

Racial Equity Assessment Lens (REAL) Form

Name of Initiative/Program or Project: [Determining Fees & Charges Including Financial Assistance Program \(FAP\)](#)

Department: [Recreation, Parks and Cultural Resources](#)

Name of all staff conducting the assessment: [David Eichel](#), [Dianah Alston-Sanders](#), [Geoffrey Adams](#), [Robbin Justice-Jones](#)

Is this Initiative/Program or Project New or Existing: [Existing](#)

Section I: Origin and Description

Programming has been provided by the Town of Carrboro in a formal capacity since 1974 and most programming requires a determination of fees for participant registration. Fees are set yearly during the annual budget process and are based on the direct cost components to provide programming for the community. The purpose of the participation fees are to offset the costs to the Town for providing recreation programming and facilities. Historically, targets for cost recovery have been set for some types of programs. Examples include recovering 100% of direct costs for classes and summer camps and 80% direct costs for adult athletic leagues. Other programs are more subsidized by the Town and fees are set to be competitive with other recreational organizations in the area, while recovering as much as possible to offset the budgetary expenditures.

For those who struggle to afford program participation fees, a Financial Assistance Program (FAP) exists. The basic concept of the program was established approximately 25 years ago to provide an option for families that are Orange County residents that have a desire to participate in programming but are unable to afford the full cost of fees. Seeing the value of the idea, it became more formalized and structured in 2003. After meeting the eligibility guidelines, qualifying families are granted a full fee waiver (100% of the program cost) or reduction membership (25% of the program cost). This waiver/reduction is valid for one fiscal year.

In recent years, the Department has enhanced the approval process through the implementation of online forms (Cognito Forms), which includes Google Translate for improved accessibility. The development of the Language Access Plan has also enabled the Town to become more accessible to a broader range of individuals.

Since FY 2021-2022, applicants who are already on the Chapel Hill Affordable Housing list are not required to provide as much documentation as those not on the list when they apply for the FAP program, thus removing a burden for families interested in the program.

Section II: Desired Results

1. Topic/Issue:

Cost Determination (All Fees)

Affordability

Eligibility for the Financial Assistance Program

2. Baseline Data and Racial Disparities:

Cost Determination (All Fees)

Fees are generally based on market rate for comparable programming. Periodic cost-comparisons are conducted by Town staff, typically in line with budget preparation or when a new program is being considered. Historically, the Department has based cost recovery on direct costs only. This may include instructor fees, staffing, equipment and supplies, etc. Fees have not factored in full-time staff time, utility usage (ex. athletic field light use) and similar costs. While the Town Fees & Charges set target goals for cost recovery to help determine program fees, these have been difficult to achieve due to increased programming costs to pay part-time staff a living wage and continue to afford equipment due to inflation without pricing Department programs out vs. comparable programs in the area. The Department is exploring creating a new cost recovery policy to have a more objective measure for determining cost recovery within the reality of operating under these increased cost pressures.

Affordability

Several factors can affect the affordability of a program. Some examples include the length and time of the activity, the cost of equipment, etc. A longer program with more contact hours, may cost more up front but may end up being more affordable when considering the number of hours of play, instruction, etc. Keeping programs affordable is part of the reason why hard cost recovery percentage targets may not be attainable in all situations. For example, if a Youth Basketball League were to be required to recover 100% of costs, it may become unaffordable. This is why the Department uses both cost recovery and market rates to help set fees.

Eligibility for the Financial Assistance Program

The Department follows the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines by year to determine eligibility for FAP. This allows the Town to have an objective measure for determining eligibility and also uses guidelines that many prospective participants are familiar with from other aspects of their lives. Historically, disparities have included a lack of exposure/targeted marketing, as well as language barriers.

