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Strategic Data Analytics



EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION IN OHIO'S CIVIL LEGAL SYSTEM

Authored by: Equius Group, Strategic Data Analytics & Ohio
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There is great power in partnership. While the Equius Team contributed amply to this process, the rigor, veracity, and thoughtfulness that the Foundation committee and team, along with SDA, applied to this work is unmatched. This is more than an obligatory message about this project being a team effort, iron truly does sharpen iron. It is Equius' expertise in facilitation and racial equity, the Foundation's knowledge of the legal intersections, and SDA's ability to make data sing, coupled with our expert-laden DEI committee that has gotten us this far together.

It has been our honor to accompany you on this leg of the journey, thank you for your trust and partnership.

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THE APPROACH

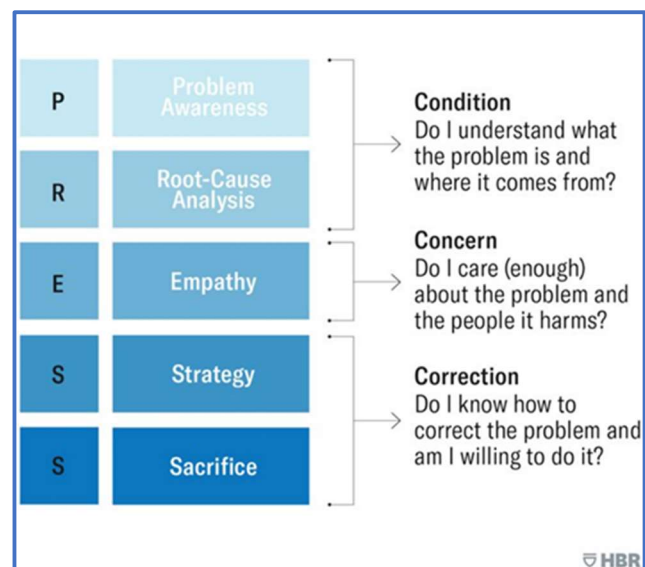
In Spring 2022, the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation (the Foundation) engaged two consulting firms, the Equius Group (Equius) and Strategic Data Analytics (SDA), to support the newly chartered Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Standing Committee to better understand the state of racial justice and equity in Ohio's civil legal system. This effort aligned with the Foundation's commitment to reduce inequitable outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and other Ohioans who are systemically marginalized. As SDA gathered and analyzed data, it became clear that along every measure on which we focused, including health, wealth/debt, education, and housing, Black Ohioans' outcomes are worse than that of their counterparts. Hispanic Ohioans are a close second. For that reason, we emphasize the data tied to those respective groups when we specifically reference them. At times we also include Ohioans that have been systemically marginalized, which includes other groups of Color, rural Ohioans, the LGBTQ+ community, those with disabilities, and other demographic groups navigating poverty. The goals of this engagement are to successfully launch the Board DEI Standing Committee and provide the Board with key issue recommendation(s) which can be developed into strategies and interventions to improve racial equity specifically, and equity broadly, for systemically marginalized people throughout Ohio's civil legal system.

For this project, SDA provided the research and data analysis to ensure that the committee's work and recommendations would be grounded in hard data. Foundation staff brought their understanding of the current state of the civil legal system in Ohio and managed the project. The Equius team supplied not only the facilitation, but the expertise in the application of a racial equity lens and human centered design to ensure that the Ohioans behind the data remained the focus from start to finish and that both individual behavior and decisions were seen alongside the systemic drivers of disparity.

Equity Lens	Racial Equity Lens
Using an equity lens means considering how people who have been marginalized may be impacted when planning, developing, or evaluating a policy, program, or decision and to identify and potentially eliminate or mitigate barriers. The purpose of an equity lens is to be deliberately inclusive as we make decisions to support the goal of more equitable outcomes. An equity lens will not tell you what actions to take, rather the lens helps focus on equity considerations in acting and making decisions.	Applying a racial equity lens involves intentionally taking a race conscious approach and centering Communities of Color to target improvements for those most impacted by racial inequity. "Adoption of an RE [racial equity] lens requires a more comprehensive understanding of the U.S. societal context, specifically the impact of race and ethnicity on people and outcomes. This context is extremely important in data analysis." – Centering Racial Equity in Measurement and Analysis. The application of a racial equity lens will not tell you what to do, but it requires being deliberate in identifying and considering the racialized impacts and outcomes in acting and making decisions. Without a racial equity lens, the cause and effect of race and ethnicity may be overlooked and the effectiveness of otherwise well thought out solutions/ interventions diminished.

At the committee retreat in July 2022, Equius introduced the PRESS model as a tool for being intentional in problem solving. See, Appendix C.

In addition, Equius introduced the committee to a human-centered design, a problem-solving technique that puts real people at the center of the development process, enabling one to create products and services that resonate and are tailored to the audience's needs. Human centered design uses personas to help planners understand the lived experiences of the people behind the data. In this way, the designers are better able to understand the needs of actual people for whom the problem-solving process is targeted.



