuating inequitable access to services and opportunities and intergenerational oppression. Public systems built on structural and institutional racism—like the criminal justice, education, and healthcare systems—often marginalize people of color and lead to disparate outcomes between racial groups. The housing and homelessness system also plays a role in perpetuating racial inequities and makes visible the impacts of racial inequity in other aspects of life. In comparison to the general population, minority groups overall represent a disproportionate share of those experiencing homelessness. The discrepancy is particularly striking among African Americans: while composing only 13 percent of the general population, African Americans make up 40 percent of the national homeless population.¹

In recognition of the deep roots racism has planted in our community, in August 2018, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners passed an Equity Ordinance to declare a County-wide focus on issues of racial equity in County services, policies, and procedures; address inequities that exist within the County; and make the County an equitable place to live and work. And in July 2020, the Board of Commissioners passed a resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis in Washtenaw County.

Informed by known racial disparities in homelessness (see Appendix A for a full local racial disparity assessment) and with momentum for change, the Washtenaw County Continuum of Care (CoC) endeavored to better understand the ways in which people of color, specifically those who identify as Black or African American, experience homelessness and the local homelessness response system. Through a series of focus groups, OCED gathered firsthand stories and feedback from clients. Findings and key insights gleaned from the focus groups are discussed in this report, along with next steps for using these findings to affect change.

Focus Group Methodological Overview & Limitations

To further explore known quantitative racial disparities in the local homelessness response system, OCED developed a Racial Equity Exploratory Research Plan. The plan proposed a series of focus groups and utilized a peer-facilitated focus group model, where the focus group facilitators and the participants

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Racial Inequality," accessed on August 7, 2020, <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/inequality/>.

all identified as Black or African American and had experience with homelessness in Washtenaw County. The CoC Board approved the research plan on May 15, 2019.

Participants and facilitators were recruited via outreach through local housing agencies and posting of flyers in highly trafficked locations. Facilitators participated in a mock focus group followed by an in-depth facilitation training prior to conducting their first focus group. Focus groups consisted of 3-6 participants and 1-2 facilitators and followed a script (Appendix B) designed by OCED, with feedback from facilitators. All participants signed an Informed Consent acknowledging that the information they shared would be used in this report.

Given limited interest from potential participants, in general focus groups were organized without regard to participant gender, age, family status, etc. However, one focus group consisted exclusively of Veterans who identify as Black or African American and followed a separate script (Appendix C). In total, seven focus groups (24 participants) were held between August and December 2019. Facilitators and participants were provided a \$30 and \$25 VISA gift card, respectively; refreshments and bus tokens were also provided.

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. All responses for each question were analyzed together and then coded using descriptors. Findings included in the report are those that came up in more than one focus group or were mentioned by multiple participants within one focus group. Strong, recurring themes across focus groups were identified as key insights.

Limitations

While focus groups provide a valuable opportunity to gather data directly from clients that cannot be captured through quantitative analysis, they do have some limitations. Namely, participants self-select into the focus groups, meaning that data are not always representative of a wide range of experiences. During the focus groups, more reserved individuals may be less likely to dissent against the dominant view or express their opinions, leaving out critical voices and experiences. Consistency across focus groups can also be difficult; questions may be asked in different ways or facilitation styles may vary. In addition, time limitations may impact facilitators' ability to ask all questions in the script and get full feedback from all participants. Access to transportation and work schedules can also be barriers to participation that impact findings.

In this particular study, no control group was used. The intent of the focus groups was to better understand the experience and stories of people of color who interact with the homelessness system and identify opportunities for improvement. Because robust disparity analysis was not the goal, a control group was not necessary to achieve the study's intended outcomes. However, this impacts the study's ability to identify experiences that are unique to clients who identify as Black or African American.

Focus Group Findings

Focus group findings include both a detailed breakdown of participant responses and suggestions and key insights.