3. Historical Root Causes of Disparities:

Cost Determination (All Fees)

Program costs are primarily driven by direct costs to implement a program. These costs are affected by the cost of living in our area and may rise due to inflation. The primary factor behind most program costs is personnel, which creates challenges for the Town to provide a living wage to employees while also keeping programs affordable for participants. These issues have been compounded since the Town officially became an Orange County Living Wage employer in 2016 and since inflationary pressures have increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another possible disparity could arise from a lack of public input in the determination of programming and rental fees. It is uncertain how much the proposed fees and charges have been discussed and shared as part of the public budget process and their availability for inspection during the public hearing window each year.

Affordability

Individuals classified as low-income have been the most vulnerable in terms of potentially being priced out of programs. This is the primary reason why the Financial Assistance Program was established. Historically, this has had a greater impact on participants and residents of color, necessitating prioritizing basic needs such as housing, food, clothing, etc. vs. discretionary spending on items and activities such as recreation programming.

Desired Results Statement: To ensure all fees for programming and facilities are affordable, equitable & accessible to all individuals. To ensure the Financial Assistance Program is available and individuals needing to utilize this program are aware of its existence and that the process to obtain membership in the program is simple and transparent.

Section III: Demographics

Who is this program focused on? (Neighborhoods, geographic areas, racial groups, income groups, etc.)

Recreation, Parks & Cultural Resources programs are available to anyone who wishes to participate and are not restricted to only Carrboro or Orange County residents. Programs and facilities are currently utilized by residents from Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Orange County, as well as those from surrounding counties.

The Financial Assistance Program (FAP) is focused on offering financial assistance to Orange County residents who wish to participate in Recreation, Parks & Cultural Resources programs, but are unable to pay the full fee to participate. The program is available for individuals and families who meet established income criteria. The FAP currently only applies to program fees and does not include facility reservation fees. However, fee structures have recently changed to allow for discounts for Carrboro/Chapel Hill/Orange County Residents vs. Non-Residents.

What data can you provide to describe the target population?

Given the target population are residents of the Town and surrounding towns/counties, available United States Census data is the primary data available to describe the population of Carrboro and surrounding areas to determine the demographics of the community being served. This information was last updated with the 2020 US Census and will next be updated in 2030.

Through the Department's registration and reservation software, demographic data regarding race and ethnicity was unavailable prior to 2021-2022 and remains incomplete since it must be updated by individual participants and families who were already in the system prior to 2021-2022. The Department worked with the software vendor to have these fields created and they can be used to provide information by program or facility. For those whose data is incomplete, the system is set to request this information at their next interaction with the software.

Regarding the FAP application, these same data fields were added to better capture demographic information on participants. In addition to age, race, ethnicity, etc., the FAP application also gathers information on income. However, this data has never been aggregated into one document or report.

The total number of approved FAP applications is available back to 2019-2020 and is outlined here:

Fiscal Year	Applications Approved	Notes
2019-2020	7	COVID-19; reduced programming
2020-2021	6	COVID-19; reduced programming
2021-2022	10	
2022-2023	13	
2023-2024	14	
2024-2025	14	
2025-2026*	11	

*applications as of 8/1/25.

What data is missing?

While the Department’s registration and reservation software collects data on basic demographic information (ex. age, ethnicity, etc.), there are several data points that are not captured. Some examples include income (non-FAP participants), education, occupation, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, primary or secondary language, families with multiple children, etc. US Census data can provide a baseline for the general area, but it does not capture actual participant data for the Town.

Public outreach and community surveys to determine if fees, charges and the FAP for the Town are affordable. Currently, program participation evaluations and outreach surveys through the Communication and Engagement Department may be the best feedback the Department receives regarding fees and the FAP. Historically, these do not reach unserved individuals in the community or those who are not active participants in current programming. Carrboro in Motion events sponsored by Communications & Engagement have allowed an increased opportunity to reach some of these unserved individuals.

Additionally, on past and present evaluations, questions may be more focused on the quality of programming and suggestions for new programming rather than affordability, though there is a question that asks for feedback on program cost. There is an opportunity to utilize these means of feedback for more specific data regarding fees and affordability, as well as knowledge of the FAP.

