

# Promoting Racial Equity

in the Forest Preserves of Cook County

## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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At the Forest Preserves, we value the people of Cook County on whose behalf we hold and care for the woodlands, wetlands, forests and other natural areas within the preserves. We want everyone to feel welcome at the Forest Preserves and seek them out for discovery, renewal, and fun. To achieve this, we have launched more than 20 programs and initiatives to enhance our cultural competency and to promote diversity and inclusion amongst visitors, employees, partners, volunteers and vendors. A summary of these initiatives is presented in this report.

## Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (REDI) Members

### Leadership

Tracy Bishop (Co-Chair)

Amanda Grant (Co-Chair)

### Cohort 2 (2020)

Charmaine John

Aaron Luna

Credell Walls

Lydia Uhlir

Kea Bellamy-Cobb

Maninder Sangha

Alejandro Diprizio

### Cohort 1 (2019)

Raquel García-Álvarez

Reinaldo Ramos

Ryan Lothian

Daniel Mahoney

Brenda Occhiuzzo

Martin Hasler

Fannie Kittoe

Monica Fife-Ivy

Felicia Phillips

Samson Awoyemi

Gail Baker

Thomas Lyons

Michele Mottlowitz

Joel Rosario

### UIC Department of Public Administration

Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton

Adam Slade





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# Executive Summary

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In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd murder, the Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Committee adapted to meet the needs of a changing social environment. While working in a primarily remote environment, the committee decided to boost its efforts on cultural change and policy change at the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

## Cultural Change

REDI Committee members delivered several internal and external training events to embed racial equity knowledge within Forest Preserves employees and to contribute to the discussion of racial equity throughout the region.

Staff cultural change requires a foundational understanding of what racial equity is and how it impacts organizations. Foundational knowledge allows employees to discuss the implications of their work with each other using a racial equity lens. Additionally, critical conversations about employee experiences can create learning opportunities and build trust inside the organization. Internal events include:

- Staff Racial Equity Impact Assessments Training
- Racial Identity Caucuses
- Forest Preserves Staff REDI 101 Workshops

As the Forest Preserves moves forward on its race equity journey, it seeks feedback from outside the agency. Activities include hosting focus groups and engaging stakeholders, as well as participating in panels and delivering presentations to the public. External events include:

- Cook County Office of the President: Forest Preserves Panel Discussion on Operationalizing REDI
- CMAP Talks: Advancing Equity in Parks and Open Space
- Chicago Botanic Garden Modified REDI 101 Presentation
- Vital Lands IL Summit 2020: REDI to Bring DEI to Your Workplace & Racial Equity Diversity Inclusion

## Policy Change

Racial equity transformation requires not only cultural change, but policy change as well. The Forest Preserves incorporated REDI Committee members into decision-making processes by inclusion and/or regular required communication on agendas on Senior Staff meetings. In addition, the REDI Committee also engaged and advised in the following policy change activities:

- **REDI Committee Consultation.** When issues emerge that have racial equity implications, the REDI Committee is viewed as a resource for departments to engage in the problem-solving process.
- **Non-Discrimination Policy Recommendations.** To ensure the efficacy of the Non-Discrimination Policy, REDI Committee member Lydia Uhlir and other REDI members provided suggestions for improvements to guide future training, policy revisions and policy alignment with other HR policies.
- **Land Acknowledgement and Engaging Native American Communities.** The Forest Preserves drafted the [Forest Preserves' Land Acknowledgement](#) in consultation with the American Indian Center (AIC) and continues to engage with organizations representing Native American communities.
- **Approval of REDI Position Paper Part 1 - Racial Equity.** The Forest Preserves engaged external stakeholders to help orient the agency on its racial equity journey. The paper was approved by the Board of Commissioners in July 2020.

## Pilot Projects

Each cohort of the REDI Committee scopes, develops and initiates pilot projects to help improve policy and process at the Forest Preserves as a part of their cohort activities. Cohort members can translate their experience in their day jobs to have a positive, equitable impact throughout the agency.

- **Human Resources Pilot Projects.** Analyzing Human Resources Department policies and processes through an equity lens, focused on diversifying hiring panels and improving recruitment and candidate selection.
- **Volunteer Pilot Project.** Addressing inequities that occur within Forest Preserves volunteer interfaces and providing racial equity training to volunteer ecological stewardship leaders.
- **Community Engagement Pilot Project.** Analyzing community engagement efforts and expanding outreach to communities with barriers to connecting with the Forest Preserves.
- **Training Pilot Project.** Identifying and removing barriers to equitable training and development opportunities in the Landscape Maintenance department.

The Forest Preserves is encouraged with the progress made, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As the country and the region emerges from the pandemic, these efforts will help the Forest Preserves move forward on its racial equity journey.



# 1. Introduction

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The Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Committee was created as an organizational response to a high-profile, racially driven hate crime at the Forest Preserves of Cook County. The Forest Preserves had established equity and inclusion as a key goal before this incident, but the event was a wake-up call that more needed to be done. In 2018, the Forest Preserves formed the REDI Committee and convened a committee to write a position paper on racial equity. In late 2018, a partnership was formed with Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton and the Department of Public Administration at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) to deepen the scope of work for the REDI Committee.

The REDI Committee began 2020 with the original 2019 cohort and a new 2020 cohort joining forces in a peer-to-peer model that promotes leadership and sustainability from within the ranks of the Forest Preserves. Cohort 2 (2020) members began their initial training, while Cohort 1 (2019) began their Year 2 activities.<sup>1</sup> Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued systemic racism on the lives of Cook County residents, the Annual 2020 REDI Report reflects the tireless commitment and passion of the entire Forest Preserves to operationalizing racial equity, improving agency performance and increasing access and inclusion for all residents of Cook County.

## Mission of the REDI Committee

We **envision** the Forest Preserves promoting inclusiveness of services and employment to all residents of Cook County. Our actions will better reflect these values by treating all people with respect.

The **REDI committee** is committed to educating our internal employees on how to practice racial equity in the workplace and restructuring internal processes to reflect our values of equity and inclusion.

Our **goal** is to train all employees on the importance of REDI and using a REDI lens when working/creating/doing their work so that we strengthen the organization from the inside out.

The REDI committee was envisioned to focus first on the *internal* environment of the agency. This approach reflects theories of organizational change driven not solely by efficiency claims but by racially equitable principles and practices that increase effectiveness in the delivery of services and engagement with the external community. After an initial assessment, it was determined that within the Forest Preserves:

- There was a profound need to build a “community from within” that values the insights and from a variety of voices to enable long-lasting organizational change.
- These efforts are urgently needed to increase agency performance metrics that compliment community indicators.

Members of the REDI Committee have been engaged in a learning process with actionable outcomes grounded in organizational change models and uniquely driven by racial equity principles. In 2019, Cohort 1 members received in-depth training on how to operationalize racial equity within large public

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<sup>1</sup> This is a 2-year fellowship model, with the alumni of REDI fellowships remaining engaged in a REDI Advisory Council that allows them to offer insights and new engagements on a case-by-case basis.

organizations by building skills in project management, process analysis, peer engagement and meeting facilitation. A set of pilot projects<sup>2</sup> emerged that addressed internal policies, procedures and structures to avoid the inadvertent exclusion or marginalization of staff, partners and stakeholders from thriving and accessing the vast natural resources managed by the Forest Preserves.

Importantly, the focus was shifted from individual and interpersonal language and approaches dealing with racism, towards dismantling institutionalized racism and building new structures of inclusion to reflect a modern vision of inclusive governance. The Forest Preserves adopted a “Diversity and Inclusion Statement” internally in May 2018<sup>3</sup>. The document was reviewed and approved by all department heads in an Interdepartmental Committee meeting and shared with all staff and has been incorporated into orientations for new employees and is available on the Forest Preserves’ public website.

#### **Forest Preserves DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT (Adopted May 2018)**

The Forest Preserves of Cook County is one of the largest public conservation agencies in the country. We strive to protect a diverse array of ecosystems that shelter thousands of different plants and animals which provide the residents of Cook County and its visitors with clean air, healthy waterways, and many different opportunities to explore and take respite in nature.

The nearly 70,000 acres of public land that we protect harbor some of the last best examples of our natural heritage, as well as culturally significant historic sites. We recognize that if these public lands are to thrive, they must be treasured by a diversity of residents who advocate and care for the health of the Preserves.