Based on the results of the Ohio Legal Help: Civil Justice Study 2021 (See, Appendix D), which reported that connecting with Ohioans most in need of legal help, especially Black Ohioans, is most successful when done through trusted intermediaries, the decision was made to interview leaders in trusted non-profit organizations across Ohio. Equius conducted over twenty interviews and collated the responses so that the responses could be used not only to develop personas for critical analysis but could also be used to weigh the importance of each substantive area impacting the disparities currently seen through the poverty data.

Thus, to identify a recommended focus area, the consultants, staff, and committee gathered and analyzed data. We applied the factors and tools discussed above, viewing the quantitative data through both an equity and racial equity lens. We overlaid the qualitative data gathered through individual interviews with organizations around the state. This allowed us to include the perspective, feedback, and ideas of both organizations on the ground, working directly with populations of interest and intermediary organizations.

This approach helped the committee evaluate critical legal issues in housing, education, debt/wealth, and health holistically and with some perspective of people's lived experience. Through this process, the committee gained a better understanding the civil legal barriers and challenges facing Black Ohioans, Hispanic Ohioans, as well as those of other groups of Color, rural Ohioans, the LGBTQ+ community, those with disabilities, and others navigating poverty.

As you will read in the report which follows, the committee concluded that the Foundation should undertake its first efforts by focusing on the substantive area of stable, affordable, and safe housing for Black and Hispanic Ohioans specifically, and others experiencing systemic marginalization more broadly. Through this report, the committee offers both a process and a recommendation that we hope will allow the Foundation to take action and **make a difference** in reducing systemic barriers to civil racial justice for Black and Hispanic Ohioans.

DISCOVERY – DATA OVERVIEW

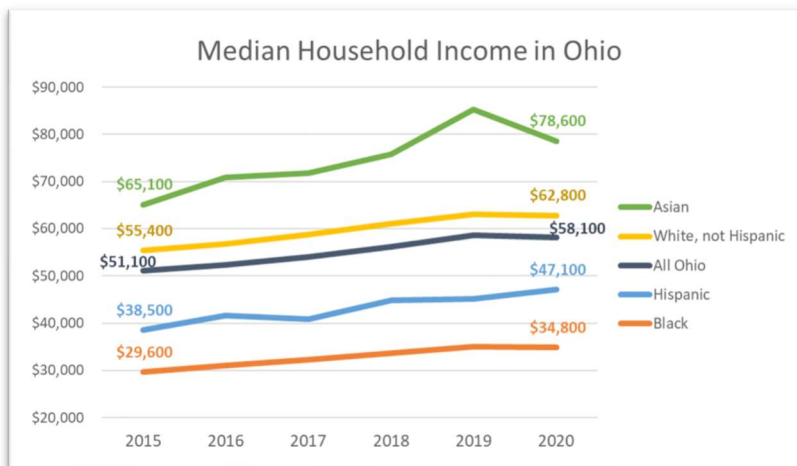
The committee's work was a process grounded in data, both quantitative and qualitative. SDA's research and data launched and bounded the process - from confirming the legal outcomes disparities for Black and Hispanic Ohioans to applying census tract analysis to identify the geographic regions of the state where the disparities are most dramatic.

Research Data Overview

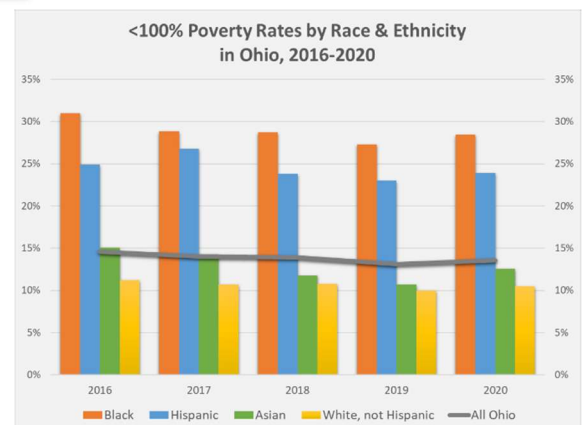
SDA researched and analyzed publicly available data related to indices of poverty; housing, including affordability, conditions, evictions, and access to mortgage loans; employment; access to credit and other forms of wealth building; debt; health, including conditions, outcomes, and access to healthcare; educational outcomes and school discipline; and foster care. In its initial presentation to the committee, SDA compared the data based on race and ethnicity. See Appendix E for a more complete summary of the data review.

The data revealed the following:

- Black Ohioans have only fifty-five percent of the median household income of white Ohioans, and Hispanic Ohioans have only seventy-five percent of the median household income of white Ohioans.¹

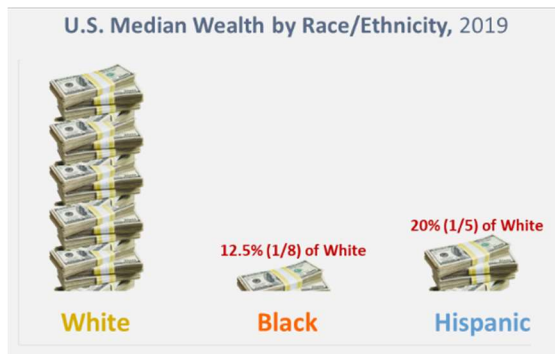


Median Income Black Ohioans \$34,800
Median Income Hispanic Ohioans \$47,100
Median Income White Ohioans \$62,800



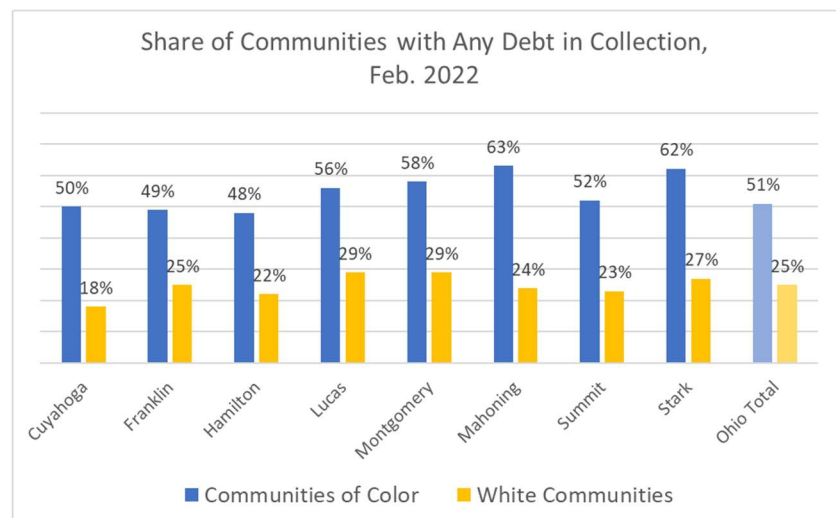
¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-19 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates & 2020 5-Year Estimates, Table S1903. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov> on Feb. 16, 2022.

- Black Ohioans face three times the poverty rate of white Ohioans and Hispanic Ohioans face 2 times the poverty rate of white Ohioans.²



- The median Black family has 1/8 the wealth of the median white family, and the median Hispanic family has 1/5 the wealth of the median white family.³

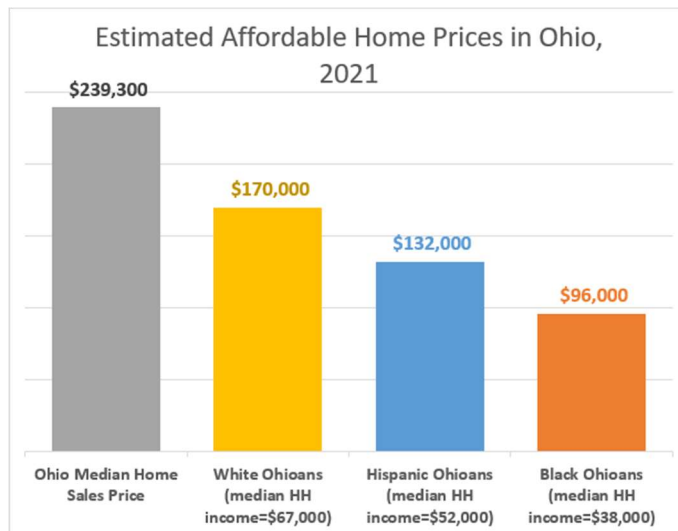
- Communities of color in Ohio are twice as likely to have debts in collection than white communities.⁴



² U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-19 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates & 2020 5-Year Estimates, Table S1703. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov> on Mar. 17, 2022

³ HUD, "Closing the African American Homeownership Gap," Mar. 22, 2021. Choi, Jung Hyun, "Disparate Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic Across Race and Ethnicity in the Housing Market," Urban Institute, June 29, 2022. Simms, Margaret C., Ph.D., "Minding the Wealth Gap: Putting Policy in Place to Increase Black Wealth," National Urban League.

⁴ Urban Institute, Debt in America Dataset <https://apps.urban.org/features/debt-interactive-map/>.

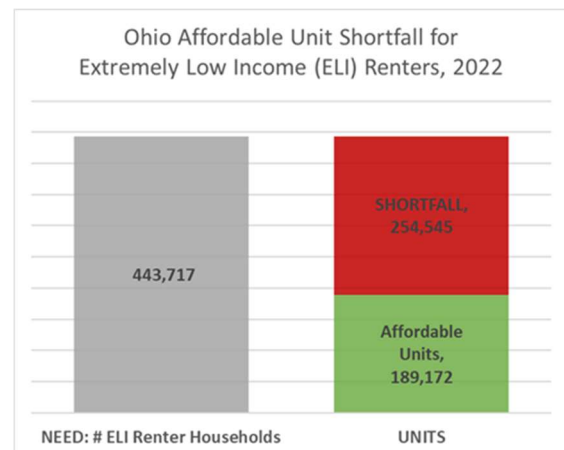


- Black and Hispanic Ohioans are less likely to own their own home than white Ohioans, due, in part, to escalating home prices; higher rates of mortgage denials; and lower median salaries.⁵

Home ownership is the largest source of wealth for most American families.

This gap in home ownership is larger than in 1960, before the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

- As noted above, Black and Hispanic Ohioans are more likely to have a lower median household income than white Ohioans. This also affects their ability to find rental housing. Ohio currently has a shortfall of 250,000 rental units for extremely low-income renters. Extremely low-income renters are those who earn less than 30% of an area's median income. Thus, 58% of extremely low-income renters have no access to affordable rental housing.⁶



- Black Ohioans have worse health outcomes than white Ohioans in the following areas:⁷
 - Babies' birthweight,
 - Child and infant mortality,
 - Deaths due to injury,
 - Firearm fatalities,
 - Life expectancy,
 - Premature death, and
 - Teen births.
- Prior to the pandemic, Ohio was one of only eight states in which the Black-White achievement gap was increasing and one of only five states in which the Latino-White achievement gap was increasing.⁸ Remote learning and reduced reporting between 2020 through 2021 will have likely increased those disparities.

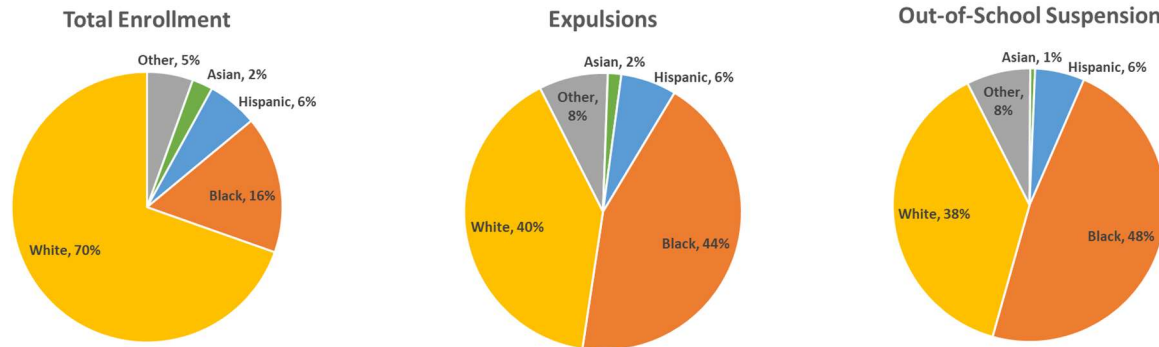
⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S1903, Median Income in the Past 12 Months. <https://data.census.gov>. Median home sales price data retrieved from www.Ohiorealtors.org on June 21, 2023.

⁶ 2022 Ohio Housing Profile: <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/ohio>

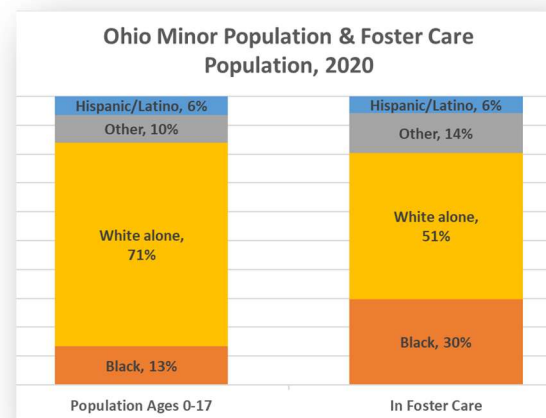
⁷ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. Retrieved from www.countyhealthrankings.org on Jan. 28, 2022.

⁸ Stanford University, Educational Opportunity Project. <https://edopportunity.org/>.

- Racial achievement gaps are often linked to racial discipline disparities. In Ohio, Black boys account for 26% of expulsions and thirty-two percent of out-of-school suspensions but comprise only eight percent of enrollment.⁹



- Black and Hispanic children are taken into foster care at rates disproportionate to their percentage of the population.¹⁰



In light of the disparate experiences of Black and Hispanic Ohioans, the committee queried what geographic areas of Ohio are most impacted. To identify these areas, SDA utilized a scoring method to establish which census tracts experience the most significant concentrations of disparities. First, SDA identified the counties with the largest populations of Black and Hispanic Ohioans. Then, within those counties, SDA isolated the census tracts with the greatest concentrations of Black or Hispanic Ohioans. All of the data categories reviewed for the initial data review were analyzed for the 573 census tracts with the greatest concentration of Black Ohioans and the 339 census tracts with the largest concentration of Hispanic Ohioans. SDA then narrowed its review to 200 census tracts in ten (10) counties for Black Ohioans and 196 census tracts in fifteen (15) counties for Hispanic Ohioans where disparity concentrations related to debt, housing, health, and/or education were most pronounced. Finally, 20 census tracts were identified for both Black and Hispanic Ohioans in which there were the most significant concentrations of multiple issues. Overlaying the 20 census tracts for Black Ohioans and the 20 census tracts for Hispanic Ohioans resulted in identifying areas of focus in eight counties: Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery, Stark, and Trumbull.

⁹ Ohio Department of Education, Discipline Occurrences, 2018-2019 School Year, available at <https://reports.education.ohio.gov/>.

¹⁰ Child Trends analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect from Annie E Casey Foundation. U.S. Census ACS Tables S0901, B17001, B17001B, B17001H, B17001I (5-Year for 2020 and 1-Year for 2016-2019). Children's Defense Fund Ohio: "Measuring Transformation & Elevating Youth Voice in Child Welfare," April 2022. <https://cdfohio.org/reports/>.

Qualitative Data Overview

Equipped with SDA's research that broadly defined key issues and geographic areas, criteria for qualitative data collection were developed. This ultimately drove the approach to outreach, determined priorities/areas of focus, and established the stakeholders to whom there would be outreach.

The committee narrowed the substantive areas of focus to:

- Debt/Wealth
- Education (K-12)
- Health
- Housing

Based on census tract analysis and the committee's interest in capturing the experience of Black and Hispanic Ohioans in large and small cities as well as rural communities, our targeted, qualitative outreach was directed at the following counties:

- | | | | |
|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| • Cuyahoga | • Hamilton | • Mahoning | • Stark |
| • Franklin | • Lucas | • Montgomery | • Trumbull |

Within these counties, we targeted for interviews non-profits which are working in the areas of interest and adjacent intermediary organizations, with an emphasis on organizations led by Ohioans of Color. The purpose in connecting with these leaders was to solicit their experience with the challenges faced by their clients and to identify intervention points at which the Foundation could make a difference through the law.

We utilized an asset framing approach for the interview process. While we wanted to hear the challenges and root causes in issue, we particularly wanted to hear about clients' resilience and ability to thrive in the face of significant adversity. We also wanted to gain an understanding of short-term and long-term potential wins for clients. See, Appendix F.

Using these criteria, over fifty organizations across Ohio that could provide insight in the areas of concern were identified for outreach. Equius interviewed twenty-one organizational leaders. Those leaders were generous with their time, expertise, and offered broad insight into the communities they each served. See, Appendix G. The interview themes that surfaced around assets, challenges, and root causes became the basis for the creation of personas representing the clients' experiences and stories.

Through research, interviews, and overall data analysis, the convergence of systemic factors that influence individual decisions were illuminated. Whether or not Ohioans can access the resources needed for adequate housing, healthcare, wealth building and quality education is determined by more than their individual decision making alone.

NAMING RACISM

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
James Baldwin

Embarking on a statewide effort focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion at this time in Ohio requires a great deal of courage.¹¹ The language and practice of DEI is being called into question and the headwinds are getting stronger. Nevertheless, multiple state agencies and statewide organizations continue to employ data-driven practices and, as a result, remain committed to addressing meaningfully race-based disparities driven by systemic inequities; and, their work is making a difference. This work, and the collective commitment of its advocates and allies, is more important than ever. The data identifies deep gulfs of disparity across housing, health, wealth/debt, foster care, and education. Those gulfs are the deepest for Black Ohioans followed closely by Hispanic Ohioans.

Poverty plays a significant role in these barriers, and it can be tempting to identify class as the sole culprit. In Camara Phyllis Jones’ book, *Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework a Gardener’s Tale*, she states, “It is important to note that the association between socioeconomic status and race in the United States has its origins in discrete historical events but persists because of contemporary structural factors that perpetuate those historical injustices. In other words, it is because of institutionalized racism that there is an association between socioeconomic status and race in this country.” Those who want to live in Ohio where all its citizens can afford safe, sustainable housing, access quality public education, receive quality healthcare, and earn a family sustaining wage must not shy away from calling a thing a thing. The thing that looms large in the qualitative and quantitative research is institutional racism and its multiplying effects.

If we can name institutionalized racism, we can address it as the root cause. We cannot stop talking about racism or stop using the word as it will not cease to exist simply because we don’t say it. Racism is a systems issue. The “E” in the PRESS model stands for empathy. Robert Livingston notes that we must care enough to act. He says we must care enough to be willing to sacrifice. “The real challenge for organizations is not figuring out “What we can do?” but rather “Are we willing to do it?”” The Foundation has started this journey and must remain committed for the long term.

Systems level transformation in Ohio’s civil legal system is a long-term endeavor. Solutions will be multi-faceted and will need to be enacted by multiple organizations in partnership. Due to the vastness of these issues, no single organization can address every issue or solve every problem.

¹¹ For the specific definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion used in this context, See, Appendix H.

*You cannot change any society unless you take
responsibility for it, unless you see yourself belonging to
it and responsible for changing it.*
Grace Lee Boggs

The Foundation is already effective at building strong relationships and partnerships; that skill can be leveraged to broaden the types of organizations with which it builds trusting relationships. The Foundation needs to continue to support and be supported by the other state agencies and state and local organizations doing racial equity, equity, and justice work while cultivating new allies and collaborators. Through this project and through its Standing DEI Committee, the organization has grown its capacity to be even more effective in increasing access to the civil legal system for Ohioans who have far too often been left behind.

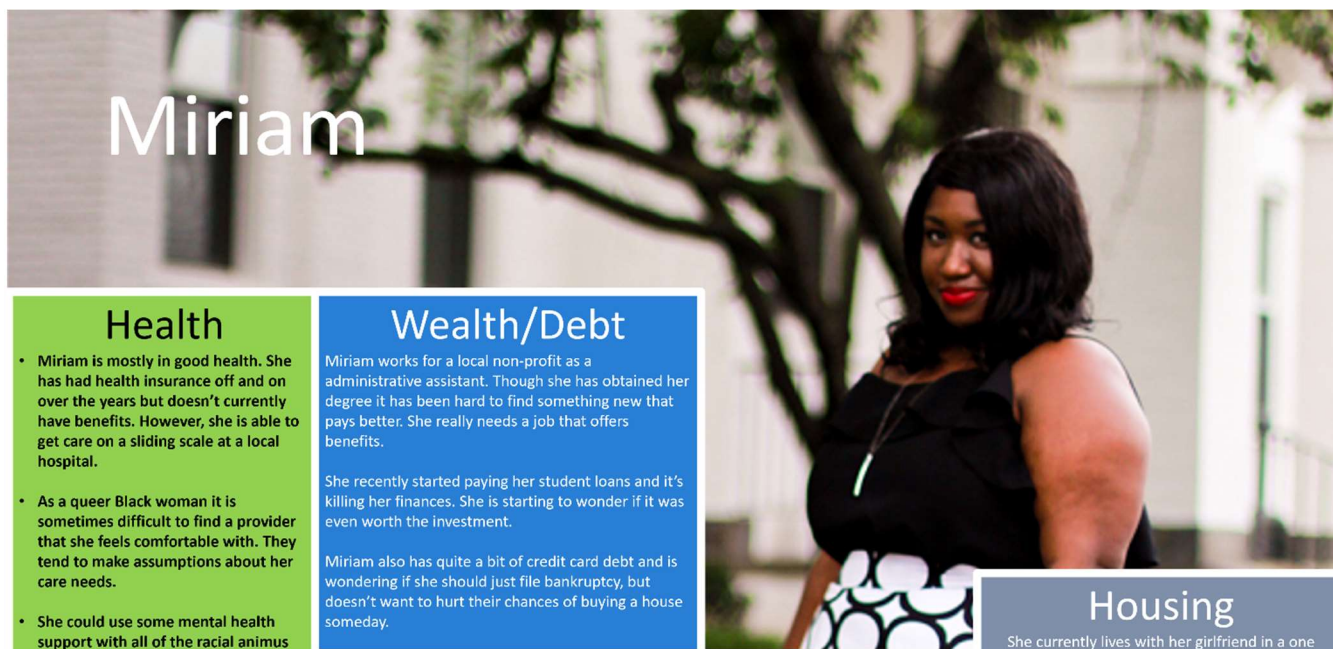
UPSTREAM LEGAL INTERVENTIONS - INNOVATING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

The Foundation is positioned to leverage the civil legal system in service to Black, Hispanic, and other systemically marginalized Ohioans. Sara Sternberg Greene's article Race, Class and Access to Civil Justice (See, Appendix I) links income and the probability of seeking help from the civil legal system. Her research also uncovers a connection between negative experiences in the criminal justice system and decisions to seek help for civil legal problems. In its effort to ensure that all Ohioans have equal access to justice to resolve their civil legal issues and thereby lead stable, healthy, and productive lives, the Foundation can use this process to seek innovative, upstream solutions at the legal intersections in housing, education, debt/wealth, and healthcare.

Upstream solutions address the root cause of an issue, as contrasted with downstream solutions that usually treat only symptoms. While downstream solutions are essential because they address urgent needs, the Foundation strives through this process to address causes and to prevent emergent legal issues from arising. The Foundation team painted a vivid picture for the committee around substantive areas of law and their potential impact on housing, debt/wealth, health, and education.

WHAT COULD BE? JUSTICE INNOVATIONS

At the April 2023 DEI Committee retreat at which Equius reported the results from the interviews, the committee used human-centered design and Equius' six potential clients to bring the data to life and to enable the committee to concretize potential upstream interventions. See, Appendix J.



Miriam

<h2>Health</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miriam is mostly in good health. She has had health insurance off and on over the years but doesn't currently have benefits. However, she is able to get care on a sliding scale at a local hospital. As a queer Black woman it is sometimes difficult to find a provider that she feels comfortable with. They tend to make assumptions about her care needs. She could use some mental health support with all of the racial animus that seems to rearing its ugly head it would be nice have somewhere to put her feelings of sadness, frustration and fear. She knows that this kind of stress can be damaging over time. 	<h2>Wealth/Debt</h2> <p>Miriam works for a local non-profit as a administrative assistant. Though she has obtained her degree it has been hard to find something new that pays better. She really needs a job that offers benefits.</p> <p>She recently started paying her student loans and it's killing her finances. She is starting to wonder if it was even worth the investment.</p> <p>Miriam also has quite a bit of credit card debt and is wondering if she should just file bankruptcy, but doesn't want to hurt their chances of buying a house someday.</p>	
<h2>Education</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miriam has a Psychology degree from the University of Phoenix. She was educated in the U.S., Canada and in her early years Ghana. 		<h2>Housing</h2> <p>She currently lives with her girlfriend in a one bedroom apartment in the suburbs. The neighborhood is okay, though it seems to be deteriorating. The last grocery store in their area recently closed and the only things that seem to be moving in are dollar stores.</p>

Given the committee's desire for and bias toward action, Equius utilized a creative matrix exercise for the committee to imagine "what could be" through effective civil legal interventions. The matrix married the four substantive issue areas used for interviews with legal areas for intervention. See, Appendix K.

The committee used the following categories of types of legal intersections:

- How might we change policy or law to:
- How might we use administrative processes/procedures to:
- How might we create new access pathways to:
- How might we use technology to:
- How might we use training and education to:

The corresponding prompts for focus areas were:

- How might we interrupt debt and generate wealth?
- How might we create access to safe, stable, and affordable housing?
- How might we guarantee equitable education?
- How might we interrupt healthcare delivery to create access to appropriate care?

The committee then applied their learnings throughout the project to generate ideas around how to interrupt inequities based on legal interventions. The exercise resulted in the following key takeaways:

- The committee generated multiple ideas in each substantive legal area, reflecting the fact that there are enormous opportunities to identify impactful projects and the Foundation need not stop with a single project identified through this process.

- The committee's most concrete ideas were generated in interventions falling within Policy or Law and within Administrative Processes/Procedures. The committee also identified some opportunities in Creating New Access Pathways.
- None of the substantive legal areas stand in isolation. Taking action on any one substantive issue will positively impact others. For example, if you stabilize and improve a family's housing, their health, wealth, and education outcomes will also improve. The interconnectedness of these issues means that well-designed interventions will have a positive ripple effect in multiple substantive areas of focus.

MOVING FORWARD

Grounded in the review and investigation of disparities and Equius' qualitative information gathering, the committee began developing the themes and reflecting on opportunities for intervention. Nonprofit leaders identified multiple challenges for clients, so themes were organized based, in part, on the number of times an issue was identified by a nonprofit leader.

Biggest Challenges



Housing inequity and insecurity was elevated as a theme throughout the committee's discernment process. It was identified as one of the most significant challenges for Black and Hispanic Ohioans in SDA's research. Housing issues were given added dimension through the interview conversations. Housing was identified 24 times as a significant issue, often included in more than one category by the interviewees. Housing emerged multiple times in single interviews as one of the clients' top three issues, as an issue that impacts financial stability/health/education, and as an area in which legal changes could positively impact the lives of clients.

Inadequate health equity, especially around substance abuse, mental health, and trauma, was highlighted as a top three issue five times and as the most significant issue impacting client health ten times - more often than any other health issue. Despite the fact that substance

abuse is, today, recognized as a disease and not a character flaw, necessary and comprehensive care is still difficult to access due to limited resources and a high volume of need. There are also inadequate mental health resources available for those suffering from the impact of trauma and/or depression.

Lack of economic equity, insufficient finances, and not having employment with a living wage was lifted as one of the top three issues clients are facing eight times. Economic equity also emerged as an issue connected to housing and education. During SDA's data presentation in July 2022, it was shared that one of the outcomes of the pandemic was an inflated sense of Ohioans' income and savings due to the child tax credit, stimulus funds, and health care expansion. It was noted that this will likely shift as the remnants of those interventions dwindle with the discontinuation of those supports.

Language barriers and lack of cultural competence emerged as one of the top three issues that clients were facing six times and was named as the top issues serving as a barrier to client education four times. Schools, hospitals, government agencies and other similar organizations are often ill prepared to provide adequate translation services to clients even when they are willing and committed to assisting them. Even those who speak the client's language may not be able to adequately translate because of the various dialects that exist for a single language. Depending on the context, mistranslation can have dire consequences.

Individual lack of self-worth and isolation along with siloed, disconnected, and what were described as hostile services were each identified seven times as one of the top three issues that clients face. Hostile services are described as encounters where clients receive either subpar services or the service provider makes it clear that they are unwelcome and/or undeserving of the service being provided. This negative state of being is likely linked to the many other barriers that emerged from the interviews such as hostile services, lack of financial resources, and inadequate housing. While legal intervention alone may not create a sense of self-worth, legal interventions addressing the multiple other issues that emerged can provide the necessary condition to give Black and Hispanic Ohioans and all those living in poverty a sense of dignity that can lead to a deeper sense of self-worth and connection.

Perhaps surprisingly, racism and discrimination were only named explicitly as a top three issue two times. They were elevated as the most significant health issue twice and a place of opportunity for legal change four times. As the Equius team reviewed the nonprofit leaders' responses, it became clear that many of the other themes described were symptoms of broader discrimination, even when the interviewees failed to name them as such. For example, hostile services were potentially connected to disdain for those who need services to begin with, whether driven by classism rooted in the client's poverty, language barriers rooted in the client's immigration status, or some other identity marker. These concepts could be further explored during the next phases of the Foundation's work.

Top 3 Client Challenges		Most Significant Issue Impacting Client Financial Stability	Most Significant Issue Impacting Client Housing Stability	Most Significant Issue Impacting Client Health	Most Significant Issue Impacting Client Education	What legal change would prevent problems for clients?	Totals
Absence of safe, affordable, quality housing that is environmentally healthy	9	2	4	3	2	4	24
Inadequate health equity, esp. around substance abuse, mental health, and trauma	5	1	2	10	3	1	22
Lack of economic equity/insufficient finances/employment with living wage	8	4	2	1	2	0	17
Language barriers /cultural competence	6	1	1	2	4	2	16
Absence of legal status / criminal justice reform	2	5	3	0	0	3	13
Insufficient knowledge of: rights, systems, and finances	5	0	2	2	0	3	12
Deficient education /lack of quality early childhood education	2	0	3	0	7	0	12
Individual lack of self-worth; isolation	7	2	0	0	2	0	11
Racism/discrimination	2	1	0	2	1	4	10
Siloed, disconnected, and/or hostile services	7	1	1	0	0	0	9
Absence of safe and welcoming communities with sufficient opportunities for engagement	4	1	2	0	1	1	9
Lack of transportation and access to services	2	0	0	1	1	0	4

FOCUS AREA RECOMMENDATION: HOUSING

Housing is an area of dramatic disparities for Black and Hispanic Ohioans. Housing also emerged as the most consistently identified challenge for clients in the statewide interview process. Moreover, housing intersects with and can ameliorate most of the other substantive issues of focus, including wealth, debt, health, and education. Thus, the committee recommends that the Foundation begin its efforts by focusing on stable, affordable, and safe housing options for Black and Hispanic Ohioans specifically, and others experiencing systemic marginalization more broadly.

Housing is a powerful lever in advancing both racial equity and equity more broadly. Some researchers espouse that zip code matters more than genetic code. According to the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, “Quality, affordable housing is vital for Ohio families to maintain stable employment and longer-term health. Low wages, a lack of safe and affordable housing, and the impact of racism and housing discrimination result in many Ohioans spending a significant portion of their income on inferior quality housing in neighborhoods that are disconnected from necessary resources, including high quality healthcare and high paying jobs.” See, Appendices L and M.

Quality housing is linked to educational and health outcomes, and homeownership is tied to wealth building. The Housing First approach credits getting people into permanent housing with increasing the chances of addressing substance abuse issues, obtaining treatment for mental health challenges, obtaining stable employment, and improvement to overall wellbeing.

To make measurable progress in addressing issues of inequities in housing, the Foundation will need to, once the focus area is approved, narrow this broad issue area to well-defined

impact areas within which they will develop new and innovative interventions. This will enable the Foundation to effectively utilize its levers and resources, in addition to its ongoing work, to make progress towards reducing inequities in housing outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and other systemically marginalized Ohioans. It is only through the cumulative effect of these kinds of laser focused efforts on smaller pieces of the puzzle and organizations working in close collaboration that will we collectively move towards racial equity in our state and in our country.

Identifying a focus area, improving stable, affordable, and safe housing for Black and Hispanic Ohioans is a big step, but it is only the first step on this important journey for the Foundation.

Narrowing the Focus to Develop Effective Interventions

To be highly effective and impactful, it will be necessary for the Foundation to narrow this broad issue area of housing down to defined aspects upon which the Foundation can focus and apply specific and measurable change and outcomes criteria to measure its work and impact. The Foundation will be best served by narrowing its focus and measuring its outcomes to avoid the pitfalls of activity resulting in little impact.

The data gathering and analysis approach we used in this phase of the project is a model for moving forward. Narrowing the focus should also be human-centered and data driven and should apply the lenses of equity and racial equity. Engaging the broader community is an essential step in developing specific actions or projects. The next phase of the project will need to tap those with expertise and experience in housing and its related issues. A human-centered approach will mean engaging directly with people whose expertise lies in lived experiences. Following this template will increase the likelihood that interventions will have the desired multiplier effect.

Conclusion

This report concludes the first phase of the Foundation's journey. Through it, Foundation staff and the Standing Committee have developed greater capacity, tools, frameworks, knowledge, and experience which equip them for the steps ahead. The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate that there is a tremendous amount of work to do. The Foundation must now take a first step into that work in housing and thereby begin to make an intentional difference in civil legal outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and other systemically marginalized Ohioans.