Benchmarking data from surrounding communities, such as Chapel Hill and Orange County, are also currently not available.

Section IV: Stakeholder Engagement (community, employees, etc.)

Currently, there is no direct involvement outside of targeted feedback through participant surveys and evaluations. In the past, the department has worked with Town communications staff and consultants to receive more targeted feedback, such as the 2006 Recreation & Parks Master Plan; 2014 Community Programs Needs Assessment; 2020-2022 Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan, and the Biennial Town Survey.

Individual or Group	Please describe the impact.
<p>Town Employees (Council Members, Administrators, Employees)</p>	<p><i>Involvement</i> Town employees and elected officials are involved in determining fees based on historical data and cost recovery and FAP qualifications are based on guidelines from the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines.</p> <p><i>Impact</i> Input on fees and charges can become one-sided and not include additional factors and/or community feedback or affordability. Soliciting feedback may require more staff time and capacity. Not soliciting feedback or having a more transparent process may also require more staff time to respond to questions and concerns regarding fees.</p>
<p>Program participants</p>	<p><i>Involvement</i> Program participant reviews/surveys to provide feedback on current programming.</p> <p><i>Impact</i> Participants are required to take time to complete surveys/provide information. These only impact participants in current programs, current facility users, or those willing to complete other surveys. This could lead to some groups being underrepresented or some not having the time to provide input. Programs such as Carrboro In Motion and large special events could be utilized to solicit feedback from those not in paid programs or rentals.</p>
<p>FAP participants</p>	<p><i>Involvement</i> FAP participants that qualify for the program. How do we reach the unserved members of the community that currently don't know about this program?</p>

	<p><i>Impact</i></p> <p>Engaging with current FAP participants is useful to gain feedback on their experience, but it misses potential new participants in the program.</p> <p>Only benefits individuals that already know about the FAP program. Does not reach members of the community who don't know about the program or may speak a different language. Marketing efforts should be increased to raise awareness of the program.</p>
Unserved members of Community	<p><i>Involvement</i></p> <p>Unserved members of the community are currently not involved outside of outreach through surveys. Although they may participate in some programming like special events, they may not be aware of all programming offered. More community outreach to receive feedback as to why they are not currently participating in programming is needed. Are fees/affordability a primary driver for lack of participation or are other factors at play?</p> <p><i>Impact</i></p> <p>Not receiving feedback or perspective from those unserved individuals may limit participation among groups who could benefit from recreation services. Receiving feedback on fees and the FAP would help to inform the Department on updates to processes and procedures.</p>

Section V: Benefits and Burdens

Recreational programming and facility reservation opportunities are primarily focused on serving residents of Carrboro, but services are also available and designed for residents of Chapel Hill, Orange County and surrounding communities.

The following table outlines the benefits and burdens for specific groups within this broad service area:

Area/Topic	Benefit/Burden	Please describe the impact.
Carrboro/Orange County Residents (including Chapel Hill)	Access to recreation programs and facility	Effective FY26, Carrboro/Chapel Hill/Orange County Residents now have fee discounts for facility reservations vs. what Non-Orange County Residents pay. This is in line with how programming fees have

	<p>reservations with discounted fees.</p>	<p>been determined for many years. This provides a benefit to local residents and taxpayers who are subsidizing these services.</p> <p>Under current policies, since Orange County provides funding to Carrboro to offset recreation services, the fee discounts apply to everyone in Orange County. This may produce some burden for Town Residents who also pay Town of Carrboro taxes but have to share services with Non-Town Residents.</p> <p>See 10-minute walk shed area/topic below for additional information.</p>
<p>Non-Orange County Residents</p>	<p>Access to programming and facilities in the Town of Carrboro. Increased fees and no access to the FAP.</p>	<p>Non-Orange County Residents may benefit from access to programming or facilities not available in their area.</p> <p>This group may be burdened by higher fees for non-county residents. Non-Orange County Residents are also not eligible for the FAP.</p> <p>These factors could disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income residents who may not be able to afford to live in Orange County and have relocated to Alamance, Chatham, etc. but still wish to participate in programs in Carrboro.</p>
<p>Low-Income Residents</p>	<p>More access to programming and being more involved in the process of determining fees and charges for department programming and access to facilities.</p>	<p>Ensuring participants and community members have access to affordable opportunities is beneficial for everyone.</p> <p>There is an additional benefit to those who qualify for the FAP that allows them to participate in department programming and at no cost or a reduced cost. There may be a burden to those individuals who may not qualify for the FAP, but due to their low income or other financial hardships, find programming to be unaffordable. While this could affect members in a variety of demographic groups, it may have a great impact on communities of color or under-employed residents who are above income thresholds to qualify, but do not bring in enough income to afford programming or reservations.</p>