We welcome and value each resident and visitor who comes with unique experiences and characteristics. We believe that we are stronger when we respect, accept and learn from our similarities and differences.

#### **What We Believe and What We Are Committing to Doing**

**We value diversity in all aspects of our work and are committed to enhancing our cultural competency to best serve and engage Cook County residents in caring for the health and enjoyment of our natural and cultural heritage.**

**Our Staff.** We value our employees and the different talents, expertise and viewpoints that each brings to the table. We commit to providing a constructive, safe and positive work atmosphere and infrastructure that promotes mutual respect and empowers individuals to thrive in their jobs.

**Our Partners and Volunteers.** We value collaborative relationships and the expertise and insight that a diverse pool of partners, organizations and volunteers can provide to guide, inform, and accomplish our work. We commit to strengthening and deepening connections with existing partners and to establishing new partnerships to comprehensively advance the mission of the Forest Preserves.

**Our Vendors.** We value the innovation, resilience and flexibility that accompany working with diverse businesses in Cook County. We commit to supporting and strengthening Cook County’s economy and will choose to work with a diversity of vendors, including minority-owned and women-owned businesses.

**Our Visitors.** We value the people of Cook County on whose behalf we hold and care for the Forest Preserves and strive to ensure that all people feel welcome and can enjoy nature in the Forest Preserves. We commit to offering a variety of experiences which reflect our commitment to inclusivity and are relevant to many different individuals and communities. To explore the wide array of programming that we offer, please visit <http://fpdcc.com/events/>

<sup>2</sup> This pilot project model was implemented based upon a well-recognized organizational change process called the “Plan-Do-Study-Act” model that encourages rapid iteration and a scientific approach that hypothesizes potential for change but accepts as a valid outcome the absence of change. Results from these pilot projects laid the foundation for group learning and problem-solving, which greatly reduced the risk of failure while teaching staff that institutional change can be a slow but profoundly meaningful process.

<sup>3</sup> Drafted by the Office of the General Superintendent and Human Resources Department

## 2. Events and Programs

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Committed and determined to continue to push for change, the REDI Committee and the Forest Preserves as a whole, made many adjustments in 2020. We are actively working on improving and maintaining equity in our workplace, with our partners, in our communities and throughout Cook County. Racial equity is achievable, but for that to happen we all must acknowledge the depth and intensity of this problem. We pledge to do our part to change it.

As the REDI Committee and the Forest Preserves continues to listen and learn, we also remain transparent about the obstacles we've faced on our journey of operationalizing equity. We've shared our experiences of this process through various training, webinars and presentations to staff and partners. Many of the trainings and presentations from 2018-2020 are included here:

### 2020

#### **1.29.2020 - 1.30.2020 Vital Lands IL Summit 2020: REDI to Bring DEI to Your Workplace & Racial Equity Diversity Inclusion: The Forest Preserves of Cook County Through its REDI Journey.**

Invited by the organizers of the annual Vital Lands of IL Summit, a state-wide summit for conservation practitioners, REDI Committee members Tracy Bishop & Raquel García-Álvarez completed two workshops and one session wrap-up presentation for an estimated 100 attendees from the environmental conservation field in Illinois. The presentations facilitated by Tracy and Raquel focused on the process the Forest Preserves has followed to begin operationalizing equity within the agency.

#### **3.12.2020 Staff Racial Equity Impact Assessments**

REDI Committee Co-Chair Tracy Bishop facilitated a Racial Equity Impact Assessment Workshop for Forest Preserves senior staff. The workshop briefed the general superintendent, deputy general superintendent, directors and deputy directors on the elements of a racial equity impact assessment.

#### **6.22.2020 - 6.25.2020 Racial Identity Caucuses**

The REDI Committee recommended a series of racial identity caucuses in response to the murder of George Floyd. Racial identity caucuses are a well-known model in the organizational change and culture field. Dr. Yang-Clayton ensured that these caucuses were customized to reflect the existing work and mission of the REDI committee. Both Tracy Bishop and Amanda Grant, co-chairs of the REDI committee, were instrumental in providing the organizational culture insights so that these caucuses were scheduled at inclusive times and structured so that staff and supervisors would have their own spaces. Adam Slade facilitated the Black caucuses and brought in consultants who have worked with Dr. Yang-Clayton in the past. Discussion of hosting regular racial identity caucuses is under consideration for the first quarter of 2021.

#### **9.4.2020 Forest Preserves Staff REDI 101 Workshops**

As part of the REDI Committee's 2020 goals, members began working with Forest Preserves departments to schedule mandatory racial equity workshops for all agency staff. Workshops were developed and facilitated by committee members and began with the agency's senior management team.

#### **9.16.2020 Cook County Office of the President: Forest Preserves Panel Discussion on Operationalizing REDI**



In partnership with Cook County’s President Office, REDI committee Co-Chairs Tracy Bishop and Amanda Grant, and member Ryan Lothian engaged with representatives of various government agencies to discuss the work and purpose of the REDI committee. The panel discussion highlighted how the Forest Preserves began to operationalize racial equity, brief summaries of current and past pilot projects, and challenges.

#### **10.01.2020 CMAP Talks: Advancing Equity in Parks and Open Space**

In partnership with Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the Forest Preserves joined a panel to discuss how CMAP’s data on ‘economically disconnected areas’ was used to develop a new position paper, “Moving Towards Racial Equity” as part of their [CMAP Talks series](#). The position paper outlines the Forest Preserves’ plans to implement its goals for racial equity. In addition, the panel discussed operationalizing equity within government and how the Forest Preserves’ mission advances CMAP’s ON TO 2050 regional goals for access to parks and open space.



#### **11.17.2020 Chicago Botanic Garden Modified REDI 101 Presentation**

REDI Committee member Raquel García-Álvarez presented a modified REDI 101 training to the Chicago Botanic Garden’s (CBG) newly formed Equity Team to share REDI’s process and progress. CBG appreciated the presentation and accompanying resources as they were useful to moving their equity work forward.

## **2019**

#### **4.24.2019 New Horizons in Conservation Conference**

Forest Preserves staff attended the second annual conference held in Chicago and organized by the University of Michigan’s School for Environment and Sustainability. The conference was attended by more than 200 students, faculty, SEAS alumni and conservation professionals—the majority of them people of color—who gathered to discuss and understand the status of diversity, equity and inclusion within the environmental sector. The conference provided the opportunity to hear from a diverse range of leaders and visionaries, engage in hands-on workshops and trainings, connect with peers and network.

#### **6.22.2019 Pride in the Preserves at Caldwell Woods**

The Forest Preserves partnered with the Northwest Side Coalition Against Racism & Hate to welcome 100 people to Caldwell Woods to celebrate Pride Month and commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.



#### **8.3.2019 Second Annual Peace in the Preserves at LaBagh Woods**

More than 400 people attended the event sponsored by the Northwest Side Coalition Against Racism & Hate and the Forest Preserves to celebrate diversity with an afternoon of music and activities.

#### **9.20.19 Implementing Racial Equity: From agency-wide initiatives to social service delivery programs**

During the 2019 Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC), Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton hosted REDI Co-Chair Tracy Bishop and a representative of the City of Evanston for a panel discussion focused on some of the most challenging aspects of pursuing racial equity work at public bureaucracies.

### 10.17.2019 Moving Towards Racial Equity in the Forest Preserves of Cook County – Stakeholders’ Roundtable

The roundtable discussion with key stakeholders engaged in racial equity efforts was facilitated by the Metropolitan Planning Council to solicit input on the draft racial equity position paper developed by the Forest Preserves’ Conservation and Policy Council.



## 2018

### 8.3.18 Peace in the Preserves

More than 300 residents attended the Peace in the Preserves event hosted by the Northwest Side Coalition Against Racism and Hate, along with the Puerto Rican Agenda, Puerto Rican Bar Association of Illinois, Forest Preserves of Cook County and Portage Park for Action, Respect and Community. The event celebrated and promoted diversity in response to the June 2018 incident at Caldwell Woods. The Forest Preserves’ Conservation & Experiential Programming provided support.

