

City of Evanston Black Employees

Letter to Administration and Action Plan



Our goal as Black employees of the City of Evanston is to seek acknowledgment of disparate actions and to request actionable remedies that ensure fairness and equality in the disbursement of existing policies and practices that address the internal culture of privilege and disparities in employment practices.

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Letter and Action Plan for Racial Change at the City of Evanston

Dear Directors, Mayor, and City Council,

We are writing to you as Black employees of the City of Evanston. We range across various departments and divisions, and in seniority from young professionals to staff who have served for decades. Many of us grew up and/or live in this community so we pay intent attention to our work environment. Sadly, we commonly see and experience inequitable actions by other city staff that contribute to the marginalization of Black lives, Black bodies, and Black voices. We have decided that for this work community to function equitably, silence is no longer an option.

According to the City Council goals, the City of Evanston aspires to achieve equity in all city operations, as well as racial equity in the community. However, this has been difficult to accomplish, possibly because Black City staff do not work in an equitable environment.

In August 2022, a group of approximately 30 Black City of Evanston employees met to share stories of their individual experiences in the workplace. What started as an impromptu safe space for support quickly turned into a much-needed deeper discussion. The stories that were shared in that room were sobering, disheartening, and shocking, to say the least. The group of employees were from various city departments, including City Manager's Office, Community Development, Fleet, Police, Accounts Payable, Legal, Parks & Rec, Heath, Public Works, Library, and Water. What we identified at this gathering is that our experiences may seem singular, but are actually part of a deeper systemic racial issue rooted in the policies and politics of our workplace. Since that August meeting, more people have come forward from other departments to share their stories, many of whom are terrified about speaking up. Frankly put, the City of Evanston has a problem with presenting an equitable workplace for marginalized employees and we are in agreement that this discrepancy needs to be addressed and corrected.

Our intention with this letter is to not only highlight the discrimination, institutional inequities, and barriers faced long term in the COE environment but to provide a solution-based framework to improve the workplace for all employees. These grievances are not new to leadership, but as new leadership continues to come on board, we believe that a formal submission of complaints is necessary to facilitate the enactment of long-term, sustainable change. Accountability is listed as an organizational goal, and this letter and action plan aims to ensure that the City of Evanston lives up to that value, both internally and externally.

We, the Black employees of the City of Evanston, recognize that in order to achieve clarity of necessary actions, it is important that we provide clear examples of how Black employees are subjected to inequity and internal social harm. Below are our lived experiences as Black employees working in a culture of what we perceive to be driven by white privilege in the City of Evanston and some of the messages we receive from leadership. Our experiences include racist tropes, microaggressions, unfair hiring practices, inequitable discipline, pay disparities, and lack of support and upward mobility. In addition to these stories, we have included data from our research as well as a list of actions we believe will lead to fostering an equitable work environment as well as an inclusive internal culture that values and affirms black employees.

In addition to these stories, we have included a list of actions we believe will lead to the fostering of an equitable environment as well as an inclusive internal culture that values and affirms black employees. This is not a complete list, rather, this is a call to awareness, accountability, and action to correct historical wrongs.

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.” — Alice Walker

“The time is always right to do what is right.” –Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” –Barack Obama

“RACISM IS SO UNIVERSAL IN THIS COUNTRY, SO WIDESPREAD, AND DEEP-SEATED, THAT IT IS INVISIBLE BECAUSE IT IS SO NORMAL.” — SHIRLEY CHISHOLM

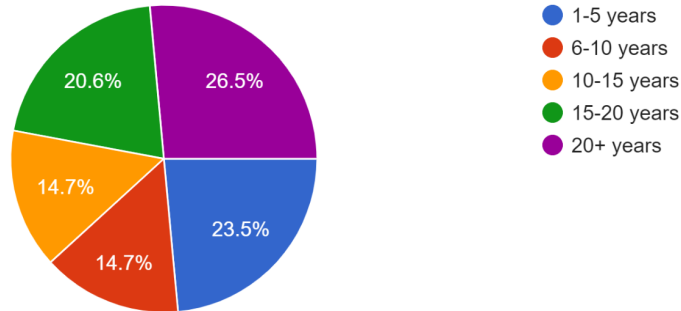
“When I liberate myself, I liberate others. If you don’t speak out ain’t nobody going to speak out for you.” – Fannie Lou Hamer

“If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it.” - Zora Neale Hurston

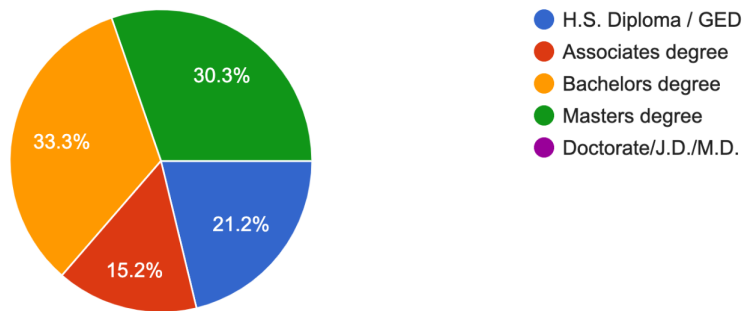
SURVEY

We conducted a brief survey of a sample group of Black COE employees to gauge experience and sentiments about the workplace. Here are the results:

Seniority Level
34 responses

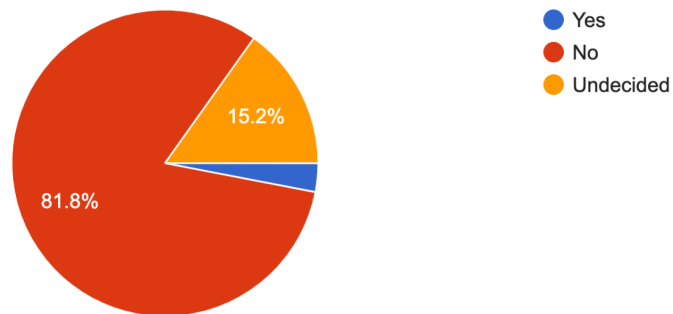


Level of Education
33 responses



Do you feel that the COE offers a racially equitable work environment?

33 responses



If No, Why?

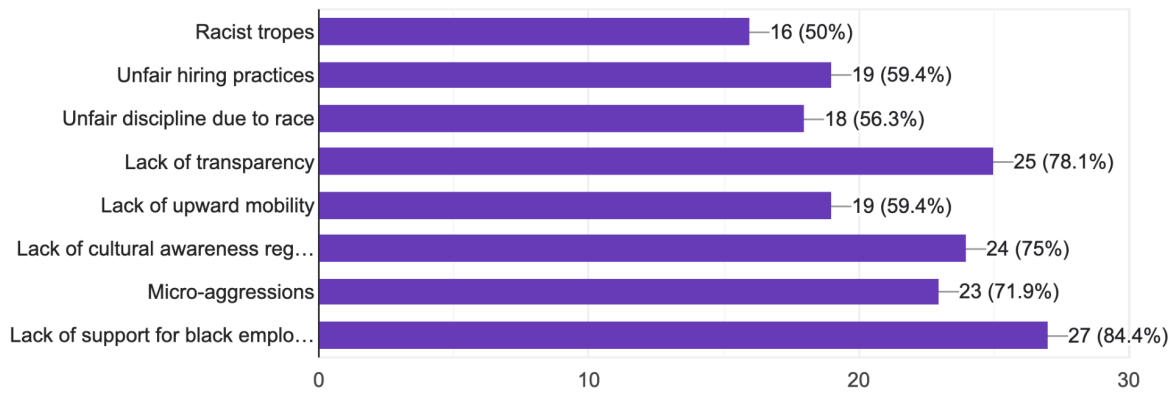
- *Individuals are not treated or paid equally based on their merits.*
- *Pay is not equitable for black and brown staff, especially women.*
- *Things appear to be equitable on paper, but within the departments, there are numerous inconsistencies in how black and brown folks are treated in comparison to white folks.*
- *Work distribution and promotion are not consistent.*
- *The hiring practices are racist.*
- *Unfair treatment, pay, opportunity for training.*
- *I have seen in my years of service a racial divide in how black employees are treated.*
- *During my time as an employee, I have witnessed racial disparity in promotions, opportunities of advancement, training opportunities, disciplinary actions, and assignments.*
- *There seem to be lots of rules/procedures/policies that apply to some, not all, employees. We aren't always given what we need to be successful employees.*
- *Racial Equity is discussed, but using Black people as pawns politically (i.e. beach tokens, re-imagining policing, etc.) is dismissive and corruptive behavior within departments. Watching people be promoted who care little to nothing about this city or its people seem to thrive economically sooner & longer. Those who go above & beyond rarely get rewarded. Those people are usually Black.*
- *I witnessed a peer get training for a position that only management knew was going to open up, get training for a whole month in a whole*

different department, get the job uncontested and get two pay increases in a matter of six months.

- *Unequitable pay amongst black employees. Lack of Advancement opportunities for black employees.*
- *I believe it's harder for black EPD recruits to get through FTO*
- *I have seen some situations that are possibly racist but none that has really happened to me.*
- *Black Employees are often not considered for management opportunities even when they are overqualified. There is a lot of nepotism and privilege exercised throughout the organization.*
- *Racist & harmful comments. Retaliation. Under pay w/increase work responsibilities.*
- *Pay disparity. Microaggression.*
- *Some employees are only trained on specific items, but all are expected to perform the work task.*
- *The COE does not offer or promote a racially equitable work environment. This can be validated by the low pay and promotion rate of COE black employees. Moreover, Black employees are terminated and disciplined at a disproportionate rate.*
- *There are different rules for different people*
- *There is a lot of favoritism in the organization. As a black employee, I believe that it doesn't matter my experience, degree, or knowledge. If your boss doesn't like you, you don't get opportunities. I have faced so many roadblocks in promotions and pay even though I meet all the requirements.*
- *I feel that if it were not for my tenured presence and skill set I would be another statistic.*
- *Black employees must work twice as hard to get any type of reward. Opportunities for development are reserved for white employees.*
- *From this point forward, I've been severely underpaid. I've requested at least three raises and have been denied while my racial opposite counterparts have been approved by the same individual who has denied me at every instance since the beginning of my hiring process. This is not only insulting to my profession, but is disrespectful to my career and my character.*
- *Microaggressions, lots of microaggressions.*

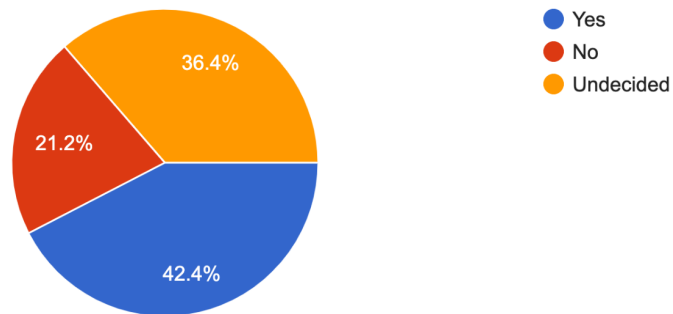
Have you experienced and/or witnessed any of the following? Check all that apply.

32 responses



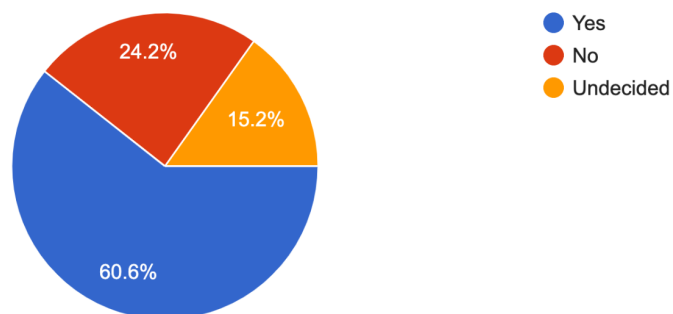
Do you feel your professional development has been limited?

33 responses



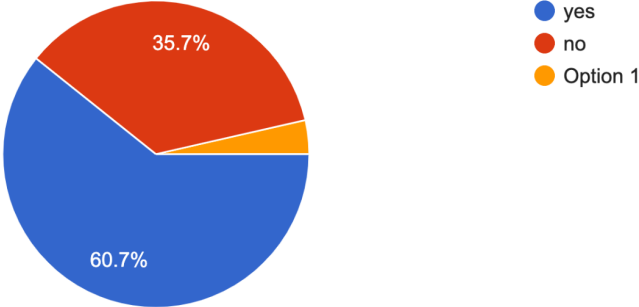
Do you feel you have been discriminated against or treated unfairly in the workplace due to your race?

33 responses



Have you ever been ask and/or required to do more work than your non-black counterparts that are in the same or similar role?

28 responses

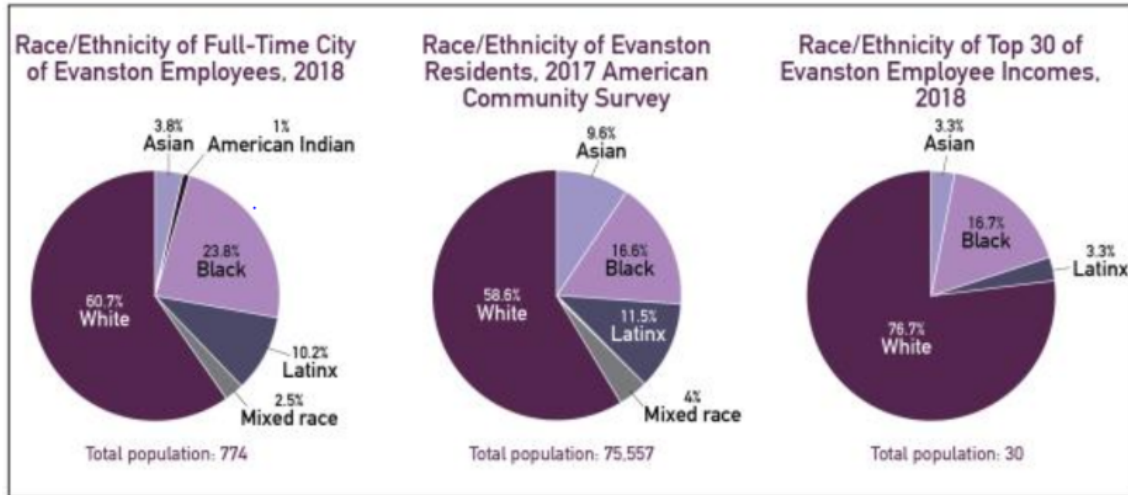


*Option 1 is undecided. It was not clearly typed out as a response.

STATISTICS

2019 Payroll Data

“City payroll data shows some are underpaid, underemployed”

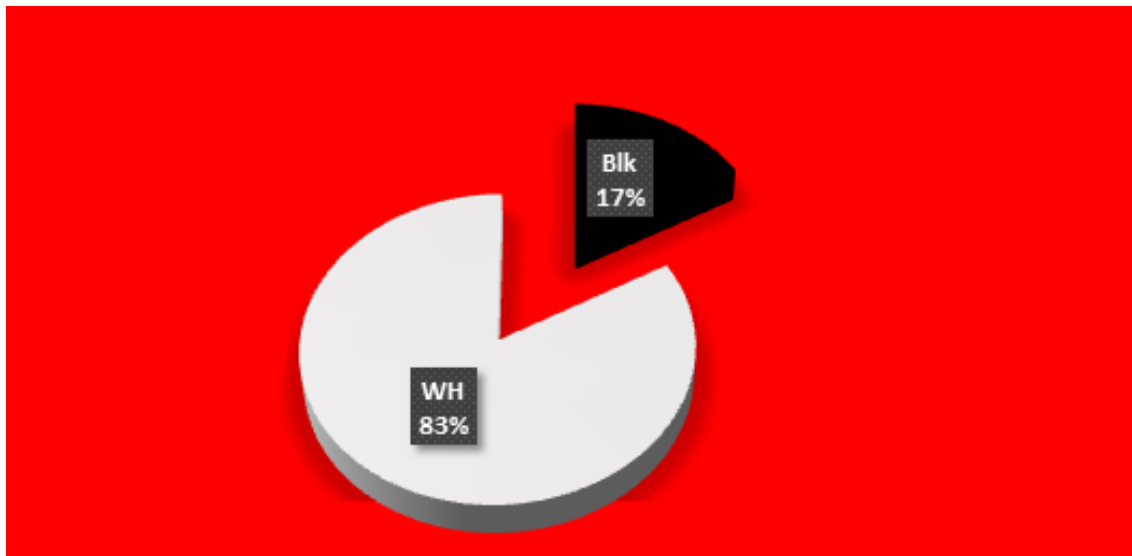


Graphic by Roxanne Panas

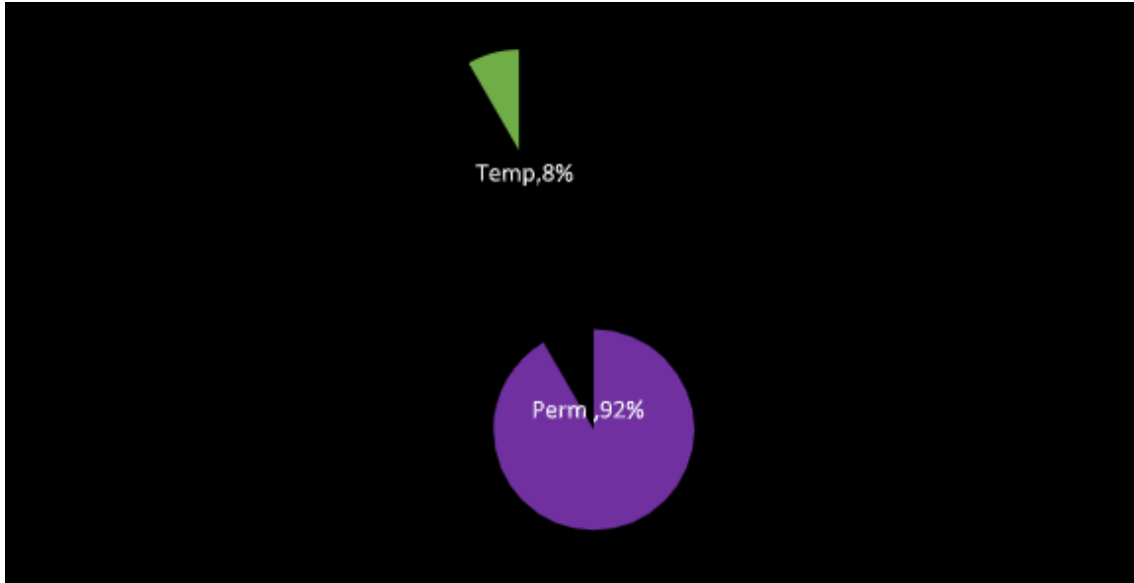
Citation:

<https://dailynorthwestern.com/2019/10/16/city/city-payroll-data-shows-some-are-underpaid-underemployed/>

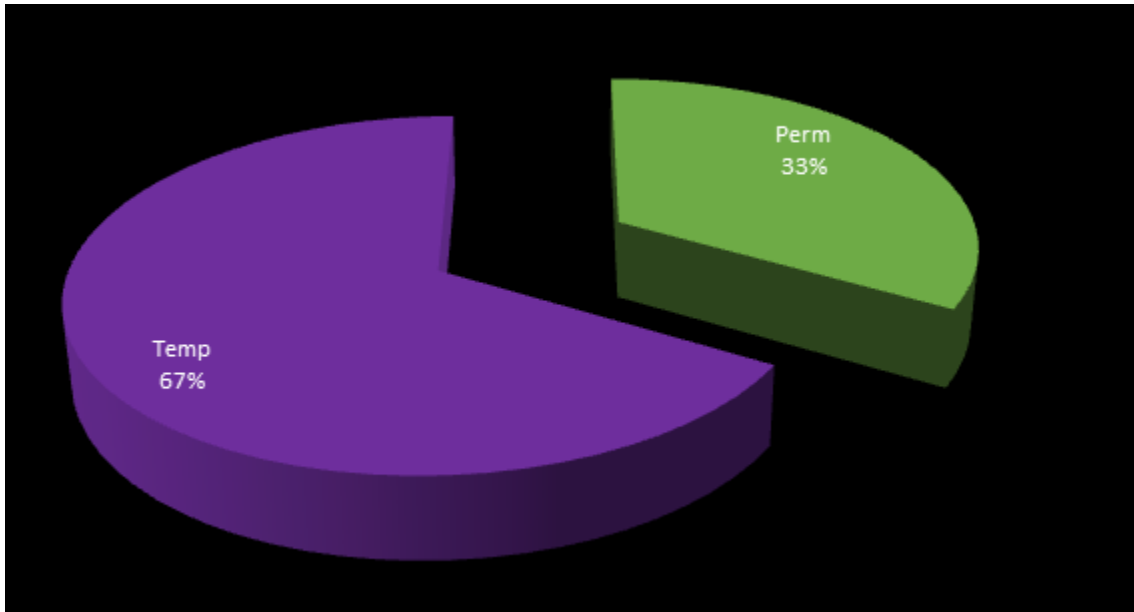
2022



Position Classification increases between black and white employees from January 2022 through July 2022



Permanent White Employee vs. Temporary White Employee increases from January 2022 through July 2022



Permanent Black Employee vs. Temporary Black Employee increases from January 2022 through July 2022

Employee Demographics

Demographic data for full-time employees (as of 11/2020):

Race Breakdown

White	410	58.4%
Black	178	25.3%
Hispanic	73	10.4%
Asian	30	4.27%
American Indian	1	.1%
Two or More Races	9	1.28%

Gender Breakdown

Male	500	71.3%
Female	200	28.5%
Other	1	.1%

Age Breakdown

60+	74	10.55%
50-59	152	21.68%
40-49	202	28.8%
30-39	218	31.09%
Under 30	46	6.56%

Residency Breakdown

Evanston	143	20.39%
Chicago	163	23.25%
Skokie	47	6.70%
Mt. Prospect	23	3.28%
Des Plaines	16	2.28%
Morton Grove	13	1.85%
Park Ridge	13	1.85%
Glenview	12	1.71%
Other	262	37.3%

LIVED EXPERIENCES

For optimal clarity, these lived experiences of numerous City of Evanston Black employees have been categorized according to the systemic inequitable and/or racist action they fall within:

RACIST TROPES

"I shared with a white coworker that I had gone to a BBQ over the weekend, and this coworker responded with " Did they have fried Chicken at the BBQ?"

"A Watermelon was placed in front of my workstation. I immediately threw it in the garbage. At lunch, my supervisor then placed the tray of cut watermelon in front of me. I tried to speak to the supervisor who did it, but he didn't want to talk about the incident. The next day, the division manager informed me that my supervisor went to HR and I should too."

"This year Juneteenth was added as a federal holiday June 19th (which was a Sunday) and observed on Monday, June 20th. Banks/financial institutions were closed. Tuesday, June 21st during an in-person meeting; a statement was made between two individuals regarding business with one of the banks the city uses. The bank contacts could not be reached, and no response was received from the bank because they were closed due to the holiday. It was then stated that Monday was a holiday "Juneteenth holiday" and then the individual said, "All of the maids had the day off."

Message: Black employees are subjected to unprofessional comments that are blatant attempts to connect the current conversation to post-slavery events.

HIRING/TRAINING PRACTICES

“I have recommended several qualified Black candidates for various positions with the city. They have met the requirements in the job description, yet were denied an interview. “

Message: Black employees' suggestions are discredited and are perceived as insignificant and a waste of time.

“Nepotism leads to hiring a two-year seasonal person instead of hiring existing qualified Black employees. The Black employee was told he was too old but is now doing the job.”

Message: Black employees are discriminated against not just for race but also age.

“A White person with no electrician certification was hired as an electrician. He did not have the training but was given the job despite Black candidates that did have the certification having expressed their interest”

Message: Black employees can have all the required skills and certifications needed for a position and still get passed over for less qualified White counterparts.

“It is well known among Black officers that we are treated differently in the field training program. Black trainees are talked down to, over-scrutinized, scored more harshly and quickly labeled as either having “officer safety” issues or “report writing” issues. Black trainees are washed out of the training program at a higher rate than White trainees even though there are less Black trainees. There have been Field Training Officers that were completely disrespectful and unprofessional with trainees and enjoyed stressing them out. Some White training officers won’t even properly train Black trainees which sets them up for failure. We usually try to support Black trainees because we know how difficult and stressful training can be.”

Message: Black new hires must be micromanaged and suffer in silence in order to keep their job.

“I have more experience, but management chose White guys with less seniority and experience over me. There was an instance where a White co-worker with 8 years LESS seniority and LESS experience was chosen for different opportunities. That particular coworker was friends with a supervisor

and plows the supervisors driveway. Another White co-worker was sent to Wilmette to train in order to become familiar and get a heads up on the other candidates. That was previously unheard of, and the supervisor is still here making decisions.”

“A director chose her son over me for a position. I reported it to HR. The HR head told me that she informed them they couldn’t handle promoting that in that way. They did it anyway and gave jobs to two people with less experience. I was later told by someone else that the supervisor gave them the opportunity because I was too old. The two picked were in their 20’s.”

“My boss feels like they are super woke and hires BIPOC staff like museum artifacts. I say this because I have sat in on interviews where people have tanked, and she still hired them saying that we don't know what their home life is like and if they have ever had proper training. The problem with this is if you hired BIPOC people just because they are BIPOC, it makes it harder for the BIPOC staff that are performing well. And it doesn't do that person a favor if they apply for another job.”

DISCIPLINE

“A White supervisor fired a shot at a person suspected of burglary. He was the only one that fired a shot. The person was running and there was no imminent threat. The supervisor put other officers and residents at risk of serious harm but received minimal discipline under the previous Chief. However, Black officers have taken more serious discipline for much smaller and less egregious issues

Message: Work rules are not strictly enforced or reprimanded when not followed by White supervisors.

“An employee brought various concerns to management including racial concerns. Soon after voicing their concerns they were accused of smoking marijuana in city vehicles and drug tested. Despite there being no evidence of smoking, they were suspended for 10 days.”

Message: Speaking up against management will result in employees being targeted.

“A White supervisor was intentionally keeping overtime opportunities from employees of color. The incident was documented and provided to the unit supervisor and department head. That supervisor was never disciplined or addressed about the behavior and is known to have racist tendencies. The department head retired without resolving the issue. The department head later returned on an interim basis and still didn't address the issue. Both supervisors were later promoted to higher ranks. One was promoted by the interim without any formal process being done.”

Message: It's okay to intentionally prevent Black employees from making more money and doing so may get you promoted.

Targeted investigation: A Black employee posted a comment about White Privilege on their personal social media page while off duty. 7 White coworkers banded together to file a complaint to HR and HR chose to investigate the off-duty behavior. However, HR chose NOT to investigate sexual abuse claims made against White employees, presumably because the issues took place off-duty. Additionally, a supervisor told the employee that talking about white privilege was causing a racial divide in the department. This exact situation is listed in the 2022 Lakefront Report.

Message: A Black employee talking about white privilege off - duty should be investigated but a White employee involved in sexual abuse off-duty should not. Black voices and opinions are not valued. White abuse is tolerated.

“Upon attempting to provide information on unionizing, a worker was pulled aside by HR and told not to “intimidate” employees which was not what was occurring.”

Message: HR picks and chooses who and what to address even if a Black employee is not doing anything wrong.

“My supervisor provided false information to the department head that resulted in me being sent to OMEGA for a probable career ending fitness/medical test. The supervisor is White and received no discipline despite the fact that she speculated and lied.”

Message: There are no ramifications for attempting to end Black careers and affect Black families

“A Black former Deputy Chief was passed over several times for promotion for failing to properly document an issue between another supervisor and officer. A White Commander was not disciplined at all for having an affair with a subordinate while both were married. Instead he was assigned to a bigger unit where he yelled at employees and eventually became the supervisor, ironically in the office that holds officer’s accountable for their behavior.”

Message: Black employees suffer harsher disciplinary actions while White employees receive no discipline for actions that affect other employees in the workplace.

“There were instances when a supervisor was extremely inappropriate towards me. I told him don’t talk to me like that. He wrote me up and said I was being insubordinate to him because I was telling him don’t talk down to me. He said I was talking to him instead of going to work. Then he came to my truck, opened the door and slammed it in my face, and no one believed me. I served a 5 day suspension because I got mad at him, and he sent me home.”

Message: Black employees are lied about, treated poorly, then disciplined unfairly when they stand up for themselves.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

“Several employees have stated that their complaints to their supervisor and HR have gone unaddressed and were not documented by HR. This same fact is mentioned in the 2022 Lakefront report.”

Message: HR dismisses complaints from Black employees as frivolous.

“A report was completed after the PD did internal focus groups with Dr. Gilo Logan for diversity training in 2015-2016. The full report was not released to the City Council.”

Message: COE knows there are issues but is not being transparent with staff of the community.

“In 2019 an employee satisfaction survey was sent out by the Manager Erika Storlie. The results were never fully shared but are cited in a 10/07/19 memo written by previous HR Director Jen Lin. Where are the full results?”

Message: COE knows there are issues but is not being transparent with staff or the community.

LACK OF UPWARD MOBILITY/OPPORTUNITY

“I asked for reclassification which would have resulted in higher pay and was told that it was not going to occur until HR was solidified and not in transition.”

Message: Black employees must wait for important matters to be addressed until the time is convenient for others.

“I was told I was not qualified for a position that I was interested in, but was then told to train the person who was hired.”

Message: Black minds are exploited and not fairly rewarded.

“I noticed that Management consistently sends White employees to get training in other municipalities/companies to get ahead of their peers so they can get whatever job is open or getting ready to be open.”

Message: The careers and professional development of White employees take priority over all other employees.

“I was not able to have the responsibility of transporting vehicles despite having the experience to do so, but a coworker was able to. Was told by another coworker that they believed it was due to my skin color.”

“I was held back from promotions due to not finishing college. I had to go back to school for 5 years straight while working for the city in order to get a promotion. The current City manager from my understanding does not have a degree at all and has only been with the organization for 6 years. I have been in the city for 10 years and have two degrees.”

Message: White existence matters more than Black minds and experiences.

“I asked about the company paying for me to go to school to get a masters degree in social work instead of their desired field. They told me no and then told a White coworker yes.”

LACK OF CULTURAL AWARENESS AMONG WHITE PEERS

“I witnessed a young white city employee address a well-known elderly Black Evanston woman (about eighty years old) by their first name. I pointed out to this younger white woman that this elderly woman, out of respect, should be addressed as Ms. "So and so", not simply by their first name. I attempted to educate this person on the practice in the Black culture to demonstrate our respect for our elders in this way, we call it "putting a handle on their name". I tried to explain that too many of our elders were treated as "boy" or "girl" even as adults by White people both younger and older. This employee looked at me with a "whatever" attitude and moved on without any acknowledgment of the cultural and racial significance and insensitivity of their actions, and apparently not interested in being educated about it. This is just an example of white privilege that goes unchecked.”

“In my 12+ years as a City of Evanston employee, I have had the opportunity to witness many positive and negative behaviors as it pertains to race and cultural differences, actions, and interactions. On the positive side, there have been occasions when white employees have taken the initiative to become better allies and commit to learning how to recognize and change race and cultural bias behaviors. On the negative side, I have witnessed the action of white privilege and the act of simply being tone deaf to the race and cultural challenges that Black employees and community members encounter on a regular basis.”

“My crew was working, and we were asking each other what we would do if someone hurt our family members. We each took turns responding how we would respond. My white supervisor came over and said if the person was me, they (Supervisor) would stab and bash my brains. HR confirmed with others this statement was made. (There are more incidents like this with the same supervisor targeted at me and other Black employees). Response: We met with HR and the supervisor, who said that he had been joking. He was asked to apologize. I have gotten no response as to why my supervisor feels the need to address me in this way. HR informed me that this incident did not have to come to HR.”

Message: HR does not take Black employee complaints seriously and dismisses and condones the concerning behavior of White employees.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

“I was in a meeting where I disagreed with a Councilmember’s way of enacting a program, only to be informed the next day by my Black supervisor that this Councilmember felt I was being too aggressive with my tone. I was told it's safer to step back from the project.”

Message: Black people are often labeled as aggressive when speaking up. Black voices are muted to be kept “in line.”

“A group of Black employees had dinner together after hours. A White co-worker said, “we know you had dinner,” in a tone and manner that attempted to intimidate those who attended.”

Message: Black employees gathering is seen as a concern or threat

“I have been asked so many times about my hair. I even had a supervisor ask why I keep changing it and can’t I just pick one style. “

Message: Black employees are expected to conform to White expectations.

“I attended a work-related event. Since it was after hours and near my home, I invited my friend to attend with me. She had just had a baby, so her husband and newborn joined her. A White co-worker asked my friend what her baby’s name was. My friend told her the baby’s name. The baby had a name that related to his Middle Eastern culture. My co-worker blurted out, “What kind of name is that!! Why couldn’t you give him a normal name like James or Tom?”. My friend was upset, and I was embarrassed by how she was spoken to.”

Message: Ethnic names are not deemed acceptable to White palettes.

“I was asked to “put my black woman hat on” to answer a question”

Message: Racism is alive and well within the City of Evanston

“My boss tried to touch my hair before and had to be corrected. I also watched another non-BIPOC staff touch another BIPOC staff members hair...”

Message: THIS IS JUST WRONG. It is not okay to ever touch or ask to touch a black person's hair. Ever.

“Some of my coworkers used to call me the wrong name and would walk quickly if we were headed to the parking garage like they didn't recognize me outside of the building, and now all of a sudden, I am a threat.”

Message: All Black people look alike and are scary.

“Sometimes I am asked to work with patrons of color when they are in "bad moods" because I can "relate" to them. It's not said but implied.”

“My boss has sent me resources on Black women's mental health and compassion fatigue without my asking and only to me.”

Message: It's okay to make decisions for Black employees without seeking their input.

PAY DISPARITIES

“I requested and was denied a raise, yet again, by Kelley Gandurski prior to her departure as City Manager. However, shortly after my denial, Ms. Gandurski approved an individual with the same level of degree and experience level as I. This white employee with less than one year on the job, was elevated to an even higher six-figure salary. **PLEASE NOTE:** The individual who received the raise was also the main spokesperson advising all other city employees to wait until after the Baker Tilly Report for compensation talks and increases. Why did this exception not apply to her? The only difference between this individual and myself is the color of our skin and our duties, which I handle a great deal more. This employee was elevated into a higher even six-salary range, while I am nowhere near the salary range of a professional with the same level of experience. After bringing this to the new City Manager's attention, I was instructed to prepare an email of supportive evidence of why I am deserving of a raise, while my White counterpart received a MUCH easier fate. To date, I am still awaiting a response and/or increase.”

“We were all told there would be no reclassification or pay increases until after the Baker Tilly Report, however, some white employees were able to obtain reclassification or pay increases.”

“A White supervisor intentionally kept overtime opportunities from Black and Brown employees. There were emails to prove that she was only notifying and selecting White employees. The issue was brought to the attention of the higher-ups, and nothing was done. She was later promoted to a higher rank at the direction of the previous city manager and still continues to treat Black employees differently..

Message: Blatant racist behavior by supervisors is not only ignored but also rewarded.

INEQUITABLE WORKLOAD

“I have been asked to do someone else's job or task because she was 'busy'! I told my boss (the Chief), and he put an end to it. SN: My direct supervisor at the time was making it an issue.”

Message: It's okay to overload Black employees

A White detective was able to “opt out” of handling a case and still has her spot in the unit but a Black detective was reassigned despite working very hard based on her “attitude”.

Message: Black employees are labeled and held to different standards

“During the most recent sergeant testing process, candidates were given extra points for specializations that they held in the department. Several officers requested points for community outreach efforts but were denied. At that time, almost 100% of community engagement was done by Black officers who usually went above and beyond handling important programs that the PD and city get positive publicity from. Many of those Black officers are well known in the community and genuinely care about residents. The result was nearly all White candidates in the top 6 spots except for 1.”

Message: Black employees are used for their genuine efforts but not rewarded or appreciated.

“I have multiple instances of mistreatment and unfair racially-based treatment in the almost 10 years I've been with the city. I have absorbed multiple positions without fair compensation. I was unceremoniously

transferred to a different department when I voiced my experiences under the previous City Manager.”

LACK OF SUPPORT FOR BLACK EMPLOYEES

“A black immigrant employee was seriously injured on the job (has a plate and screws) and tried to get workman's comp. Being an immigrant, he did not know the system and protocol. He went to HR, and HR did not provide the proper information or guidance to apply. His inquiries to HR went unanswered, and no one provided any updates. That employee went back to work in 2003 and works with a lifelong injury”

“During the protest, colleagues apologized for their race and the world. They made it very uncomfortable. Everyone kept asking me to take time off if I needed it but I felt like if I took it, they would deem me the angry Black woman.”

Message: Black employees must carry the burden to racism and are often expected to explain or suffer through uncomfortable interactions with White peers.

“An annual conference occurred where there is typically a ride provided to staff to attend. A Black employee who planned to attend exchanged emails to confirm their ride. The day of the conference the employee showed up for the bus but no one else showed up, and there was no bus. Fleet tried to give her a dirty van to drive, but that wasn't the expected arrangement, nor was the employee comfortable with it. The employee was unable to attend the event, and nothing was resolved.”

Message: Black employees are forgotten and expected to accept less than their White counterparts.

“Me and another BIPOC staff members “Blackness” was used to get our department to be a part of this international startup alongside my White boss. Our department would have never gotten the position with having us 2 be there. My boss ensures that we attend the meetings so we can keep our seat at the table in this collective.”

Message: Black bodies are literally being exploited

“In meetings sometimes, I am told what to say or how to say things as if I don't have a mind of my own. I also suggest an idea and it is dismissed until a white coworker says it.”

Message: Black ideas and voices are not valued. Black employees must be “groomed” on how to perform in certain settings.

“During the George Flyod protests, Black officers were constantly subjected to racial slurs and hateful things being said to them by protestors. At one point, there were over 40 protests in a row. Each time, Black officers were verbally abused by both Black and White protestors. Every racist term you can think of was said to Black officers for over 40 days straight! There was never any support offered or outreach from the city or the department. Dealing with covid was hard enough, but adding in constant protests and being called horrible racist names had a serious effect on so many officers. Yet only the Black supervisors seemed to care enough to check on any of us.”

Message: Black trauma doesn't matter

“When I have challenged my supervisor, they have retaliated against me in subtle ways that make people question the decision but within the rules/guidelines. For example, changing my desk schedule, denying me from accepting a grant, telling me I cannot do specific things because it isn't my job when they had no problem with me doing it weeks ago.”

Message: Black employees should stay in their place.

“I told my boss once that they were whitewashing my work. After giving examples and them crying, they said they would never help me again and then did not speak to me for 2 days until they had a breakdown at work and needed me to help calm them down.”

Message: White fragility is more important than Black effort.

“This will sound crazy but my boss also sometimes treats the White men in my department unfairly thinking that they are balancing the scales.”

“I was promised that as soon as I finished my second masters, I would get a change in title and nothing happened.”

Message: Black minds are not valued nor rewarded despite being deserving of both.

“During the shootings and protests, I had to deal with a lot of my White colleagues' emotions and ignorance. Whenever there is a shooting or any type of violence, my coworkers are amazed that I am not riled up like them over it. My boss didn't show up to work after the Highland Park shooting, I had to call them and check-in, and they just couldn't handle the violence in the world so they needed to stay home. Meanwhile, in Chicago BIPOC are killed all of the time, and I don't get a day off work”

“I always have to work harder than all of my coworkers to prove that I belong and that I am a valuable asset.”

“I can't count the number of times I suggested an idea and it was ignored, but when my White co-workers suggest a similar idea it is hailed as the best thing ever. It's annoying and disrespectful. I have just as much experience and education and a lot of times MORE than my White counterparts but my voice is ignored”

Message: Black ideas are ignored must be validated by some one White before being considered

FORMER COE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES

We conducted interviews with several former Black City of Evanston employees. Some were hesitant to share their story. But those that shared had many of the same experiences as current employees. Sadly, many Black former employees not only possessed the qualifications, education, and talent to do their job well but also possessed the desire to serve the community.

Some left of their own free will due to the stress for more equitable opportunities, while others were strategically targeted and forced out oftentimes due to minor infractions. At least one of those former employees had served the city and community for decades and advocated for fair treatment and non-discriminatory treatment of community members, only to be targeted and conspired against by

In the last 10 years, at least 7 black former employees who were also department heads have left COE under concerning circumstances. Several filed lawsuits included discrimination and have won/or received a payout from

the City. At least 2 were passed over many times for White employees with less experience and education. Countless more former COE Black employees who were not department heads have taken their talents elsewhere for a variety of reasons, including the racist work environment.

Conversely, very few White department heads, particularly males, are forced out despite there being widespread knowledge and complaints of issues surrounding them, including ineptitude, inappropriate behavior, racist actions/remarks, lack of experience, and lack of education. The existing city manager does not possess the qualifications, education, or experience for his current role; however, a former Black deputy city manager possessed all the required qualifications, experience, and education but was passed over multiple times.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONCERNS

A common theme that arose while preparing this action plan was the inadequacy of the Human Resources department both under previous leadership and current leadership. Many of the lived experiences shared were reported to HR with little to no follow-up. For many Black employees, complaints are dismissed as frivolous or never addressed. The 2022 Lakefront report presented by Salvatore, Prescott, Porter & Porter, identified several failures within the Human Resources department, including:

- 1. Inadequate documentation**
- 2. Inconsistent response to complaints**
- 3. Complaints not being handled according to policy**
- 4. Human Resources lacks the necessary training and CAPACITY to handle investigations entirely in-house.**
- 5. The Human Resources Division's intake, tracking, and documentation systems are inadequate for the City's size.**
- 6. The handling of "informal" Healthy Work Environment complaints or "concerns" is imprecise, poorly understood, and has undermined the credibility of the City's Human Resources operation.**

These concerns are not new. In 2019 the City of Evanston Human Services Committee requested information from Human Resources regarding the Healthy Work Environment policy, including the process and the potential outsourcing of complaint investigations. Previous HR Director Jennifer Lin submitted a memorandum dated October 7, 2019, recommending the employee complaint process remain the same. The same memorandum cited that a 2019 Employee Satisfaction Survey showed that 55% of employees out of 329 that responded felt that Always or Often to "My work environment is supportive, comfortable, and healthy." The survey does not represent over half of the organization. Nor does the memorandum address the 45% of survey respondents that do not share the same sentiments.

Additionally, 2019 was the same year that lakefront employees made complaints that, as reported by the Salvatore, Prescott, Porter & Porter report, were not handled properly by Human Resources. In fact, they were ignored.

The 2022 Lakefront Report also made several recommendations, including:

1. Revise Human Resources investigation practices and ensure that investigations are handled by trained investigators with adequate capacity.

- a. Rework the intake process to standardize the initial conversation with complainants, with the goal of honoring employee agency while minimizing any impression that the City discourages formal complaints or does not want to investigate a matter.
- b. Consider referring the process of complaint intake and investigations (either in whole or as needed based on the capacity) to an outside entity that will professionalize and track the process from start to finish.
- c. To the extent the City retains in-house complaint intake and investigation process, review Human Resources staffing levels to ensure adequate capacity to conduct prompt and thorough investigations as needed.

2. Adopt stronger and more formal systems for documenting and tracking employee complaints.

- a. Implement a case management or tracking system to document all complaints brought to Human Resources, including those that may not result in a formal investigation, such as informal concerns, anonymous complaints, seasonal employee matters, and third-party complaints.
- b. Adopt a system for keeping files of formal investigations including interview notes, findings notifications to complainant and respondent, reports to City Manager, and any discipline imposed.

PAY DISPARITY CONCERNS

Pay disparity in terms of racial equity is not a new concept. Countless articles and studies unanimously identify that Black and Hispanic employees nationwide earn significantly less than their White counterparts despite having advanced qualifications and experience.

As the Baker Tilly report showed, the COE of Evanston employees overall are paid less than comparable communities in the area. Many Black COE employees shared that they are under-compensated in a variety of ways, including

- Unfair pay compared to White counterparts with similar or fewer qualifications/education/experience.
- Increased job duties without increased compensation
- Improper job classification, which affects pay

A 2019 Daily Northwestern article stated:

Evanston paid white employees significantly higher salaries while underpaying and employing smaller numbers of people of color, city documents from 2018 show.

Payroll data obtained by The Daily showed full-time white city employees received a median income of \$91,089 in 2018, nearly \$5,000 greater than the city's overall median salary and roughly \$15,000 more than black employees, the next largest racial group. White employees also composed about 76.7 percent of the 30 highest income earners on the city payroll, with an all-white, principally male group holding the five highest-paid jobs in the city – and a total of \$1 million in collective income.

Evanston paid out roughly \$68 million to 774 full-time employees last year. Of those employees, 30 identified as Asian, 184 as black, 79 as Latinx, 10 as multiracial and 470 as white. Only one respondent identified as Native American.

Besides white employees, Asians were the highest paid group, receiving a median salary of \$90,904 compared to the overall median of \$86,314. All other groups were paid less than the median. Black employees received a median salary of \$76,423; Latinx \$73,441; and multiracial persons \$67,603. The city's sole Native American employee received a salary of \$25,945. Certain minority groups were also underrepresented. Asians, Latinx and multiracial persons made up a smaller percentage of employees than they do in Evanston as a whole, according to demographic estimates from the 2017

American Community Survey. The city does not exclusively employ Evanston residents.

Similar trends are apparent among Evanston resident-employees, who comprise 20.3 percent of the city's workforce.

Higher-paying jobs among residents overwhelmingly belong to white citizens, with 41 of the 50 highest incomes of resident-employees –82 percent– attributed to that group. By comparison, only 57.3 percent of overall resident-employees are white, with whites comprising only half of resident-employees' 50 lowest paying salaries, which range from \$65,607.52 to \$3,153.60.

City documents do not state the length of employment within a given year; at least four individuals included in this cohort appear to have left or joined the city partway through the year.

Resident-employees, over a third of whom identify as black, claim a smaller income than the median, at only \$72,619.

As recently as September 2022 there were two COE job postings for the exact same titled position of, "Administrative Coordinator", yet the pay was different and education requirements were different in ways one would not expect

The Administrative Coordinator position under the Parks and Recs Department which is headed by a Black department head required a college degree but paid less. The Administrative Coordinator for Public Works which, until August was headed by a White department head did NOT require a college degree and paid MORE. Both postings appeared to have similar duties. The posting for the Parks and Rec Administrative Coordinator has since been removed.

Instances like these are deeply concerning and point to the aforementioned issues with Human Resources. It further highlights the COE's overall neglect toward providing an equitable workplace. Paying Black employees less than their White counterparts directly contributes to the generational wealth gap that was established by historical wrongdoings.

ACTION PLAN

This action plan has been designed with intentionality to assist with improving the workplace within the City of Evanston for Black and Brown staff who continuously go above and beyond while oftentimes being marginalized, insulted, overlooked, and unfairly disciplined. The aforementioned categories are not exhaustive, but were some of the items we chose to focus on. These categories were used as a guide to facilitate our demands. Those demands are as follows:

1. Hire an outside independent agency to conduct a full audit and investigation into the Human Resources policies, procedures, practices and discipline procedures and past discipline actions:
 - a. Hiring; Recruitment,
 - b. Methods of recording keeping,
 - c. Discipline procedures for union and non-union employees,
 - d. Review discipline by race and discipline procedures citywide within each department.

Timeline: 6 months

2. Implement the recommendations made by Salvatore, Prescott, Preston & Preston within 12 months from the date of this letter.

Timeline: 12 months

3. Hire an outside agency to review all HR complaints handled and/or mishandled by Megan Fulara and previous HR Manager Jennifer Lin.

Timeline: Immediately

4. Hire an outside agency to assess the actions of Dave Stoneback relating to his treatment of Black Public Works employees during his tenure as the Director of Public Works. (Several Black Public Works employees have shared some troubling experiences, including the shift in the hiring of more Hispanics who are no better trained nor more qualified while employed under the leadership of Dave Stoneback). As part of this investigation, we strongly recommend oral interviews be conducted with present and past Black Public Works employees.

Timeline: Immediately

5. Implement racially equitable hiring practices.
 - a. POST all openings either internally or external or both (Ex. Police Chief opening was never posted)
 - b. Diversity on each interview panel.
 - c. Score interview questions.
 - d. Work to retain black apprentices. **(We have hired several black apprentices at the Water Plant, but we do not retain them)**
 - e. Create a committee to review candidates
 - f. Conduct blind resume review

Timeline: 12 Months

6. Increase the number of HR employees, there are too few for this number of City employees.

Timeline: Immediately

7. Overhaul “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” Training
 - a. Training should be mandatory for all employees
 - b. Training should actively highlight racial equity issues instead of tiptoeing around or glossing over them
 - c. Retain an equity director/ officer outside of the City

Timeline: 12 Months

8. Pay Black employees equal to our White counterparts (Baker Tilly)
 - a. Immediately close any pay gaps between Black and White employees within the same classification who have equal education, experience, and/or degrees. (See Statistics attached)
 - b. Compensate black employees who bring additional skills/certifications that are utilized by the City.

Timeline: Immediately

9. Create and implement a Pay Equity Ordinance (See [New York's Pay equity ordinance](#)).

Timeline: 12-18 Months

10. Standardize access to training and learning opportunities. Opportunities that include certifications and/or may increase an employees pay should be posted to the intranet

Timeline: Immediately

11. Hire an outside agency to conduct a full audit of the Evanston Police Department Field Training Program including procedures, practices, and treatment of recruits.
Timeline: Immediately
12. Create and implement a standardized staff Manager Performance Review across all departments that allows staff to provide feedback on their managers/supervisors.
Timeline: Immediately
13. Create a formal process for complaints (electronic complaint procedure) that includes a tracking feature.
Timeline: Immediately
14. Allocate funding in support of Racial Change Action Plan Implementation.
Timeline: 2023 Budget cycle and beyond
15. Establish an Evanston Legacy Leadership program to assist with professional development and advancement of employees from Evanston.
Timeline: 12 months
16. Share this Action Plan and implementation status publicly on the city webpage and via social media outlets.
Timeline: 1 week after receiving the Letter and Action plan
17. Quarterly Progress Reports to the Implementation Committee (composed of Black employee group members), to City Council regarding the implementation of this Action Plan.
Timeline: 12 months from
18. Establish and implement an Affirmative Action Plan
Timeline: 12-18 months from date of letter
19. Internally, release complete results of the 2019 Employee Satisfaction Survey including comments and the full unredacted Logan Report
Timeline: 1 month from date of letter

20. **LISTEN!** Black employees are ready, willing, and more than qualified to bring new ideas and solutions to the table. **Listen to Black Employees when they tell you what they need.**

Timeline: 1 month from date of letter

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS

- Provide space for City of Evanston BIPOC to provide feedback and insight on key decisions that guide racial equity within the organization.
- Utilize outside resources such as Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE). GARE is a national network of government agencies working to achieve racial equity for all. GARE provides tools and resources to governments to develop and implement a variety of equitable solutions including Action Plans.
- Commit to the intentional development and funding of the COE Racial Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Committee (REDI) so that staff can have a voice and platform to improve the organization. Although the REDI committee has attempted to identify racial inequity in the city, this committee does not have the ability to properly address many of the issues presented and **should not be used as the sole solution** to the aforementioned institutional problems. REDI is not enough to tackle these problems, nor shall the employees dedicated to change be exploited as such.
- City Council, you too play a role in how COE staff is treated. We are asking that you direct the City Manager to implement this plan.

WHAT WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR

Unfortunately, it is common for organizations to have a knee-jerk reaction to matters involving race and equity. No organization wants to have a reputation of being inequitable or be perceived to cultivate an environment of white privilege. We get that. However, documents like this typically only occur when there is a longstanding issue that needs to be addressed and has been ignored. What we don't want is a poorly thought out attempt to smooth things over. Specifically, we are not looking for a "resolution" that will be read publicly then forgotten, nor are we looking for a more elaborate celebration during Black History Month. Those types of attempts are superficial, fleeting, and insulting to the intelligence and effort of Black employees. We are looking for systemic, organizational change, and an intentional culture shift that is rooted in equity, diversity, and inclusion.

SPEAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

As stated at the beginning of this document, the intention is to provide solutions to building a more genuinely equitable foundation for all COE employees. It is not easy nor comfortable for people to speak up and share their truths, especially in matters surrounding racial discrimination and oppression. As we have all learned through history, speaking up is usually the only way to force and demand change. Many employees that took part in the development of this letter and plan did so because it was necessary, however a fear of retaliation and targeting exists for all of us.

After the initial gathering of Black employees in August, several employees reported back that they had been cornered by supervisors inquiring about what was discussed. Some employees received angry accusatory emails, or had rude comments made to them about their involvement with trying to create a more equitable workplace. To be clear there is no leader, just a collective of dedicated employees trying to effect positive change.

What is retaliation? According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “retaliation occurs when an employer (through a manager, supervisor, administrator or directly) fires an employee or takes any other type of adverse action against an employee for engaging in protected activity.” We are asking that employees that took part in the development of this letter and plan be protected under **(740 ILCS 174/) Whistleblower Act**. Additionally, employees understand the importance of record-keeping and documentation.

What does retaliation look like?

- Termination or failure to hire
- Demotion
- Decrease in the number of hours worked.
- Warning or lowering of performance evaluation scores
- Exclusion
- Reassignment
- Increased scrutiny at work
- Attacks on the employee's reputation
- Actions that make employee's work more difficult
- “Just joking” harassment
- “Speech” harassment
- Not listening
- Spreading false rumors
- Exclusion from emails, meetings, training,

conferences, City, award ceremonies, travel

- Taking credit for another's work
- Creating unrealistic performance expectations
- Accusing, assuming or asking employees about their involvement in racial equity

- Work overload
- Increased scrutiny
- Excessive monitoring
- Micromanaging everything the employee does
- Reassigning job duties to another

CLOSING

We ENJOY the work that we do for the community. There is an incredible amount of good work that happens at COE and so many very good people of all backgrounds. However, we require a more equitable and accountable environment to continue that good work. We recognize that some White employees may feel that our action plan creates unfair advantages for Black employees, although this is not the case. The reality is that Black people as a whole have witnessed and experienced our White counterparts receiving unfair advantages for generations upon generations, and it still clearly exists today. We are not asking for unfair advantages nor handouts. We are asking for EQUITY. Equity in pay, equity in treatment and equity in opportunity. Equity is an advantage for everyone!

It should be noted that although this letter and action plan were developed by Black COE employees, we know that our co-workers of other colors, cultures, and ethnicities may also experience inequality. This effort is to improve equity for all employees that may also experience many of the same situations. We also recognize that many of our White co-workers support our efforts and are also working towards a more equitable workplace.

We are asking the City Manager, Mayor, and City Council to take this document seriously and support the need for a more equitable workplace for COE staff. Our elected officials hold their authority due to the community selecting them. Many of those same community members work for COE. Stand up for what is right.

The City of Evanston has a lot of work to do. As stated in Section 1 of the 2019 Resolution Commitment to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity (58-R-19), ***“The City Council of Evanston hereby acknowledges its own history of racially-motivated policies and practices, apologizes for the damage this history has caused the City, and declares that it stands against White Supremacy”***. We are asking that the City of Evanston stand on those same words and acknowledge, address and repair the social harms that have been inflicted on Black employees internally. Dismantle your own system of oppression.

City Of Evanston Black Employee Action Group
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