<p>Rural Areas, Neighboring Communities</p>	<p>Provide an alternative to programming in their own community or lack thereof, including programming or facilities that are provided by the Town of Carrboro that otherwise may not be available.</p>	<p>Participants can benefit from access to a wide-range of programming or facilities unavailable in their immediate area.</p> <p>However, transportation may be a burden to these participants if they lack a means of personal transportation and are faced with limited public transportation options to/from their rural community to town. The same information outlined in Non-Orange County Residents above applies here.</p>
<p>10-Minute Walk Shed from Home to Parks for Residents</p>	<p>Provide more access to residents to Parks and other Town resources.</p>	<p>A goal of the Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan is to ensure residents are within a 10-minute walk shed from their home to a park to increase access and reduce reliability of other forms of transportation. Access can benefit residents from having access to free facilities outside of fee-based recreational services.</p> <p>A burden is that not all activities or amenities are available at all park facilities, so options could be limited depending on the location. This can directly impact communities of color where access to parks may be lacking. Specifically, communities along the NC-54 Bypass and in the Qualified Census Tract along Jones Ferry Rd and Main St. are burdened.</p>

1. If you mentioned communities of color in the table of above, how might this initiative negatively impact them? While fees may impact communities of color, determining fees based on the market and having the FAP available helps to mitigate these impacts. The residents of most need should qualify for the FAP, so those most impacted may be those who do not qualify but are under-employed or face other financial hardships, transportation hardships, etc. that can prevent participation.
2. If you mentioned people with low incomes in the table above, how might this Initiative negatively impact them? As with communities of color, those with low-incomes may be negatively impacted if income is too high to qualify for the FAP, but not high enough to comfortably pay for services.

Section VI: Funding

Programming and facilities are funded through the Town’s budget. Historically, there has not been pressure to recoup a hard percentage of costs since the Town’s philosophy has been to subsidize programming for the quality of life of the community. However, increasing budget pressures may put pressure on the Town/Department to raise more revenue through increased participation and rental fees.

Regarding the FAP, anyone who qualifies has been accepted and allowed to participate. This does not result in the Town having to pay fees to any person or group, but it does impact revenues for the Town. Thus, the more participants who participate through the FAP, the lower overall Town revenues will be. This provides an immediate benefit for FAP participants, but they, along with other taxpayers, may see a burden if taxes must eventually be raised to offset programming and facility costs.

Section VII: Unintended Consequences and Mitigation

Type	Potential Unintended Consequence	Mitigation Strategies to Prevent Consequences and Advance Racial Equity
Social	<p>Participants or residents may feel unheard due to feedback being difficult to obtain, language barriers, or those who are in underrepresented areas or those new to the community being more difficult to connect with sometimes.</p> <p>Some residents who cannot afford programs offered may not feel as connected to their community vs. those who can participate.</p>	<p>Continue efforts to work with Communications and Engagement Department to increase surveys and feedback from the community. Many efforts are being made to eliminate language barriers across departments. This will help get a new perspective and maintain equitable and affordable fees.</p>
Economic	<p>Inflation could result in increased costs to provide programming and recreation facilities, and participation and rental fees may need to be increased. The Department is currently seeing an unintended consequence of paying part-time employees a living wage, resulting in higher programming costs.</p>	<p>Continue to allow FAP and try and maintain comparable fees to neighboring towns and counties. Encourage low-income participants to apply for FAP if the current fees and charges are unaffordable.</p> <p>Investigate new revenue streams to offset participation, such as scholarship programs are allowing for donations to go directly towards offsetting participation costs.</p>