### 9.5.18 Summit with the Puerto Rican Community

Forest Preserve District of Cook County Board of Commissioners President Toni Preckwinkle and Commissioner Luis Arroyo Jr. convened a summit between Cook County and Forest Preserves leaders with members of the Puerto Rican community to address the circumstances that contributed to the June 2018 incident at Caldwell Woods and to find common ground for policy and training reforms. Participants included officials and members from the:

- Forest Preserves - General Superintendent Arnold Randall, former Chief of Police Kelvin Pope and former Director of the Conservation & Experiential Programming Department Cynthia Moreno
- Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx
- The Puerto Rican Agenda’s Carlos Jimenez Flores
- National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts CEO Billy Ocasio
- ASPIRA Inc. - Attorney and Chairman Fernando Grillo of Illinois
- HISLEA - President Juan Valenzuela

### **11.26.18 Forest Preserves REDI Committee Launched**

The Forest Preserves convened an internal Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Committee to create a work culture that embraces diversity and is inclusive and welcoming to all employees, visitors and partners. The committee analyzes Forest Preserves operations, policies and procedures to build upon what is working well and change what is not. This includes hiring, training, evaluation, promotions, contracting, vendor selection and other policies and procedures.



### **12.14.18 Cultural Awareness Forum**

The Forest Preserves worked with the U.S. Department of Justice and the Chicago Commission on Human Relations to develop a forum to listen to different perspectives and have an honest conversation about what the Forest Preserves can do to be more culturally aware and welcoming to all residents. Panelists included Fawn Pochel of the American Indian Center, David Bush of Broadview Missionary Baptist Church, Carmen Rodríguez of Hate Has No Home Here and José López of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. Ninety Forest Preserves employees participated in the forum which included a separate facilitated session for police officers.

## **2015 to present**

### **Next Century Conservation Plan Implementation**

The Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP), adopted by the Forest Preserves' Board of Commissioners in 2014, lays out a set of bold actions to be implemented over the next 25 years to make Cook County a national leader in metro-area conservation, and to make the Forest Preserves more inviting and accessible to all Cook County residents. The Forest Preserves is working with the Chicago Botanic Garden, the Brookfield Zoo and more than 70 partners to make everyone feel welcome at the Forest Preserves—including residents of communities which have historically faced barriers to connecting with the Forest Preserves. Efforts include:

- Ongoing: Awarding camping scholarships to attract a broader, more diverse audience to Forest Preserves campgrounds.
- Ongoing: Hiring young adults from low-income communities to serve as Youth Outdoor Ambassadors who conduct outreach within their communities.
- Ongoing: Hosting the Cooler in the Forest summer day camp program with a special emphasis on bringing Chicago Park District summer campers to the Forest Preserves, providing free transportation to park groups.

- Ongoing: Hosting cultural events such as Juneteenth, Camp Hip Hop and Peace in the Preserves.
- Ongoing: Installing welcome signs in four languages (English, Spanish, Polish and Russian).
- Ongoing: Created Spanish-language bird guides, trail maps and children’s activity books.
- 2015: Developed community leadership workshops to provide information and training workshops for community leaders to understand the value and opportunities at the Forest Preserves.
- 2016: Launched the Camping Leadership Immersion Course (CLIC), a training and gear lending program that provides the opportunity for groups to learn camping skills and then use Forest Preserves equipment to bring their campers at reduced rates to Camp Sullivan.
- 2017: The Conservation and Experiential Programming Department transitioned its recreation team from specialized Outdoor Recreation programming to a geographic focus to better serve all of Cook County with a variety of outdoor activities.
- 2017: Produced Spanish-language Public Service Announcements which aired on Spanish broadcast radio and television stations.
- 2017: The Sand Ridge Campus initiative launched to understand how the Campus—which includes the Sand Ridge Nature Center, Camp Shabbona Woods, Green Lake Family Aquatic Center, picnic groves, trails and other nature assets—can better serve the community in Southern Cook County.
- 2018: Through support from the Great Rivers Chicago Initiative, the Better Beaubien project strives to better connect the surrounding community with Beaubien Woods and Beaubien Woods Boat Launch. Better Beaubien helps build connections by collaborating on programming with local groups and institutions, including the neighborhood advisory committee, park, library, bike advocacy group, food justice group and early childhood coalition, as well as local schools, the Chicago Housing Authority and Metropolitan Family Services.
- 2018: Launched the Greater Maywood Paddling Program, a training and gear lending program for local groups in and around Maywood. The program provides training and gear so that groups can lead their own paddling programs on the Des Plaines River and the pond at Trailside Museum, allowing groups to experience river and still water paddling without needing to invest in their own equipment.
- 2019: Built an ofrenda (alter) to endangered and extinct species at Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center as part of the Día de Muertos celebration.
- 2019: Created an Event and Programming Partnership program that allows groups to propose event ideas and request resources from the Forest Preserves to support new initiatives to connect more people to nature.
- 2019: Read the Land Acknowledgement for the first time at the Forest Preserves’ inaugural celebration of Indigenous Peoples Day, which also featured the ribbon cutting of [Serpent Twin Mound \(Pokto Ćinto\) at Schiller Woods](#).
- 2019: Redesigned Forest Preserves’ website to allow translation into Spanish and other languages.
- 2020: Offered “Out In Nature” programming to invite LGBTQ+ nature lovers to the preserves.

Progress reports and more information about these efforts are included in the [Conservation & Policy Council 2019 Annual Report & 2020 Budget Recommendation \(PDF\)](#) and the [Five Year Implementation Strategy for the Next Century Conservation Plan – 2020 Update \(PDF\)](#).

## 3. Cultural Change

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### Accessibility

The Forest Preserves of Cook County is committed to enabling the use and enjoyment of our recreational facilities and natural areas by all. The Forest Preserves continues to update and develop policies and programs with respect to employment opportunities, programs, services, and activities so they are accessible to employees, partners, and visitors with disabilities.

With the assistance of an accessibility consultant, the Forest Preserves developed a data matrix used to identify existing barriers related to accessibility at over 95% of the Forest Preserves' public spaces. The Forest Preserves analyzed parking, signage, curb cuts, paths of travel, doors, water fountains and more. In addition, an Accessibility Advisory Committee, which is made up of non-Forest Preserves staff, was formed and tasked with helping the Forest Preserves develop policies and make procedural changes. This advisory group is made up of accessibility experts and leaders across Cook County.

In accordance with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, all Forest Preserves programs and events are planned with accessibility as part of the standard operating procedure. Some of these procedures include: Providing auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to allow participation in a Forest Preserves program, service or activity. In addition, the Forest Preserves was able to allocate funding to identify and publicly designate eight fishing locations and 46 picnic shelters as accessible. Each accessible shelter has accessible parking, an accessible curb cut and path from parking to picnic shelter, and accessible path from picnic shelter to an accessible indoor bathroom or accessible portable bathroom.

Additional accomplishments of the Forest Preserves accessibility efforts include:

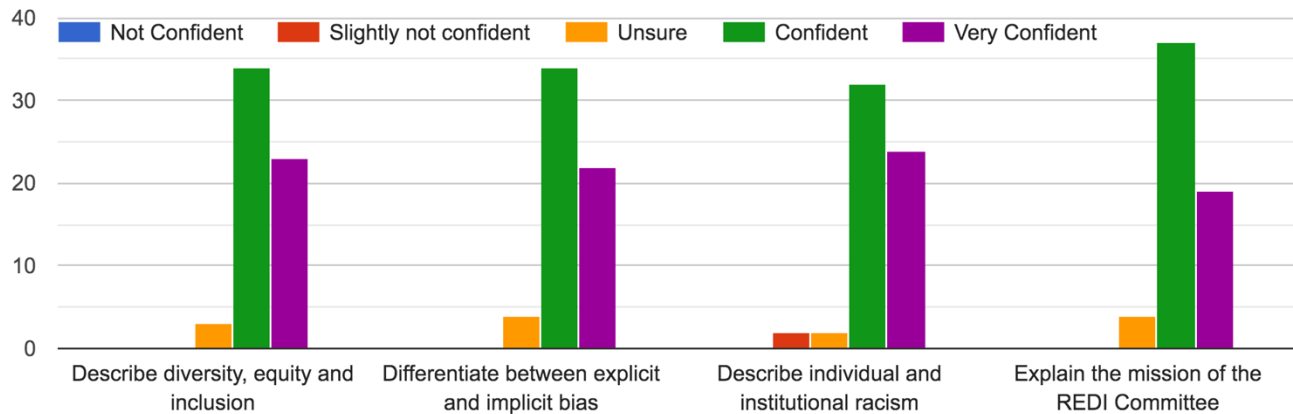
- The new version of [fpdcc.com](http://fpdcc.com), launched in July 2019, is designed to conform to level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0), a world-wide voluntary accessibility standard.
- The [Accessibility Page on the website](#) outlines the Forest Preserves accessible locations and amenities, accessibility policies and ADA notice and grievance procedure.

In 2021, the Forest Preserves will update the picnic and camping permit online reservation system to conform to WCAG and provide accessibility compliance training for Forest Preserves staff.

### Agency-wide Racial Equity Training

The REDI Committee determined that agency-wide cultural change was the best approach to create a shared understanding of racial equity and its impacts across departments. Dr. Yang-Clayton led the development of an introductory REDI 101 training to be delivered by REDI Committee members to their own departments. REDI Committee members customize their internal racial equity training for their departments. REDI Committee members have begun delivering this training within their departments and will allow departments to start considering racial equity in their internal operations. Additional support is likely needed for certain departments that are especially impacted by racial equity changes. The Communications Department, Human Resources Department and the Police Department are examples of Forest Preserves departments that may need extensive internal support from leadership and the REDI Committee to ensure lasting transformation due to their impact on the internal culture of Forest Preserves and their engagement with the public. This training is scheduled to be completed by the Spring of 2021 and is required for all employees.

After the REDI 101 training, many staff indicated that they felt "confident" or "very confident" in differentiating or describing the racial equity concepts they learned during the training.



### Engaging the Public

In 2019, one third of the Forest Preserves advertising budget was dedicated to advertising to Spanish-speaking and Black residents in Cook County, with ads featured through Chicago Defender, WVON, Univision, Hoy, CROE and a PSA campaign, which included Spanish language radio segments across the Chicago Designated Market Area. In 2020, nearly two thirds of the Forest Preserves advertising budget focused on advertising to zip codes within Economically Disconnected Areas (EDAs)<sup>4</sup> and advertising to Spanish-speaking and Black residents.

In 2019, the Communications Department executed social media campaigns for Black History Month, Women’s History Month and National Hispanic Heritage Month. In 2020, the Forest Preserves also included campaigns or posts for Indigenous Peoples’ Day and Native American Heritage Month/Day, as well as Latino Conservation Week. To expand the visibility of programs to the public, and particularly underserved areas, the Communications Department worked with the REDI Committee to add 57 new Event Guide distribution locations (community centers, libraries and non-profits) serving EDAs, increasing the percentage of Event Guides distributed in EDAs from 39.6% to 48.5%.

### Racial Identity Caucuses

The REDI Committee recommended a series of racial identity caucuses in response to the murder of George Floyd. Racial identity caucuses are a well-known model in the organizational change and culture field. Dr. Yang-Clayton ensured that these caucuses were customized to reflect the existing work and mission of the REDI committee. Both Tracy Bishop and Amanda Grant, co-chairs of the REDI committee, were instrumental in providing the organizational culture insights so that these caucuses were scheduled at inclusive times and structured so that staff and supervisors would have their own spaces. Adam Slade facilitated the Black caucuses and brought in consultants who have worked with Dr. Yang-Clayton in the past. Discussion of hosting regular racial identity caucuses is under consideration for the first quarter of 2021.

### REDI Training

The REDI Committee receives in-depth training on racial equity concepts and change management approaches to achieve equitable outcomes. Each cohort is trained in initial concepts and then scope out their own projects based on the perceived needs of the cohort. Project planning and outreach to departments guides racial equity transformation efforts. In 2020, the REDI Committee worked on projects related to human resources policies and processes and the Forest Preserves volunteer programs, as well as developing and executing agency-wide racial equity training.

<sup>4</sup> [Economically Disconnected Areas \(EDAs\)](#) are census tracts with a concentration of low incomes and greater than regional average concentration of minority or limited English proficiency populations as defined by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

Just as the REDI Committee trained a cohort in 2019 and 2020, the REDI Committee is recruiting a third cohort to train in racial equity process improvement in 2021. All departments across Forest Preserves will have at least one trained staff member among their ranks to ensure equity considerations across the agency. As pilot projects or opportunities to improve racial equity arise, active participation and representation of departments on the REDI Committee in future cohorts will be pivotal in creating lasting change.

### **Training History**

The Forest Preserves Human Resources Department is committed to active learning and transformation among its staff and has conducted the following trainings that Forest Preserves employees received in recent years:

- REDI workshops: Racial Equity 101 Training (2020-2021)
- Unconscious and Implicit Bias education training for the Police Department (2020)
- Unconscious and Implicit Bias education for all Forest Preserves employees (2021)
- Annual Fostering a Respectful Workplace-EEO training for all employees (2020)
- Fostering a Respectful Workplace free from Sexual Harassment for managers and supervisors (2018)
- ADA Awareness (2017)
- Fostering a Positive Work Environment for Landscape Maintenance and Resource Management managers and supervisors (2016)
- Essential Leadership Skills for managers and supervisors (2016)
- Conflict Resolution (2016)
- Diversity and Inclusion (2016)
- Professional Workplace Behavior (2016)
- Procedural Justice–Diversity and sensitivity challenging sworn officers for the Police Department (2015)
- Customer Service (2015)

## **4. Policy Change**

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While identifying procedures or processes that impact racial equity can be a challenge, it is also difficult to come up with policy solutions. Policymaking takes engagement with impacted stakeholders, internal feedback and creative solutions. 2020 saw several advances in policymaking. Forest Preserves policies can be found on our website at [fpdcc.com/policy-guidance](https://fpdcc.com/policy-guidance).

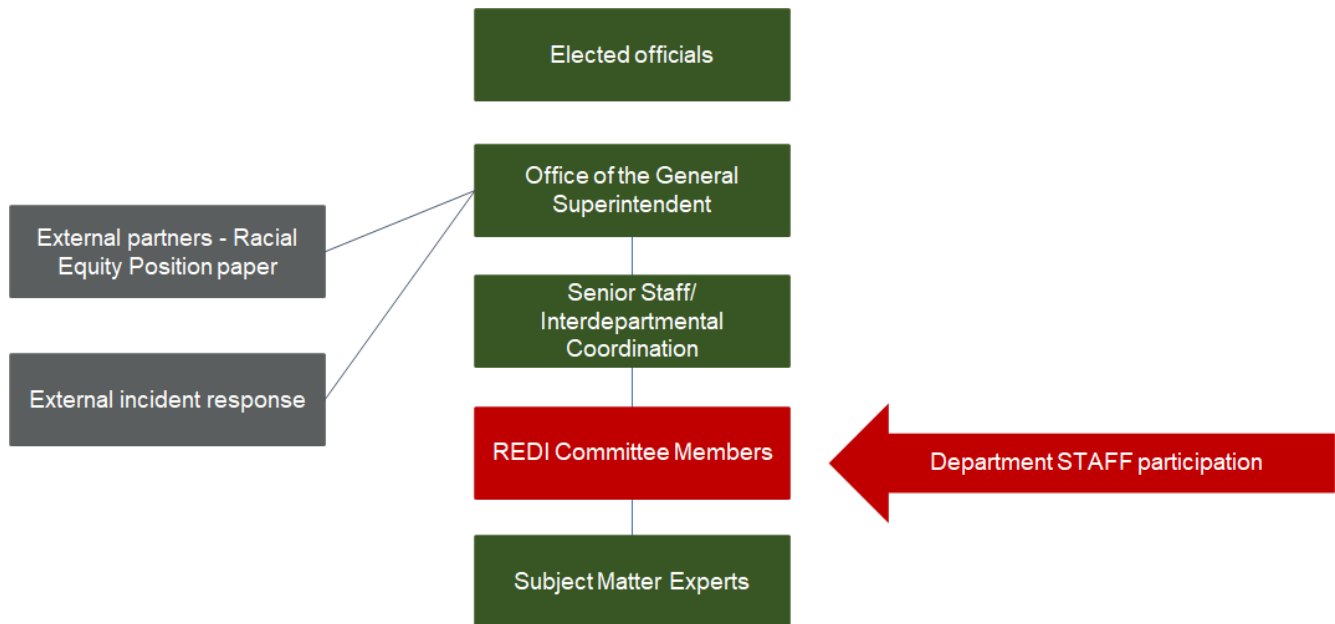
### **REDI Committee Consultation**

The REDI Committee has proven to be a valuable resource for Forest Preserves on its racial equity journey. When policy questions with racial equity implications arise, the REDI Committee is often informed by the Office of the General Superintendent or impacted departments. These questions can be both formal and informal, demonstrating the value of the REDI Committee as a catalyst for racial equity improvement.

The task of advising on racial equity impacts across the Forest Preserves is an enormous job. As a result, the REDI Committee decided training departments in racial equity should be the next logical step to pursuing more racial equity in policy, process and procedures. After Forest Preserves' staff is trained, the REDI Committee recommends a process to evaluate future projects identified by departments.

### **Incorporating the REDI Committee in the Policy Process**

As with any process change, conflict and communication challenges are common. To proactively address this, REDI committee members have been incorporated into decision-making processes by inclusion and/or regular required communication on agendas for Senior Staff meetings and Interdepartmental Coordination Meetings. Organic identification of racial disparities in outcomes can help inform decision-making with trained staff.



**Non-Discrimination Policy Recommendations**

The Forest Preserves has a Non-discrimination Policy, Domestic/Sexual Violence & Harassment in the Workplace Policy, and a Policy of Non-Discrimination Ordinance (“Ordinance”). All three provide mechanisms for reporting any incidents discrimination or harassment. Additionally, per the Ordinance and the Illinois Human Rights Act, all employees are trained on sexual harassment prevention in the workplace, which includes providing examples of such conduct and reporting internal and external reporting options. In the same training, the Forest Preserves provides EEO training covering discrimination, harassment and retaliation, in which it also provides examples of such conduct as well as internal and external avenues for reporting such incidents.

If there are violations of any of the policies, there are disciplinary processes in the Personnel Rules and any applicable collective bargaining agreements. The Forest Preserves Legal and Human Resources Departments are frequently involved in the handling of these matters. The Legal Department handles litigation involving discrimination and harassment issues.

One area of opportunity is to ensure training of volunteers on the Forest Preserves’ Non-Discrimination Policies. The REDI Committee will support the development of this policy training and shepherd its implementation.

**Land Acknowledgement and Engaging Native American Communities**

In 2019, members of the Office of General Superintendent and Conservation & Experiential Programming (CEP) Departments drafted the [Forest Preserves’ Land Acknowledgement](#) in consultation with the American Indian Center (AIC). The Land Acknowledgement was first read on Indigenous Peoples Day in 2019 at a celebration of the [Serpent Twin Mound \(Pokto Ćinto\) at Schiller Woods](#). Indigenous artist Santiago X created the mound as part of the 4000N Trail, a new walking museum connecting the Des Plaines River and the North Branch of the Chicago River. Since then, the CEP Department has developed standards and resources for incorporating the Land Acknowledgement into the Forest Preserves public programming and performed the Land Acknowledgement at dozens of public events.

The Forest Preserves continues to engage with organizations serving Native American communities, including the AIC, American Indian Health Services of Chicago, Trickster Cultural Center, the American Indian Education Program at Chicago Public Schools, the St. Kateri Center of Chicago and Northwestern University’s Center for Native American and Indigenous Research. In November 2020, the Forest Preserves signed a partnership agreement with the American Indian Center to help develop community engagement strategies, including developing long-term programming around the Serpent Twin Mound, the Irving Park Road Canoe Launch, the Des Plaines River and Indigenous Peoples’ Day. Additionally, the AIC will help the



Forest Preserves consider strategies for reaching out to Native American communities related to interpretation, stewardship and cultural events.

### **REDI Position Paper Part 1 - Racial Equity**

The Conservation and Policy Council, a group of civic leaders who advise President Preckwinkle and the Board of Commissioners regarding the protection and restoration of the Forest Preserves, began developing a racial equity position paper to answer the following: Where has the Forest Preserves had a history of inequity based on race? How does that history contribute to systems and policies of discrimination, and how do we move towards equity to connect more people to nature and better protect nature? University of Illinois at Chicago and the Metropolitan Planning Committee assisted in developing the paper.

Authored by the Conservation and Policy Council, with input from Forest Preserves staff and partners, “Moving Toward Racial Equity in the Forest Preserves of Cook County” was the first position paper approved by the Board of Commissioners in July 2020. This paper is a clear acknowledgement that the Forest Preserves exists within a pervasive culture of structural racism that has produced deep inequities. As stated by the paper, “The Forest Preserves should work with the Conservation and Policy Council and other partners to ensure that voices from communities that are impacted by racial inequity are incorporated throughout the planning and decision-making process, and by applying a racial equity lens to major policy and budget decisions.” Other recommendations include ensuring equitable access to nature-related recreation opportunities across Cook County and building a staff that is diverse and promotes racial equity.



## 5. REDI Pilot Projects

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The REDI Committee engages in projects based on feedback from its members and fellow employees from across the Forest Preserves of Cook County. REDI Committee members use their training to evaluate outcomes of Forest Preserve services. REDI Committee members conduct research to identify root causes of racial disparities. Activities include surveys, interviews and research analysis. To operationalize changes, inclusion of other Forest Preserves departments and staff is required.

### **Human Resources Pilot Projects**

While the REDI committee recognized that the Forest Preserves' existing hiring practices, as documented in the Employment Plan, are the result of intensive decades-long Shakman litigation, there are opportunities to improve.

**Hiring panel** – In 2019, the Human Resources Pilot (HRP) Team partnered with the director of human resources and director of compliance to begin making changes to Forest Preserves hiring panels, based on the HRP Team's recommendations. As required by the Forest Preserves Employment Plan, all interviews consisted of a three-person panel, which typically consisted of three employees from the hiring department. To increase hiring panel diversity, the HRP Team recommended restructuring hiring panels so each panel featured: One position expert, one representative from an external department and one representative from an underrepresented race or gender.

Although the need for hiring panels decreased greatly due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on hiring, the Forest Preserves was able to implement the recommended changes for all interviews performed in 2020. As a result, interviewers and interviewees felt the new panel structure was more transparent and displayed the Forest Preserves' commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The hiring panel pilot netted some recommendations for improvement, including: Updating training for hiring panelists, implementing diversity requirements for panelist selection and including a non-department panelist and REDI Committee panelist for interviews. Ensuring that Forest Preserves employees are prepared to serve on hiring panels is critical to ensure equity in the hiring process. The REDI Committee would like to review current interviewer training and video resources to update them with changes made during the hiring panel pilot and any additional changes instituted by the HR Department. This may include the updating the training PowerPoint, lecture notes and video. A refresher of the selection criteria may also be included, as well as Forest Preserves preferences between evaluating internal/external candidates. The pilot scope will be discussed with the HR Department in the first quarter of 2021.

Because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cohort 1 decided to focus on another HR-related pilot project in 2020, focusing on the recruitment and candidate selection processes.

**Recruitment** - Diversity in recruitment was an implicit goal throughout the hiring panel discussions. One way to recruit more diverse candidates would be to ensure job postings reach job seekers with barriers to hearing about opportunities with the Forest Preserves. Examining how jobs are posted today and identifying opportunities for a wider distribution process can aid in increasing the number of applications from underrepresented groups. The job application review process involves analyzing application questions to make sure they are aligned with the job and reflect inclusive language, in addition to making the hiring panel pilot changes into official policy. An examination of the Taleo online job application system configuration may also uncover settings that have unintended exclusionary effects. These initiatives will contribute to an inclusive, predictable and transparent agency-wide process primed to produce equity-based recruitment results.

After the recruitment process is completed, the candidate selection process can ensure that all selection processes and procedures executed by the HR Department can allow for maximum inclusion and fairness.

**Candidate Selection** - After the success of the hiring panel pilot, the REDI Committee scoped out additional policies and procedures to investigate. The job classification process was identified because of the different ways each department initiated the creation or reclassification of new positions. In addition, the

job descriptions themselves need to be reviewed to ensure job accuracy, reflect any changes in the requirements and ensure inclusive language is used to attract a diverse candidate pool. Further research into improving the process for candidate selection will be done in 2021.

### **Volunteer Pilot Project**

The REDI Cohort 2 Volunteer Pilot Project (VP) Team conceived of this project after hearing about BIPOC volunteers not having positive volunteer experiences. A main component of the VP project is to address inequities that occur within Forest Preserves volunteer interfaces, starting with the volunteer section of the Forest Preserves website. For this process, the VP Team drafted an equity analysis of eight volunteer programs and associated webpages, calling out any inequities, problematic language or obstacles to participation. The team also included recommendations for improving the webpages. This work will continue in 2021, and include Dr. Kim Ruffin—an associate professor of English at Roosevelt University, trained Nature and Forest Therapy Guide and a longtime Forest Preserves volunteer. Together they'll work with the Volunteer Resources and Communications departments to review the operations of the Forest Preserves' Trail Watch program and rewrite the website language and other public facing material to make it more inclusive.

The analysis was a significant Cohort 2 accomplishment and contribution, despite the ongoing crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VP Team accomplishments can be considered a concrete step towards real and systemic internal change favoring racial equity in Forest Preserves' relationship with its external partners and volunteers.

Another component of the VP project was conducting racial equity training for ecological stewardship leaders. This training is focused on volunteers better understanding the importance of racially inclusive practices to the Forest Preserves' mission and how their leadership and behavior reflects this mission, while providing them with tools and resources to make their volunteer days more inclusive. This training was created in a collaborative manner with input from volunteers, partners and surrounding forest preserve sister agencies. This was part of the promise we made to partner organizations: That we would not only improve our own racial equity training, but also bring along other organizations. The pilot training was delivered in December 2020 and will be shared with the rest of the volunteer ecological stewardship community in 2021. In 2021, we will also establish protocols for handling future racially driven incidents involving volunteers.

### **Community Engagement Pilot Project**

Through their 2019 pilot project, the Community Engagement Team attempted to answer the question: How can we make it easier for communities to connect with the Forest Preserves? Through interviews with staff, the Community Engagement Team learned that there are procurement and legal hurdles that can slow or stop the Forest Preserves community engagement and partnership efforts—and that these processes are often especially burdensome for organizations with limited legal and accounting resources, including many that represent or serve people of color. Additionally, the Forest Preserves has no consistent message to potential partners about partnership opportunities, and Forest Preserves staff lacks clarity on procurement and legal processes and successful partnership and engagement models.

The Community Engagement Team developed a three-part framework to explore these problems and narrow down a subject for a pilot project:

1. **Simplify existing partnership agreement and procurement process.** How can we create a process that doesn't exclude organizations without access to legal and accounting resources?
2. **Develop, test and document engagement and partnership models.** Where are we having success engaging communities? What are the barriers to success in certain outreach models? How can we replicate successful models in other communities?
3. **Educate staff on partnership models and procurement process.** How can we document these processes and engagement models for staff, so they are not starting from scratch each time they try to engage a new community?

After exploring this framework, focus narrowed to supporting a new Conservation & Experiential Programming Department (CEP) partnership program that allows community organizations and individuals access to Forest Preserves event space, staff support and up to \$5,000 in funding for approved event ideas without going through the traditional procurement process.

The Community Engagement Team designed and executed an equity-focused communications plan to help promote the program by expanding distribution of Forest Preserves Event Guide distribution to 57 new organizations (including community centers, libraries and non-profit organizations) serving Economically Disconnected Areas<sup>5</sup> (EDAs). Nearly 3,000 more Event Guides, raising the percentage of Event Guides distributed to locations serving EDAs from 39.6% to 48.5%.

In addition, bilingual promotional pieces explaining the CEP partnership program and calling for submissions to participate went out to all organizations serving EDAs, bundled with the Winter 2019/2020 Event Guide. The CEP partnership program was also promoted in through an article in the Event Guide, the Forest Way email newsletter and on the Forest Preserves social media accounts.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic—which has limited the Forest Preserves' ability to host in-person events—arrived just after this promotional push for the CEP partnership program. Both CEP events and events by partners were put on hold, and promotion of the CEP partnership program and pursuit of additional projects within the Community Engagement framework were postponed to shift focus to other REDI Committee priorities.

However, the Communications Department has committed to further expanding distribution of Event Guides to organizations serving EDAs when regular in-person events return. They have also used EDA data to focus advertising efforts, using two thirds of their 2020 advertising budget to reach out to communities in EDAs.

### **Training Pilot Project**

The Training Pilot (TP) Team focused on training opportunities offered to Landscape Maintenance staff and examined possible barriers to equitable training and development opportunities. The TP Team interviewed 70 full-time employees in the Landscape Maintenance department. Through employee interviews, the TP Team identified the main barriers to obtaining training: Scheduling issues, distance from work locations to training locations, staffing needs conflicting with training availability and employees not hearing about training opportunities because of communications issues or lack of access to computers.

The TP team made a series of short- and long-term recommendations to remove barriers and increase certification rates. One of the short-term wins was offering commercial driver's license (CDL) training and certification again based on staff feedback. Landscape Maintenance employees were pleased that this opportunity was being offered again and that their voices were being heard.

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<sup>5</sup> [Economically Disconnected Areas \(EDAs\)](#) are census tracts with a concentration of low incomes and greater than regional average concentration of minority or limited English proficiency populations as defined by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

## 6. Committee and Task Force Participation

In addition to the efforts of the Conservation and Policy Council and the REDI Committee, Forest Preserves staff also serve on various external committees and task forces as indicated below.

Committee/Task Force	Forest Preserves Representative(s)	Notes
Chicago Commission on Human Relations Hate Crime Coalition	Deputy Commander Marty Hasler	Convened in 2011 to coordinate educational efforts and advocacy for individuals and communities impacted by hate crimes.
Cook County Committee on Addressing Bias, Equity, and Cultural Competency (Commissioner Kevin Morrison)	Rey Ramos	Convened in 2019
Forest Preserves Conservation & Policy Council REDI Position Paper Committee	Emily Harris (chair) Tracy Bishop, Rey Ramos, Raquel García-Álvarez, Eileen Figel	Initiated November 2018 and approved by the Board of Commissioners in July 2020. Recommends applying a racial equity lens to Forest Preserves policy & budget decisions.
President Preckwinkle's Racial Equity Leadership Council	Amanda Grant	Convened in 2019 to promote racial equity in Cook County.



## 7. REDI Goals for 2021

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The REDI Committee's three-year racial equity-driven model of organizational change will hit its biggest milestone in the third and final year of 2021. While we continue to engage in racial equity-driven cultural and policy change within the organization, the committee will engage in a strategic planning process to assess how racial equity-driven work can continue to be supported throughout the Forest Preserves for the next three-year cycle.

### REDI 3 Year Model for Impact and Sustainability

#### 2019 - Year 1

##### Assessment, Training and Pilot Projects

- Cohort 1 - 15 REDI members
- 6 months of training and application on project management, facilitation
- 3 Pilot projects

#### 2020 - Year 2

##### Implementation, Train-the-Trainer, Scale

- Cohort 2 - 10 new members
- 6 month training cycle
- COVID-19 + George Floyd murder = racial identity caucuses
- Pilot project implementation, new pilots launched
- Train-the-trainer

#### 2021 - Year 3

##### Strategic planning, Training, Sustainability

- Cohort 3 - 15-20 new members
- Strategic planning process
- Training and new pilots
- Implementation of pilots ready to go
- Facilitation training for racial identity caucuses

#### Cultural Change

- Launch a training for REDI Committee members on how to conduct a follow-up series of racial identity caucuses in 2021.
- Complete the staff-led REDI 101 trainings which were launched in late 2020.
- Support an accountability framework for events and programs across the Forest Preserves that celebrate the diversity and importance of inclusion in its programs and practices.

#### Policy Change

- Ensure that the Conservation & Experiential Programming Department's (CEP) outreach and engagement is effective and equitable.
- Increase the transparency and consistency of the CEP-led community grant application experience for smaller organizations seeking partnerships with the Forest Preserves.
- Replicate the Landscape Maintenance Department training access project in other departments.
- Assess MBE/WBE procurement administration and programming to engage partners for long-term development and growth.
- Continue working with the Human Resources Department to improve the recruitment process.
- Audit job descriptions to ensure that relevant background and on-the-job experience is valued in the hiring process for job success.
- Initiate REDI Position Paper Part 2 (focused on diversity and inclusion).
- Support the independent analysis of the Forest Preserves Police Department and guide implementation of best practices for policing.

#### Strategic Planning for REDI Sustainability

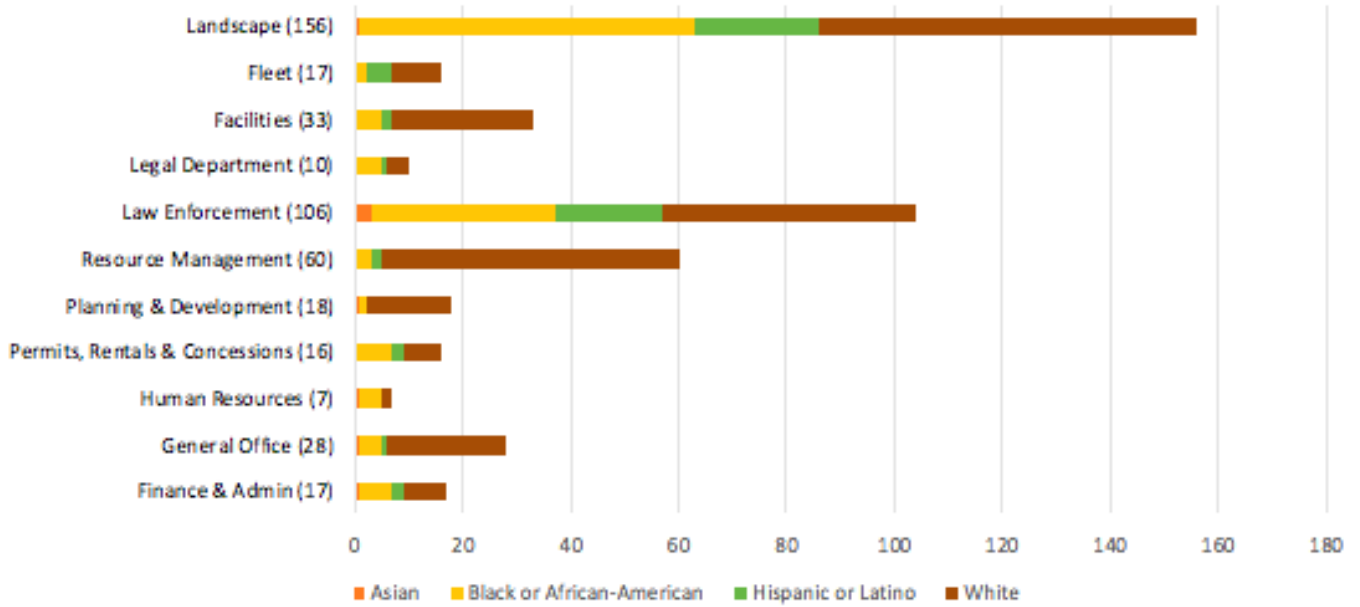
- Identify key departments and positions that can play important roles in REDI work
- Assess if existing positions could adapt a REDI component into current work plans
- Recommend language and specific job duties that are informed by the extensive work that REDI has already modeled in the previous two years as a basis for future change.

## 8. Diversity of Forest Preserves Workforce (2020)

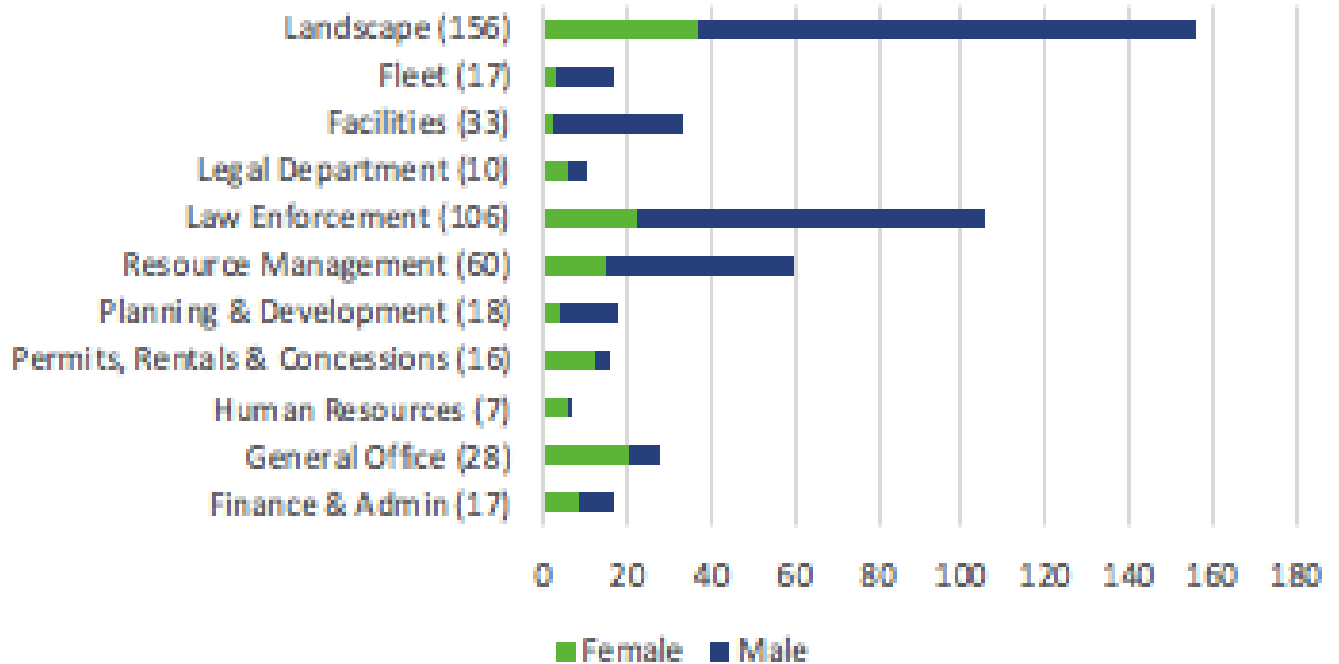
Forest Preserves Employees (entire workforce) by Race (2020)			Cook County Population <sup>6</sup>
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Asian	6	1%	7.90%
Black or African American	142	26%	23.90%
Hispanic or Latino	66	12%	25.50%
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.03%	0.10%
Two or More Races	4	1%	2%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	320	58%	42.10%
Other or Unknown	7	1%	0.70%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>102.20%</b>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
Female	185	34%	51%
Male	361	66%	49%
<b>Total</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>6</sup> [US Census Bureau QuickFacts: Cook County, Illinois](#)

### Racial Diversity across Forest Preserve Departments



### Gender Diversity of Forest Preserves





## 9. MBE/WBE Participation (2016 to 2019)

The Forest Preserves is committed to the inclusion and expansion of opportunities for small, local, minority and women-owned businesses. In 2012, an official Minority Business Enterprises (MBE) and Women Business Enterprises (WBE) participation ordinance was created for the Forest Preserves of Cook County. To remedy historic inequity and to facilitate greater inclusion, the Forest Preserves established aspirational goals for the participation of minority and women-owned businesses in contracts over \$25,000 as follows:

Contract Type	Aspirational Goals	
	MBE	WBE
Goods and Services	25%	10%
Construction	24%	10%
Professional Services	35% overall	

Since that time, the Forest Preserves has made great strides in expanding minority and women-owned business participation. In 2019 (the latest year for which full data is available), the Forest Preserves far exceeded its aspirational goals with 35% of payments made on Forest Preserves contracts going to MBE/WBE companies, including:

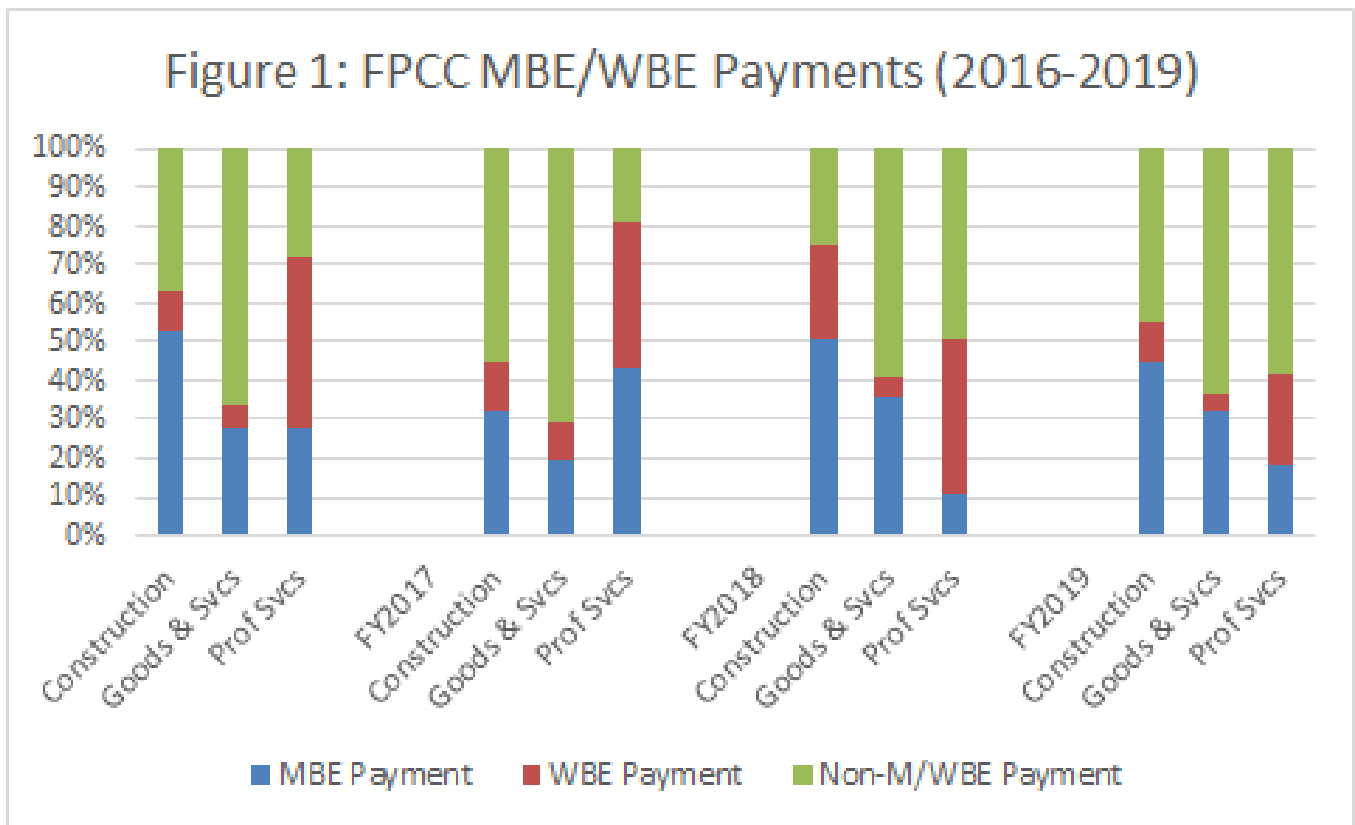
- ✓ **38%** MBE/WBE participation on goods and services contracts
- ✓ **48%** MBE/WBE participation on professional services contracts
- ✓ **42%** MBE/WBE participation on construction contracts

The Forest Preserves continues to reduce barriers and expand outreach to MBE/WBE businesses. Efforts in 2019 included quarterly advertisements in local newspapers encouraging firms to pursue business with the Forest Preserves, assistance to MBE/WBE subcontractors to become Forest Preserves prime contractors, participation in sister agencies' pre-bid meetings to promote Forest Preserves contracting opportunities, and monthly MBE/WBE workshops. In addition, the Forest Preserves participated in multiple vendor outreach events, including:

- Native American Chamber of Commerce of IL: Native American Professionals Breakfast 11/19/19
- University of Illinois Chicago- Construction Forum 11/4/19
- Construction Industry Conference- 7th Annual Construction Industry Conference 10/25/19
- Minority Business Leader's Exchange (MBLE) 10/23/19
- Cook County- Fall into the County Vendor Resource & Information Expo 10/16/19
- Metra- On track to Success Vendor Fair 9/4/19
- Minority Supplier Development Council- Chicago Business Opportunity Fair (CBOF 52) 4/18/19
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Diversity Vendor Outreach Fair (Construction) 4/9/19
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Diversity Vendor Outreach Fair 3/13/19
- City of Chicago's 2019 Construction Summit 2/6/19

- Chicago Park District- Vendor Networking Event 9/26/19
- Women Business Development Center- Connect & Celebrate Business Conference 9/6/19
- Illinois Tollway- Landscape Pre-bid Mtg. 2/1/19
- Illinois Tollway- Landscape Pre-bid Mtg. 1/25/19
- Government Procurement Forum Conference- Annual Business Diversity Conference 5/15/19
- Latino Economic Initiative- Doing Business with the District 2/15/19

Additional details for MBE/WBE payments in recent years are included on the following page.



**Table 1: Forest Preserves MBE/WBE Payments (2016 to 2019)**

<b>FY2016</b>	<b>MBE Payment</b>		<b>WBE Payment</b>		<b>Non-M/WBE Payment</b>		<b>Total Payments</b>
Construction	\$7,303,427	53%	\$1,340,038	10%	\$5,159,730	37%	\$13,803,195
Goods & Svcs	\$906,840	28%	\$178,155	6%	\$2,140,645	66%	\$3,225,639
Prof Svcs	\$375,127	28%	\$591,315	44%	\$370,927	28%	\$1,337,368
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8,585,393</b>		<b>\$2,109,507</b>		<b>\$7,671,302</b>		<b>\$18,366,203</b>

<b>FY2017</b>	<b>MBE Payment</b>		<b>WBE Payment</b>		<b>Non-M/WBE Payment</b>		<b>Total Payments</b>
Construction	\$2,804,673	32%	\$1,157,816	13%	\$4,783,317	55%	\$8,745,806
Goods & Svcs	\$1,201,101	20%	\$553,661	9%	\$4,210,767	71%	\$5,965,529
Prof Svcs	\$343,773	43%	\$299,694	38%	\$150,239	19%	\$793,705
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,349,546</b>		<b>\$2,011,171</b>		<b>\$9,144,322</b>		<b>\$15,505,040</b>

<b>FY2018</b>	<b>MBE Payment</b>		<b>WBE Payment</b>		<b>Non-M/WBE Payment</b>		<b>Total Payments</b>
Construction	\$2,039,454	51%	\$964,780	24%	\$1,019,636	25%	\$4,023,871
Goods & Svcs	\$1,843,528	36%	\$254,262	5%	\$3,025,955	59%	\$5,123,745
Prof Svcs	\$73,531	11%	\$281,743	40%	\$343,871	49%	\$699,146
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,956,513</b>		<b>\$1,500,785</b>		<b>\$4,389,463</b>		<b>\$9,846,761</b>

<b>FY2019</b>	<b>MBE Payment</b>		<b>WBE Payment</b>		<b>Non-M/WBE Payment</b>		<b>Total Payments</b>
Construction	\$1,595,520	45%	\$363,166	10%	\$1,618,897	45%	\$3,577,583
Goods & Svcs	\$2,070,995	32%	\$383,648	5%	\$4,115,858	63%	\$6,570,501
Prof Svcs	\$231,821	18%	\$313,846	24%	\$739,833	58%	\$1,285,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,898,336</b>		<b>\$1,060,659</b>		<b>\$6,474,588</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>\$11,433,583</b>

## 10. Conservation Corps Programs

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Conservation Corps programs are paid experiences that mobilize people of all ages to care for the natural lands within the Forest Preserves of Cook County. These programs intentionally bring together people who reflect the diversity of Cook County communities, with a focus on engaging people of color in conservation work, a field that is recognized nationally and locally for a lack of diversity.

The Forest Preserves are proud to partner with non-profit conservation organizations and local agencies that hire and manage Conservation Corps programs and participants with support from Forest Preserves Staff. By forming these partnerships, the Forest Preserves leverages resources that lead to additional funding sources, expand program offerings and ensure a healthy funding stream that supports the programs' long-term viability.

Since 2005, Conservation Corps programs have grown exponentially from 15 participants to 289 participants in 2020 who provided over 64,933 service hours. Conservation Corp members benefit from obtaining meaningful paid employment and perhaps more importantly they: Obtain industry recognized certifications and technical skill, receive essential environmental education experiences and grow their professional network through colleagues, career fairs and conferences.

Several Conservation Corp programs exist that provide meaningful career experiences to youth and adults ranging from summer internships to seasonal employment to year-round opportunities.



## 11. Closing Statement

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The Forest Preserves is committed to improving equity in our workplace, with our partners, in our communities and throughout Cook County. This work is far from done, and the Forest Preserves continue to listen and learn. Yet as an agency and as members of the community, we want to state loudly and unequivocally: We will be part of the change. Racial equity is achievable, but for that to happen we all must begin the hard work of acknowledging the depth and intensity of this problem. The Forest Preserves pledges to do our part to change it and will continue to work every day towards the goal of making everyone feel welcome and safe at the Forest Preserves of Cook County.