Participant Responses

Responses are grouped by topic and include those that came up in at least two focus groups or were mentioned by multiple participants within one focus group.

Table 1. Participant experience with homelessness - characteristics

Characteristic of Homelessness	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Long-term homeless	2	2
Youth homelessness	2	2
Unsheltered homelessness	2	2
Adult homelessness	2	5
Homeless in multiple jurisdictions	2	2

Table 2. Participant experience with homelessness – participant-identified cause

Participant-identified cause	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Health-related	2	3
Family and/or support network issues	3	4
Unemployed/under-employed/loss of employment	1	4
Substance use	2	2

Table 3. Participant experience upon initially accessing services

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Lack of adequate resources	5	7
Lack of agency capacity/efficiency	3	4
Restrictive eligibility requirements impacted resource provision	2	3
Staff turnover impacted client service	1	2
Staff were attentive/helpful	1	2

Table 3. Participant experience with VI-SPDAT assessment

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Felt comfortable taking assessment	4	5

Felt uncomfortable taking assessment	2	2
Saw honesty as an advantage	4	9
Felt the need to provide false information to receive services	4	6
Felt assessment was a barrier to services	1	3

Table 4. General participant experience with housing agencies

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Staff were welcoming/accommodating	3	6
Lack of resources/capacity	4	6
Too many restrictions on participants	2	2
Restrictive eligibility requirements were a barrier to services	2	2

Table 5. Participant opinion on service provision

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Services didn't adequately address/respect racial identity	2	2
Services didn't provide adequate supports for clients	3	3
Participant felt they had a say in their case management	2	5
Participant did not feel they had a say in their case management (or depended on the program)	3	3

Table 6. Participant experience with reporting race-related incidents

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Reported a race-related incident	4	5
Experienced a fear of backlash for reporting an incident	3	3
Was not aware of a clear agency procedure and/or repercussions for perpetrator	1	2

Table 7. Participant experience with discrimination when trying to rent in Washtenaw County

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Yes, I have experienced rent discrimination	5	12
Denied due to lack of rental history or poor credit	2	3
Denied due to economic or employment status	2	3
Difficult for criminal justice-involved households	3	3

Table 8. Participant opinion on racial and ethnic appropriateness of products

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Hygiene products were not racially/ethnically appropriate/inclusive	4	7

Table 9. Participant opinion of communication from agency staff

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
I did not feel I was communicated with in a way that was respectful of my race/culture (or depends on agency/staff)	4	5
I did feel I was communicated with in a way that was respectful of my race/culture	2	2
Communication wasn't clear/lack of transparency	2	2

Table 10. Changes in participants' presentation of racial or ethnic culture when interacting with staff and participants

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Changed language/way of speaking	2	3
Changed appearance in some way	4	5
<i>Dressed down</i>	2	3

<i>Minimized ethnic queues</i>	1	1
<i>Other</i>	1	1
Did not feel a need to minimize aspects of racial/ethnic culture	2	3

Table 11. Treatment of participants by staff

Response	Number of focus groups reporting	Number of times mentioned across all focus groups
Felt I was treated differently by staff based on my race or ethnicity	2	5
I did not feel I was treated differently by staff based on my race or ethnicity	3	4

Table 12. Participant suggestions for improving services and experiences of Black people in the housing and homeless system

<i>Improve awareness/communication of services available in the homelessness system</i>
<i>Provide more supports to clients to help them succeed long-term</i>
<i>Be more client-centered, client-focused</i>
<i>Have more shelter space/resources</i>
<i>Provide more wraparound and preventative services and employment support</i>
<i>Build landlord relationships and expand pool of landlords willing to take vouchers</i>
<i>Employ more staff that have experienced homelessness and/or can relate to client experience</i>
<i>Build more affordable housing</i>
<i>Address staff individual bias and improve empathy</i>
<i>Offer customer service training to staff</i>
<i>Make more intentional effort to support African Americans to attain housing</i>
<i>Convert abandoned/unused houses into units for people experiencing homelessness</i>
<i>Provide more support for moving, like a moving service, truck, and furniture</i>
<i>Provide services and programs that target/prioritize risk factors among African Americans</i>
<i>Be more transparent about the process and steps clients need to complete in order to receive resources</i>
<i>Provide more events designed for people of color, more community centers for children, and support groups for young mothers and single parents.</i>
<i>Offer parenting classes</i>
<i>Provide more bus tokens</i>

Key Insights

Analysis of focus group discussions and participant responses has yielded key themes and insights for consideration.

In general, focus group participants reported restrictive eligibility requirements. This is sometimes perceived as race-related. Participants noted specifically the strict income eligibility and being screened out for level of income despite demonstrated need. In addition, limitations of the homeless definition impacted clients, particularly for those who are living in a doubled-up situation or are paying for their own hotel room (and therefore do not meet the literally homeless or at imminent risk definitions).

At times, focus group participants observed provision of services as impacted by race. For example, when trying to access services, participants noted that they were often denied services or told to stay with a family member or other contact. In a few instances, participants mentioned they felt staff were biased against them and felt they would have gotten more help if they were not a person of color. In addition, participants observed white clients receiving more services, more quickly than black clients, including when trying to access shelter.

Focus group participants noted a general lack of resources for serving people experiencing homelessness. Specifically, select participants mentioned that it is difficult for single women, including single pregnant women, to obtain resources. In addition, it was mentioned that resources for people without disabilities are limited, and resources generally are only available for those with the most severe need, which leaves many households left out. Participants also mentioned that shelter capacity is limited.

Focus group participants noted a lack of diverse staff at agencies. Participants observed predominantly white staff at many agencies and discussed the difficulties staff have in relating to the client experience, both as a person of color and someone experiencing homelessness. Participants stated that this impacted the quality of service received.

Services and programs aren't always designed with people of color in mind. Participants noted that services didn't seem to meaningfully address risk factors, needs, or experiences unique to African Americans. In addition, participants reported that hygiene and other products available at the shelters were not racially and ethnically inclusive; products were largely geared towards white clients.

Focus group participants noted discrimination when trying to rent in Washtenaw County. Specifically, participants felt discriminated against when it came to their rental, credit, and criminal histories, and level of income. In addition, participants noted the small pool of landlords willing to accept vouchers and the rise in landlords no longer accepting vouchers.

Focus group participants discussed a lack of transparency for handling race-related incidents. While several participants did feel comfortable reporting race-related incidents, some did not. This was attributed to fears that reporting the incident would impact the services they received. Other participants felt that there would not be repercussions for the perpetrator. Participants also discussed the difficulty of voicing concerns with agency leadership.

Focus group participants did not find the system to be user-friendly. For example, participants often reported long wait times for services and experienced several "hoops to jump through." This included taking the VI-SPDAT assessment, having to obtain documents from multiple agencies, and being referred to multiple agencies/staff people.

Focus group participants noted a lack of urgency and capacity on behalf of agency staff. Participants reported feeling that staff did not prioritize their case or address it with urgency. In addition, participants recalled requesting certain resources repeatedly before receiving them.

Recommendations & Next Steps

Quantitative and qualitative data gathered and presented in this report invoke a range of short- and long-term recommendations that can be pursued by the CoC to address racial inequity.

Recommendations reflect not only the results of the focus group analysis, but also direct suggestion from participants. The Washtenaw County CoC has already taken a few critical steps towards this goal, but more can be done.

Short-term Recommendations

1. Draft and implement a Racial Equity Action Plan that takes the focus group findings into account to identify concrete system- and agency-level changes
2. Provide hygiene products appropriate for people of color at agencies
3. Apply a racial equity lens in committee and policy discussions
4. Implement program exit surveys across the system to gather additional data around barriers and experiences for clients generally and people of color in particular
5. Expand landlord outreach and engagement
6. Draft and advertise clear policies and procedures for handling race-related incidents at agencies
7. Implement program eligibility guidelines that prioritize resources for the most at-risk groups, including communities of color
8. Offer more events and resources designed for people of color
9. Draft clear communications for clients regarding system processes, procedures, and expectations to support them as they move through the system

Long-term Recommendations

10. Provide annual trainings around the intersection of race and homelessness, trauma-informed care, racially and ethnically appropriate communication, and diversity
11. Develop a CoC-wide employment strategy to support clients to obtain, maintain, and expand employment and income
12. Develop CoC staff and leadership that are representative of the population served, by considering racial equity when hiring at the CoC Lead and provider agencies, and by encouraging CoC service providers to consider equity when making hiring decisions
13. Further develop leadership by identifying and supporting emerging leaders of color through professional development and mentoring
14. Intentionally and actively recruit people of color and those with lived experience for positions on the CoC Board and Committees
15. Establish a Lived Experience Council composed of people who have experienced homelessness and received services from the Washtenaw County CoC
16. Work in partnership with non-CoC agencies and allies to educate a broad range of entities—including local and state government, law enforcement, mental health, health care, and other partners/stakeholders—about the intersection of racism and homelessness in Washtenaw

County, and work in collaboration to identify and act on opportunities to reduce racial disparities

17. Increase outreach to households identifying as Black or African American by ensuring that Coordinated Entry is marketed to and accessible by Black and African American households, and encourage service providers to expand outreach and services in neighborhoods and geographic areas with higher concentrations of Black and African American residents. Using local data, identify and target those neighborhoods that are almost exclusively comprised of individuals and families identifying as Black or African American and where deep disparities exist around various domains, such as health, housing, income, and education.
18. Increase available resources, including affordable housing, shelter space, and various forms of financial assistance for people experiencing homelessness
19. Explore feasibility of a moving service and/or supports
20. Conduct more focus groups to continue exploring inequities in the homelessness system

Next Steps

In February 2020, the CoC established an Anti-Racism Workgroup, which will tackle issues of racial inequity in our system and brainstorm meaningful solutions. OCED will share the focus group findings report with the Anti-Racist workgroup, who will delve deeply into this report's findings and recommendations. The Anti-Racist work group will lead the creation of a CoC Racial Equity Action Plan that will include concrete steps to take at the individual, agency, and system level, and research topics for further qualitative or quantitative study.

OCED will continue to utilize this report to inform conversations on improving racial equity in the homelessness system. Together with the CoC Board, Committees, and community partners, OCED will begin to implement system changes aimed at ensuring the homelessness system is responsive and equitable for all subpopulations.

The final findings report and Racial Equity Action Plan will be presented at a community meeting open to the public, the CoC, and focus group participants.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Washtenaw County CoC, OCED would first like to thank the focus group facilitators and participants for courageously sharing their stories. Special thanks also go to the providers and individuals who supported with outreach and recruitment of participants. Lastly, thank you to the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation for its generous contribution and to all CoC partners for their support of this initiative.

Appendix A: Washtenaw County Racial Disparity Assessment

In September 2019, OCED completed a racial disparity assessment to identify potential differences in how black and white households interact with and receive services from the local homeless response system. Findings demonstrate discrepancies in both the likelihood to receive homeless assistance and likelihood for a positive outcome as a result of services.

Are people of different races or ethnicities more or less likely to receive homeless assistance?

To answer this question, data from HMIS indicating who received services was compared to Census data about the general population in Washtenaw County.

Individuals and families identifying as Black or African American continue to be overrepresented in homeless assistance compared to the general Washtenaw County population.

In line with findings from previous years, households identifying as Black or African American continue to be overrepresented, making up 61 percent of all persons served by the Washtenaw County Continuum of Care (CoC) in calendar year 2018, despite making up only 12 percent of the general Washtenaw County population. This overrepresentation persists even in comparison to the county population living below the poverty line, or those experiencing deep poverty, with income below 50 percent of the poverty line.

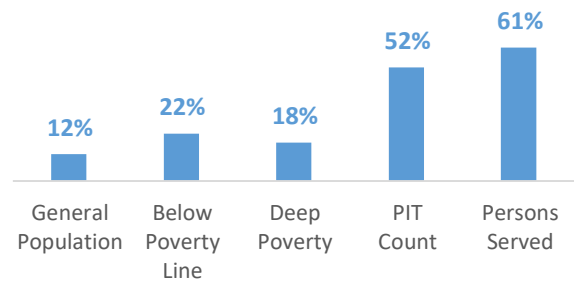


Figure 1. Persons identifying as Black or African American as share of population

All other races are underrepresented in homeless assistance.

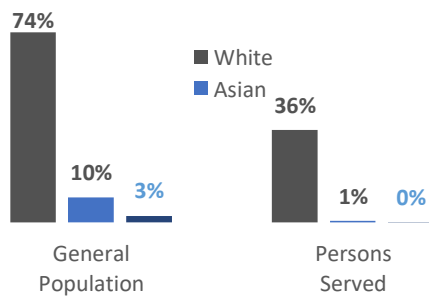


Figure 2. White, Asian, and Multiple Race persons as share of population

All other races sought assistance at a lower rate than their share of the county population.

White households account for 74 percent of the general population but compose little more than a third of households who are accessing homeless assistance. People identifying as Asian or as multiple races are present in significant numbers in the overall population but combined represent less than 1 percent of homeless assistance. American Indian/Alaska Native and Hawaiian Native or Pacific islanders make up less than 1 percent of the county population and those receiving assistance.

The share of Black or African American households receiving assistance varies from year to year.

Even though the overrepresentation of Black or African American households continues, the size of the disparity shows considerable variation from year to year. Since 2015, this percentage has fluctuated between 58 percent and 64 percent, with similar shifts seen among households identifying as White. There is a slight trend towards increased overrepresentation for households identifying as Black or African American in later years, which may point towards increasing disparity over time.

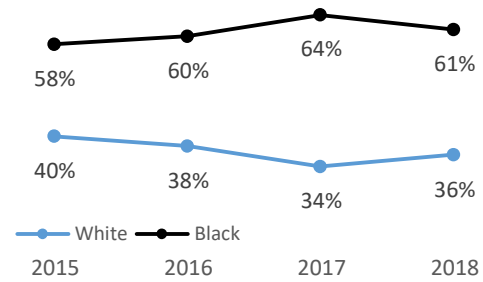


Figure 3. Share of White and Black households receiving homelessness assistance over time

People of Latinx or Hispanic ethnicity access homelessness assistance at rates similar to their presence in the general population.

While information around ethnicity is limited due to underreporting and the deterring impact of negative immigration enforcement, the available data suggest that people identifying as Latinx/Hispanic are accessing homelessness assistance at a rate similar to their share of the county population. Latinx/Hispanic persons made up 4.8 percent of Washtenaw County in 2018, and 5.6 percent of people receiving homelessness assistance. While the share receiving services is still proximate to the general population, it is also a sizeable increase of 33 percent from the 2017 share of 4.1 percent.

Racial disparities are much larger among families with at least one adult and one child compared to adult only households.

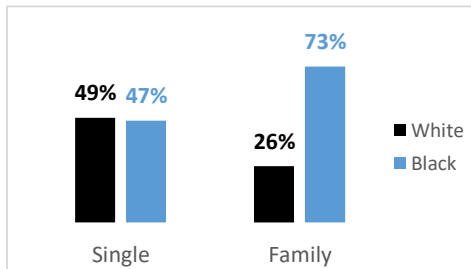


Figure 4. Racial disparities among families and adult only households

Racial disparities are much starker among families with at least one adult and one child, where 73 percent of persons served identify as Black or African American. While the share of Black or African American individual households is actually lower than the share of white individual households, there is still a sizeable disparity when compared to the general population, where 12 percent of county residents identify as Black or African American.

Are people of different races or ethnicities more or less likely to receive a positive outcome from homeless assistance?

To answer this question, two key outcome measures were considered:

- **Positive Discharge Destination Rate** measures the percentage of project leavers who exit to permanent or stable housing.
- **Length of Time** indicates how long clients participated in programs and is used to see if people of different races and ethnicities are engaged in programs for similar durations.

Data for ethnicity was not available in the outcome reports used to answer this question. While the CoC is exploring how to better measure outcomes by ethnicity, the following analysis only considers race.

Individuals and families identifying as Black or African American exit to positive destinations at higher rates than White individuals and families.

As has been seen in previous years, households identifying as Black or African American exited to permanent housing from CoC programs at a much higher rate than households identifying as White. This trend has been true since at least 2015, and the gap in outcomes seems to be widening.

This trend could benefit from further study. In particular, there is a large difference in racial disparity between families with children and single adult households, and those groups also have a different mix of permanent housing resources available to them. These two factors may be driving much of the disparity in housing outcomes.

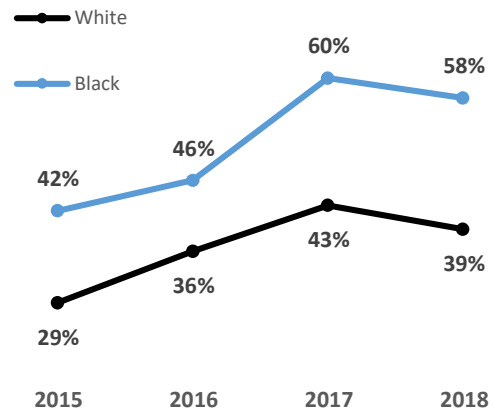


Figure 5. Share of exits to positive destinations by year

Black and White households have equivalent lengths of stay in different project types.

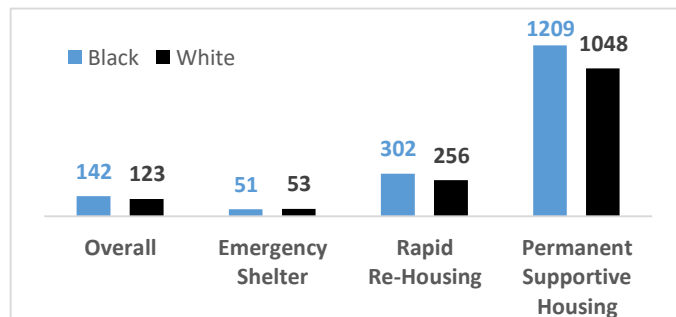


Figure 6. Length of stay by race and project type

Black and White households showed a largely similar length of stay, which is one indicator that can help understand the manner in which clients engage with a project, as well as measure the level of acuity and need among clients served. Overall, Black or African American households are engaged in a project for 142 days before exit, compared to 123 for White households.

While similar lengths of stay can be observed across multiple project types, there does seem to be a slight trend towards longer program engagement for Black or African American households in permanent housing projects, which include Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing. This trend has been observed in previous years and should be monitored closely. Qualitative input from clients served could help to illustrate what the differences in length of stay mean for client experience and outcomes.

Small sample sizes for all other races make it difficult to determine if they are more or less likely to receive a positive outcome.

Only 92 out of 3,294 clients who exited a homeless assistance program in 2018 identified as a race other than White or Black or African American. Because the share of other races is so small, it is difficult to observe significant differences in outcomes for these races, and any such observations would lack power.

Appendix B: CoC Racial Equity Focus Group Interview Script

Introduction

Thank you for coming, we appreciate your efforts in making it here today. *[Say your name and brief description of your experience with homelessness, if you feel comfortable]*

I want to start by telling you what we hope to gain from this session, then go over some guidelines for when we start asking questions.

This is a project through the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development, with support from the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation. These conversations are to help them better understand the experience of Black and African American people in our homelessness and housing system and programs. As people who have worked with these agencies, we hope to learn from your experiences to create better programs and services for people in Washtenaw County experiencing homelessness. What you share today will be used to lead the discussion for racial equity in this system.

This can be a sensitive topic, but we hope that you can share your experiences and opinions with us today. Before we start this conversation, we want to make sure you understand your rights and how your information will be used. Let's look over the Informed Consent Form together *[Read through or review Consent Form based on what participants want to go over]*

Does anyone have any questions?

If you agree with this and want to participate today, please sign and date the Consent Form.

We also have your \$25 gift cards. Please sign the Reimbursement Receipt Form to verify that you received your gift card today. *[Please make sure to collect all of these; we need them for accounting]*

As mentioned in the form, everything you say here is confidential, and what we pass on to agencies will be de-identified so they will not know who said what. For our records, Anna is in the back and will be taking notes and recording this session, but again, these will only be used for their team to refer back to later and will not be given directly to the agencies you work or worked with. Is everyone okay with this?

We wish to create a safe space for you to speak, so we have a few guidelines for our conversation today. First, please be respectful of other people, their opinions, and their experiences even if you disagree with someone. Second, please make sure you are sharing airtime with the other people at the table; we want to hear from everyone today! Third, we ask that you speak based on your own experiences and circumstances, not about what you have heard other people say. If you do know other people who you think have something to say about this topic, please have them contact us so that they can tell us directly. As a reminder, you only need to share what you feel comfortable sharing, and if you feel uncomfortable, you may leave at any time. We also have sticky notes and pen available if you wish to write down a thought and have me read it instead of you saying it out loud.

This is a reminder that you are not required to participate in this interview. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, I hope that you tell me so that I can address the situation, but you may also leave at any time. You do not need to give back the gift card if you decide to do so.

Are there any questions for me before we start?

Questions

Background

- How do you identify your race or ethnicity?
- What has been your experience with homelessness, in either childhood, adult years, or both?

Entry and Assessment

- When you first inquired about housing services (likely through HAWC, Housing Access for Washtenaw County), did you feel staff responded and were attentive to your situation and needs?
- Tell me about when you were administered the VI-SPDAT assessment? (the assessment conducted by a staff person that asks several questions about your background, previous homeless experiences, events in your past, etc.)
 - Did you feel comfortable answering the questions with the person giving the assessment? What made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
 - Did you ever feel you needed to give false information on the VI-SPDAT? Why did you feel you needed to give this information?

Service Delivery

- What homeless or housing agencies and programs have you been involved with in Washtenaw County and what were your experiences with those agencies?
 - Did you feel welcome, accepted, and comfortable there?
 - Did you feel that you were treated differently based on your race or ethnicity by either staff or other participants?
 - Did you feel that services were appropriate for your race?
 - Did you feel you had a say in your case management?
 - Did you ever have to report a race-related incident?
 - Did you ever experience something and not feel comfortable reporting it? Why/why not?
- Have you experienced discrimination when trying to rent in Washtenaw County?

Organization Culture

- During your time utilizing support from other agencies, did you feel that you were offered services and events that were inclusive of your race? Were you offered hair and skin products appropriate for you?
- Do you feel the way you were communicated with was respectful of your race and culture?
- Do you feel that you need to minimize certain aspects of your racial or ethnic culture, like language or clothes, when you interact with staff? With other participants?

Suggestions

- What suggestions do you have for improving services and experiences of Black people in the housing and homeless system?

Additional prompts and follow-up questions:

- Could you say a little bit more about that experience?
- Could you explain more about _____?
- Has anyone had a similar or different experience?
- Could you give me an example of when that happened?
- Would anyone else like to comment here?

Conclusion

Thank you again for coming and sharing your experiences. We appreciate everything you told us and your willingness to speak with us today. From here, we are going to review our discussion today and your suggestions to find ways that we can make this system more equitable for people experiencing homelessness. We will have a community event to present the results of these discussions that we will invite you to. We hope to see you there.

Appendix C: CoC Racial Equity Focus Group Interview Script – Veterans

Introduction

Thank you for coming, we appreciate your efforts in making it here today. *[Say your name and brief description of your experience with homelessness, if you feel comfortable]*

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If you agree with this and want to participate today, please sign and date the Consent Form.

We also have your \$25 gift cards. Please sign the Reimbursement Receipt Form to verify that you received your gift card today. *[Please make sure to collect all of these; we need them for accounting]*

As mentioned in the form, everything you say here is confidential, and what we pass on to agencies will be de-identified so they will not know who said what. For our records, Anna is in the back and will be taking notes and recording this session, but again, these will only be used for their team to refer back to later and will not be given directly to the agencies you work or worked with. Is everyone okay with this?

We wish to create a safe space for you to speak, so we have a few guidelines for our conversation today. First, please be respectful of other people, their opinions, and their experiences even if you disagree with someone. Second, please make sure you are sharing airtime with the other people at the table; we want to hear from everyone today! Third, we ask that you speak based on your own experiences and circumstances, not about what you have heard other people say. If you do know other people who you think have something to say about this topic, please have them contact us so that they can tell us directly. As a reminder, you only need to share what you feel comfortable sharing, and if you feel uncomfortable, you may leave at any time. We also have sticky notes and pen available if you wish to write down a thought and have me read it instead of you saying it out loud.

This is a reminder that you are not required to participate in this interview. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, I hope that you tell me so that I can address the situation, but you may also leave at any time. You do not need to give back the gift card if you decide to do so.

Are there any questions for me before we start?

Questions

Background

- How do you identify your race or ethnicity?
- What has been your experience with homelessness, in either childhood, adult years, or both?

Entry and Assessment

- When you first approached the VA for housing services, did you feel staff responded and were attentive to your situation and needs?
- Tell me about when you were administered the VI-SPDAT assessment? (the assessment conducted by a staff person that asks several questions about your background, previous homeless experiences, events in your past, etc.)
 - Did you feel comfortable answering the questions with the person giving the assessment? What made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
 - Did you ever feel you needed to give false information on the VI-SPDAT? Why did you feel you needed to give this information?

Service Delivery

- What homeless or housing agencies and programs have you been involved with in Washtenaw County and what were your experiences with those agencies?
 - Did you feel welcome, accepted, and comfortable there?
 - Did you feel that you were treated differently based on your race or ethnicity by either staff or other participants?
 - Did you feel that services provided in VA programs [GPD, SSVF, VASH] were appropriate for your race?
 - Did you feel you had a say in your case management?
 - Did you ever have to report a race-related incident?
 - Did you ever experience something and not feel comfortable reporting it? Why/why not?
- Have you experienced discrimination when trying to rent in Washtenaw County?

Organization Culture

- During your time utilizing support from other agencies, did you feel that you were offered services and events that were inclusive of your race? Were you offered hair and skin products appropriate for you?
- Do you feel the way you were communicated with was respectful of your race and culture?
- Do you feel that you need to minimize certain aspects of your racial or ethnic culture, like language or clothes, when you interact with staff? With other participants?

Suggestions

- What suggestions do you have for improving services and experiences of Black people in the housing and homeless system?

Additional prompts and follow-up questions:

- Could you say a little bit more about that experience?
- Could you explain more about _____?
- Has anyone had a similar or different experience?
- Could you give me an example of when that happened?
- Would anyone else like to comment here?

Conclusion

Thank you again for coming and sharing your experiences. We appreciate everything you told us and your willingness to speak with us today. From here, we are going to review our discussion today and your suggestions to find ways that we can make this system more equitable for people experiencing homelessness. We will have a community event to present the results of these discussions that we will invite you to. We hope to see you there.