Health	Affordability (or lack thereof) of programs can have a direct effect on quality of life and mental wellbeing of community members.	Continue to set fees and FAP to provide affordable programming as a recreation outlet for members of the community, including health focused programming and special events intended for better quality of life and inclusion of all community members.
Environment	Affordability (or lack thereof) of programming and fees may result in community members searching for programming and facilities that they find more affordable in neighboring communities. This results in a strain on the environment due to the possibility of increased travel by car rather than more eco-friendly methods like public transit, bicycle or walking.	Providing affordable programming and fees as well as accessible facilities will minimize the need for community members to travel to neighboring areas if the desired resources they are seeking are available within their community. A primary example is the 10-minute walk shed providing walkable or closer amenities near to residents.
Other	To continue offering viable programs and suitable facilities, costs may need to be increased to maintain service levels. Groups who have been benefiting from relatively low fees may find them unaffordable.	Provide transparent reasoning for fee increases during budget process. Highlight benefits of FAP, discounts for residents, and special discounts such as 50% discount for up to two rentals by non-profits each year.

Section VIII: Impacts

1. Investigate if there have been other programs of this type. If yes, what is known about the effect on these programs, especially of different racial groups?
 While many local government organizations offer some type of assistance, they can vary from place to place. The Department recently partnered with a group who provided assistance (ex. fees, sports equipment, etc.) for those wishing to participate in athletic programming who could not afford it, but that group has since dissolved.

These programs provide a direct effect of increasing participation among low-income groups, which often includes traditionally underrepresented racial groups.

2. Are there any challenges that need to be overcome? How?

Challenge: Community Feedback

How: Increase surveys and outreach to establish affordability of fees and charges across department programming and/or facilities. Involve advisory boards to help solicit feedback. Work with Communications & Engagement and other Town departments to take advantage of outreach opportunities when they arise.

Challenge: Action Plan/Updated Cost Recovery Plan

How: Develop an action plan to establish a guideline for how fees and charges are determined. Evaluate current cost recovery goals and create a new plan that aims to meet Town goals to generate revenue to offset expenditures while maintaining affordable services for the community.

Challenge: Coordination Across Organizations

How: Ensure fees and any FAP are in line with neighboring organizations (Town of Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, Orange County, Durham County, etc.) so participants will find programs affordable. If it is found that attempting to keep pace with fees and charges of neighboring organizations are pricing out participants, consider this in reviewing cost recovery goals.

Challenge: Language Barriers

How: Continue to invest in initiatives such as the Language Access Plan to ensure all members of the community are aware of opportunities for input on fees and of programs such as the FAP. Partner with organizations serving those whose primary language is something other than English to help connect with community members.

3. What can be done to mitigate any negative impacts?

Mitigation strategies are outlined in the right-hand column under *Section VII: Unintended Consequences and Mitigation*.

4. Share any relevant data.

Data needs to be determined and formalized. Annual reporting on FAP participation, including demographic information would help to track the success of the program. Additionally, input from surveys and evaluations, as well as input from informal feedback, should be solicited specifically for fees, affordability, the FAP, and other topics relevant to the discussion.

While all program evaluation data received is reviewed, the Department needs to find a better way to aggregate data in a usable format. Data is available for some recent

summer camp program evaluations and one question regarding cost indicates participants largely find the programs affordable. However, it should be noted that this information captures participant data, meaning they were registered in the program (paid or through fee waiver/reduction), so it misses information for those who may not be able to sign up in the first place.

The primary question relevant to the lens is the following:

“The cost of the camp was reasonable.” Answer choices include the following options:

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

In reviewing available data from the most recent Summer Camp evaluations, the results were as follows:

139 Responses

103 selected ‘Strongly Agree’

34 selected ‘Agree’

2 did not respond to the question

0 selected ‘Disagree’

0 selected ‘Strongly Disagree’

The data clearly shows that those who were able to register for Summer Camp programs found the cost of those programs to be reasonable.

Section IX: Accountability

1. How will the impact of the initiative be measured? Comparison of participant numbers from year to year as well as comparison of fees and charges by year. If the Town can maximize its programming while still offering a low/affordable price point to the community year after year, it will effectively create an opportunity to provide recreation opportunities for all individuals regardless of income, education, race, gender, etc.
2. What success indicators or progress benchmarks are incorporated in the proposed Initiative? (Provide indicators/benchmarks/metrics/timeline) Data is currently not available in a usable format. Data such as number of program participants, number of facility rentals, etc. could be tied to fee changes to track affordability. Additionally, a more formal tracking of FAP participation with associated demographic information is important.

3. **Who will track them?** Administration and staff should develop a system of comparison and tracking data. Work with registration software provider to see if reports can be created that will assist in tracking the information that's needed. Department staff will begin tracking the ratio of FAP participants in comparison to active households within the registration system to show trends in participation and overall utilization of the program. The FAP application was recently moved to a Cognito Form to help better track submissions, but paper copies remain available for equity purposes.
4. **What is missing? What will happen if these metrics are met and what will happen if they are not met?** If the Department cannot succeed in maintaining affordability with fees and charges as well as accessibility to the FAP, then the result is likely a decline in participation numbers which could result in cuts into overall programming and services provided to the community.
5. **In what way does this Initiative deeply consider the experience of the residents it will impact?** The initiative directly considers the residents within the community. The goal is to make sure that fees and charges, including the FAP, remain affordable, equitable and accessible to all individuals. Accessibility to the services provided by the Department directly impacts quality of life for the residents.
6. **How will you share you results with your leadership and other funders?** Updates will be provided to Department leadership and Town management staff through meetings and reports. Since fees are reviewed annually, the budget process will serve as the primary framework for defining and executing programming goals each fiscal year.
7. **How will you share results with community members and stakeholders?** Updates will be delivered through a variety of channels, including meetings with key stakeholders and/or community representatives, public outreach via press releases and social media, Department marketing materials, and Town events.
8. **How will you acquire feedback from community members and stakeholders and incorporate findings?** The Department will collect feedback through evaluations, surveys, and discussions with community groups. In cases requiring deeper engagement, targeted outreach efforts may be implemented.


RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Engagement – More community input should be included in the process and to continue to evaluate if fees and charges are affordable while also meeting Town revenue goals to keep services viable. Establish new methods of receiving feedback to engage active program participants and even look to incentivize feedback with possible discounts on programming or activities. Work with Communications & Engagement, Race & Equity, and other departments to connect with members of the community and ensure programs such as the FAP are marketed to those who could benefit from it.

Action Plan/Cost Recovery Plan – Work with staff to develop an action plan or roadmap of how fees, charges and FAP changes are determined. Traditionally, fees and charges are determined on cost recovery percentages and through local market comparisons. Establishing a standard operating procedure (SOP) that becomes a living document that can be adjusted over time if new methods or changes should be implemented. This will provide a foundation as to how all fees, charges and the FAP are developed and refined.

Evaluation Data – Evaluations should be updated to include questions regarding program cost/affordability. While this has been done for some categories of programs, it should be added to all program evaluations and rental evaluations. The Department should find a way to better aggregate the data for ease of use and to monitor trends that may arise from the responses.

Section X: Timeline and Feedback

Date submitted to R&E/CORE Team: 8/18/25
Signature of Assessor(s): 
Date Reviewed by CORE Team:
CORE Team Recommendation/Feedback:
Date reviewed by REC:
REC Recommendation/Feedback:
Date returned to Department:
Other Notes: