

# **Recommendations for the Community Input Stage of the Carrboro Comprehensive Plan using the Racial Equity Toolkit**

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## **Table of Contents**

Executive Summary.....	2
The Task.....	3
The Data.....	3
Engaging with the Community.....	6
Strategies.....	7
The Plan.....	8
Accountability and Communicating Results.....	11
References.....	12

## Executive Summary

This project sought to lay the groundwork for promoting racial equity in the early stages of the Carrboro Comprehensive Plan. We collaborated with community organizations and leaders and did external research to understand where Carrboro can and should improve its strategies for gathering community input in the most racially equitable way possible. The information here can be used as the town begins to seek community participation and visioning that is racially equitable.

Carrboro has a racial minority population that is quickly growing. However, the inequity that exists between different racial and ethnic groups is vast and often isolated into certain geographic areas. Historically, community engagement has been widely taken advantage of by white individuals in Carrboro with little effort made to engage minority individuals who face a number of barriers to participation. Through this project, we sought to provide tangible ways to break down those barriers and magnify the voices of those who are so often unheard.

Our proposal presents various methods that can be applied to bring racial and ethnic minorities into the planning process. Some examples include holding focus groups, implementing targeted canvassing, and establishing a commission to oversee the execution of this task. This methodology seeks not only to assess the opinions of minorities, but to provide pathways for the overrepresentation of these individuals' inputs so that Carrboro can begin to overcome the racial inequity that already exists.

The community engagement that will take place during the initial stages of the Comprehensive Plan has the ability to impact all of the people who live, work, and play in and around the town. Our recommendations rely on the existing relationships that have been built over time between dedicated services partners and community members. By partnering with service organizations, the leaders of Carrboro can begin to engage community members in meaningful ways, create lasting relationships, and make steps towards a town that is a champion for racial equity.

## **The Task**

Our team has been tasked with ensuring that the first step of the Town of Carrboro's Comprehensive Plan is executed through a racially equitable lens. This first step includes the Town of Carrboro conducting community engagement and outreach, in order to gather input from its citizens. Thus, our task is to ensure that the Town of Carrboro conducts its community engagement and outreach in a way that is racially inclusive and representative of historically marginalized communities. The folks in charge of the Comprehensive Plan will ultimately use the information gathered from this first step to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan that is built and executed is racially equitable in nature.

The intended result of our team's efforts are for Carrboro's community stakeholders to be engaged with and outreached to; however, there will be special emphasis placed on ensuring that input is gathered from Carrboro's communities of color, who constitute the historically underrepresented. Our ultimate intended outcome is for Carrboro's Comprehensive Plan to then be influenced and shaped by the racially representative feedback obtained.

Though Carrboro's Comprehensive Plan will undoubtedly affect the entire community of Carrboro (as by nature of a comprehensive plan), our proposal is specifically pertinent for one aspect: affecting community engagement. Our team's mission is to ensure that the Town of Carrboro conducts its community engagement in a racially equitable way. By recommending ways that the Town of Carrboro can outreach to historically underrepresented communities of color, our proposal will impact how the Town of Carrboro conducts its community engagement moving forward.

## **The Data**

The success of the Carrboro Comprehensive Plan will be dependent upon how effectively they can gain input from many geographies and cultural communities and then formulate a plan that is representative of the town as a whole. Below is a map showing the percentage of people of color living in different areas in Carrboro:

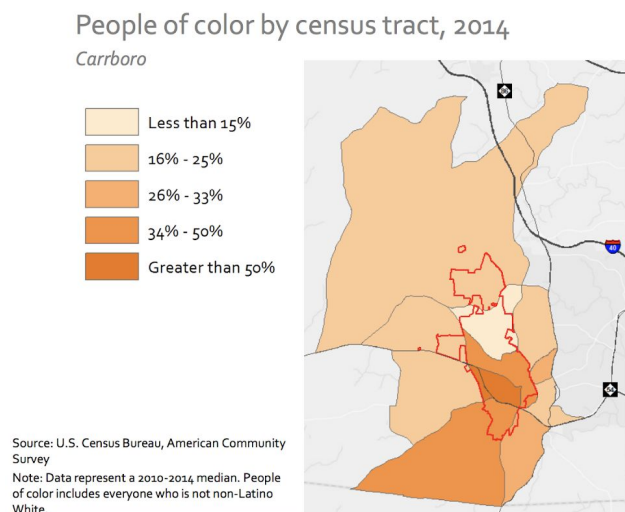


Figure 1

Source: Triangle J Council of Governments

Given the spatial distribution of minority populations in Carrboro, certain areas will benefit significantly more if the town is able to gather input in an equitable and representative way. Without consideration of these variations, they can result in significant disparities throughout the different locations.

In addition, there are noticeable trends in population growth among different racial/ethnic groups. While the **Black population** growth rates in Carrboro **decreased by 26%** between 2000 and 2010, all other minority groups saw significant increases in growth rates in the same time: **Asian (+58%)**; **Native American (+15%)**; **Latinx (+12%)**; **Mixed Race (+19%)**; and **Other Race (+29%)** (U.S. Census Bureau). These trends show that geographical differences are going to become more important to take into account as time goes on and the demographic makeup of the community takes on a completely new form.

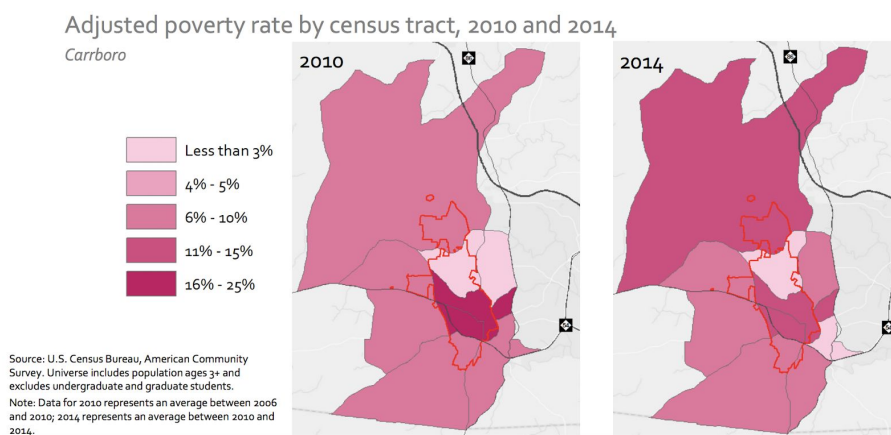


Figure 2

Source: Triangle J Council of Governments

Though all races are seeing growth in their Median household income, the disparity between the white population and non-white populations is stark. While **White households increased** from **\$53,508** to

**\$61,566, Black households increased** from **\$27,345** to **\$32,000** and **Latino households increased** from **\$42,675** to just **\$46,343**. (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey). Furthermore, the median hourly wage in the area (based on data from Durham Metro Area) for **white residents** was **\$23.5** in 2012 compared to the median of **\$11.5** for **Latino residents**, **\$16.5** among **black residents**, and **\$15.6** for **people of color overall** (Triangle J Council of Governments).

The map shown above, when compared to *Figure 1*, shows that the geographical distribution of people of color in Carrboro is closely related to poverty rates. The areas with the highest percentage of people of color, there are also the highest rates of poverty.

The economic disparities in Carrboro are significant and are rooted not only in geographical and historical differences, but, we can deduce from our research, likely also largely due to the variability in representation among different races.

We looked into data from Carrboro's *203 Project* which is planning to bring a new hub for cultural and artistic exchange and has been regularly recording data on community participation throughout the process. Data collected on turnout at community engagement events gave interesting insight into the significant lack of minority representation. **88%** of participants were **Caucasian**, while the other **12%** of **minority populations** were divided into **2% Latinx**, **2% African American**, **5% Asian**, and **4% Other**. This underrepresentation is also apparent in videos of the community input sessions—few minorities are present. While this data does correspond to general population statistics in Carrboro, 2016 Census data shows that the **Caucasian population is overrepresented by at least 10%** and the **Latinx population**, most notably, is **underrepresented by approximately 9%** (Town of Carrboro).

Representation remains an issue when we look at leadership in the town. Allison DeMarco compiled a report in 2017 that stated that **Carrboro's boards** are composed of just **2.8% Latinx** members and **black residents are underrepresented** by about **7%**. This is an area where the representativeness of the groups will literally be determining the future of the town (DeMarco).

There are, unfortunately, many factors that play into the disadvantage that minorities in Carrboro face. Geographically and economically, there are divides that favor white residents and these are only worsened on the larger scale of the community when certain groups are being underrepresented in the conversations that are shaping the community's future. We also found that there is not a particularly extensive body of data or any general understanding that we came to of how minority populations' input are being taken into account regardless of the turnout and representation. This is, however, important to look at, and perhaps can be done by keeping qualitative records throughout the project to ensure decisions are being made with intentional consideration of the racial dynamics in the community.

With this in mind, we have made a few observations that layout what we think participation goals for the town should be. Based on the data we found from the Carrboro Equitable Growth Profile, results from the *203 Project*, the 2016 American Community Survey, the 2017 advisory board report, and interviews with community partners and leaders, community engagement efforts should aim for overrepresentation among minority populations. Greater emphasis should be put on Asian, Latinx, and refugee populations in particular

because of those populations' growth rates, which are noticeably higher than Caucasian and Black population growth rates. That means that Carrboro in 20 years will likely consist of a greater number of these populations, and the town should thus plan accordingly.

With that being said, data from the Carrboro Equitable Growth Profile indicates that **Latinx** and **Black** populations are especially vulnerable because of **higher unemployment rates (Latinx-10.8%; Black-13.5%)**. In addition, while the **White** population saw a **5% drop in poverty rates** between 2000 and 2014 (from 17% to 12%), **Black poverty rates** only **decreased by 1%** (from 20% to 19%). **Latinx** and **Asian poverty rates** **decreased** significantly over the 14 year period, they are still **experiencing much higher poverty rates** in 2014 (**Latinx-28%; Asian-22%**) (Triangle J Council of Governments).

Given these statistics showing the relative economic and social vulnerability of minority populations in Carrboro, community engagement efforts should seek to overrepresent minority populations in order to strive for a more equitable future.

## Engaging with the Community

**Below we outline some of our focus areas for the project and discuss our experience and lessons from engaging with the community:**

- Focused on historically marginalized/underrepresented groups including refugees, Hispanics, and Blacks
- Spoke with service organizations that already have relationships with these groups in order to gain their insight into current issues and how to better gain feedback and input from those communities
  - Refugee Community Partnership
  - NAACP
  - El Centro
- Some groups of people are/have been very engaged; however, they have unique obstacles like existing inequity and language barriers; this leads to a type of “fatigue” when they have tried so hard for so long to encourage change but nothing has happened
- Engagement is usually tailored to the “average” person; however, the obstacles that the population we are focused on face are not “average”; engagement is often very conventional in the form of town hall meetings, public hearings, and surveys, catering to the “average” person
- Language barrier often hinders migrants and refugees from participating
- Undocumented migrants may fear the risk of engaging with government officials
- Technology barrier (ie. lack of internet, computer/phone access, etc.) disproportionately affects low-income and non-white individuals, making them unable to participate in any form of online engagement (ie. surveys, social media, etc.)
- Parents, especially those of low-income households, may struggle with meeting times because they must take care of children
- Lack of transportation is often a barrier for low-income and non-white individuals
- Timing of engagement sessions often disproportionately effects non-white individuals who work at unusual hours because they are working multiple jobs or are unable to attain a job during normal hours

### **Some conclusions for our proposal:**

- Need unconventional methods of engagement that allow for input from outside of the classic spaces
- People have become “fatigued” from the lack of change and it often leads marginalized people to stop participating
- An effort to gain the input from marginalized groups needs to show the intent for action, rather than just an effort to assess need
- Oftentimes, certain racial/ethnic groups have large numbers of people working similar jobs; if engagement is planned for a time that does not work with that job, an entire group of people can and will be systematically unrepresented
- Important to consider how responses are weighted once collected; need to have an overrepresentation from historically marginalized group in order to not just maintain the equity gap, but decrease it

## **Strategies**

Our proposal will increase racial equality by amplifying the voices of those who have been traditionally unheard. It would give a substantial weight/overrepresentation to community members who are minorities and/or people of color because they are often the ones who are consistently overlooked. We aim to present city officials with concrete steps that they can implement not only with this project but with any upcoming projects so that they can reach all of the members of their community effectively. We also want our proposal to expand on specific methods that are tailored to reach a more diverse population.

- Who would benefit from our proposal:
  - People of color
  - Parents of color
  - Non-native english speakers/those whose first language wasn't/isn't english
  - Those who are typically underrepresented/marginalized
  - The entire population of Carrboro: tailoring the plan to specifically reach those who are marginalized will ultimately help the whole of Carrboro be more equity-conscious
- Who would be burdened with implementation:
  - Task force in charge of the comprehensive plan: they are the people who would be in charge of implementing our proposal
  - City officials: our proposal would require them to put in an intentional effort to reach out to these communities and engage those who are not typically represented
  - Budget: there might be a need to allocate more funds to accommodate our recommendations

Although we aim to be as thorough as we can with our suggestions, there could be some unintended consequences. Our proposal could lead to the potential feelings of alienation from the people we have chosen not to focus on (i.e. White, conservative, etc.). We want a significant portion of the outreach efforts to be focused on traditionally marginalized group, and this could lead to groups who have been historically

represented and heard from to feel unrepresented. The time allocated for this type of community engagement might also need to be extended as reaching out to all of these populations can take longer because they require more direct and personal methods of outreach.

To mitigate some of the unforeseen consequences that will arise, we have included some methods through which we can enhance our proposal for the future:

- Create a mechanism to ensure that certain inputs from community members are weighted more than others
- Modify our proposal to come up with methods to ensure that the community is engaged in the long run as the effects of Carrboro's plan will not be seen for several years
- Come up with ways in which community members could see their inputs being implemented/taken seriously
- Create a way for community members to be continually involved in the actual implementation of the comprehensive plan

After some conversations with organizations within the town of Carrboro and considering the ways in which we can employ outreach strategies that already exist, we recommend that the Town of Carrboro reach out to community leaders and service providers that have already formed relationships and connections with community members. These organizations have a stronger and wider reach and can help implement these proposals in a more effective manner because they have already established trust with the members they service. The Town of Carrboro should partner with and provide community organizations/service providers with the support (i.e. funding, manpower, etc.) needed to conduct some of the aspects of our proposal. Carrboro city officials should also include organization/community leaders into planning task force so the voices of the communities they service are constantly in the conversation

Upon reviewing the outcomes we outlined earlier, we conclude that the potential impacts discussed do achieve our goals and implement an intentional and targeted engagement with members that are frequently underrepresented in important discussions regarding the Town of Carrboro. Our initial vision for the project was to promote racial-equity within Carrboro's community engagement strategies and we feel that these impacts achieve that goal.

## **The Plan**

Our plan assumes that a written survey will be developed by the Town of Carrboro to gather feedback for the Comprehensive Plan. Thus, as directed by Damon Seils, our plan is primarily interested in ensuring that the gathering of community input is done in a racially equitable manner. Our plan is multi-faceted:

### **Commission**

Our first recommendation is for the Town of Carrboro to establish an official commission or advisory board, that will ensure that the Town of Carrboro's community engagement is racially inclusive. From our discussion with community leaders and recommended contacts, we have learned that this process -- for it done to be effectively -- will take a significant amount of time and oversight, and we believe the Town of Carrboro should dedicate the appropriate resources for its execution. The recommendations that follow will serve as a great starting point for this commission.

### **Establish and Deepen Community Partnerships**

From the interviews we conducted with various community leaders, a central theme continued to reappear: the importance for the Town of Carrboro to forge strong community partnerships. Thus, in a more general sense, we recommend that the Town of Carrboro establish and deepen existing relationships with key community partners or organizations that represent, assist, or heavily interact with the underrepresented populations in Carrboro. These organizations have earned the trust of these underrepresented demographics and will be essential to targeting these community members. A list of some of these organizations can be found below:

- Refugee Community Partnership
- El Centro Hispano
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chapter of the NAACP
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro School District
- BRMA (Blue Ribbon Mentor Advocate)
- Community Empowerment Fund
- TABLE

More specifically, identifying key community leaders as point people will be crucial to ensuring that this plan is implemented effectively. Engaging and forming relationships with these community leaders will aid in building trust, outreach, and event planning with the underrepresented demographic. To discover who these community leaders are, the Town of Carrboro can reach out to the organizations listed above, and/or rely on general community knowledge. Some of these individuals may include Allen Buansi, Delores Bailey, and Mai Mai Ngun Sin. These individuals would be excellent people to include in the task force on Carrboro's Comprehensive Plan.

### **Focus Groups**

We recommend for the Town of Carrboro to hold focus groups to survey underrepresented demographics in Carrboro. These focus groups should include six to twelve participants, last no more than two hours, and be held at a location important and accessible to the respective demographic. For instance, locations like, First Baptist Church, the Refugee Community Partnership headquarters, or El Centro headquarters would be excellent choices. The Town of Carrboro should partner with community organizations/leaders to ensure that the focus group is publicized, constructed, and led most effectively.

Ultimately, the focus groups would serve to obtain a diverse range of qualitative information from a specific demographic. The questions should be open-ended, and an emphasis should be placed on receiving thoughtful, candid answers from each participant -- not to reach a consensus or elicit conflict within the group. Focus groups provide an excellent opportunity to obtain individuals' first hand experiences and build community trust.

### **Canvassing**

Assuming that a survey is developed to conduct its community engagement, we recommend that the Town of Carrboro pursue active efforts to canvas houses of underrepresented communities. Because these individuals may not have high levels of trust in and engagement with the government, the Town of Carrboro conducting targeted and intentional outreach strategies will hopefully ensure that their voices are heard and incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

These canvassing efforts can be done in partnership with community organizations. With the support of the Town of Carrboro, the community organizations -- who have built more trust with and knowledge of their respective demographic -- can lead these canvassing efforts in the neighborhoods they believe would be most representative of the population they serve.

Additionally, when these canvassing efforts are conducted, the Town of Carrboro and community partners should ensure that the individuals canvassing are fluent in English, Spanish, Burmese, Karen, and/or other languages, so that they can effectively communicate with the people they are canvassing.

### **Community Events**

We recommend for the Town of Carrboro to partner with various community organizations and hold community events centered around obtaining feedback on the comprehensive plan. To generate the most turnout, the Town of Carrboro should provide food and child care services, and explore avenues to provide transportation to and from the events. These events could be held once every two months with a community organization that caters to a specific demographic. This initiative would offer a great opportunity to distribute the survey, obtain qualitative feedback, and, more generally, build trust with the targeted community.

Additionally, porch gatherings or family-style meals in neighborhoods could be extremely effective. Through our research and conversations with community partners, we have realized that porches and meals often bring together members of the Carrboro community. Unconventional methods of engagement will bring together members of the community who are less interested in the traditional methods of engagement that have been used, but still hope to share their input for the future of Carrboro in a more casual, welcoming setting.

### **Question Campaign**

We propose the Town of Carrboro to have a Question Campaign, in which the town collects questions from across the community about the future of Carrboro. This would allow the Town of Carrboro to understand the extent of certain issues and diversity of its citizens' experiences.

Some avenues for question collection:

1. **Community Partners:** Identify organizations and businesses throughout the community that interact with a wide range of people from the community and have them distribute note cards on which people can ask their questions. A representative from the Town of Carrboro can collect these cards.
2. **Door-to-door Distribution:** Door hangers and flyers with the hashtag and link to online platform, as well as a location where people could mail in or bring in written input.
3. **Social Network:** Circulate a hashtag that people can use to send in questions

For a more detailed outline of what this campaign could look like, please review pages 22 through 29 of the City of Boston's *GoBoston* campaign:

[https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-03-2017/go\\_boston\\_2030\\_-\\_full\\_report\\_to\\_view.pdf](https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-03-2017/go_boston_2030_-_full_report_to_view.pdf)

### **Other Considerations**

The Town of Carrboro should ensure that the survey is translated in multiple languages, like English, Spanish, Burmese, Karen, and other requested languages from community partners as well. The town should also pretest the survey with people from various demographic groups to ensure that there are no cultural barriers or misunderstandings of questions that would lead to biased/unreliable data.

In addition, based on conversations with the Refugee Community Partnership and the Community Empowerment Fund, we were made aware of some other methods to encourage general participation. First, providing some form of compensation — food, coupons, tickets — could give people enough reason to take time from their day to participate. This compensation should be accessible to different ethnic populations, rather than being specifically useful for a certain group. This might include coupons for supermarkets and tickets to community events that are generally attended by a diverse group of people. Second, consideration of the timing of events, canvassing efforts, and focus groups is important. Most events should be held on weekends or weekday evenings after 5:00PM. To further reduce time barriers, offering childcare would allow families to participate to a greater extent. Third, the Town of Carrboro should be extremely clear when outreaching to communities with potentially undocumented citizens that the Town of Carrboro is not looking to jeopardize any individual's or family's well-being. It should communicate this message with community partners, so that this message is relayed effectively.

Our team believes this plan to be extremely realistic and tangible for the Town of Carrboro to accomplish. However, since many of the details for Carrboro's Comprehensive Plan still remain unclear, we are unsure whether the plan will be adequately funded, resourced with personnel, etc. Regardless, by looking at community engagement through a racial equity lense, our hope is that this will transform the way historically marginalized communities are heard from in Carrboro. As stated previously, our proposal is the initial step for Carrboro comprehensive plan. Thus, we hope this will lead Carrboro city officials to prioritize racially-equitable community engagement when it comes to funding and resource allocation. Community engagement that promotes racial equity will guide a comprehensive plan that seeks to further the desires of those who have so often been excluded.

## **Accountability and Communicating Results**

The impacts of our proposal can be evaluated in a variety of ways. One example is by ensuring that survey responses from underrepresented individuals are recorded at a rate higher and given more value than their population level within the Town. Additionally, turnout can be recorded at community events to ensure that the Town is engaging populations that are most frequently unrepresented. We suggest that the Town of Carrboro conduct these evaluations and review their results frequently as to assure that they are meeting their goal of conducting outreach that is racially-equitable. We hope that the outcomes of our proposal will change the way that community engagement is carried out in the future to capitalize on the chances to increase racial equity in the future.

Beyond our proposal, the Town of Carrboro must show that they are changing the way community engagement is and will be carried out in order to further advance racial-equity. The emphasis is not holding a

certain number of events or surpassing a benchmark of respondents but instead who those respondents are and how their voices can be overrepresented in the engagement process, and the comprehensive plan as a whole.

Additionally, in order to ensure that racially equitable community engagement is a long-term effort, bi-monthly check-ins with community partners are essential to help nurture and maintain sustainable relationships between the town and its minority communities. After the comprehensive plan is set in motion, creating pathways to involvement that allow all community members to work on the implementation of projects will deepen relationships and increase community-wide trust in the town and its inhabitants.

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<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

## Community Partners

Damon Seils, Carrboro Board of Aldermans, in-person interview, October 5, 2018.

Beth Vasquez, Chapel Hill People's Academy, in-person interview, October 15, 2018.

Anna Richards, Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP, phone interview, October 16, 2018.

Maddie Hayes & April Oo, Refugee Community Partnership, phone interview, October 19, 2018

Trish Mcguire, Carrboro Planning Director, phone interview, October 21, 2018.

SorAngela Hoyos, Community Specialist at El Centro Hispano, in-person interview, October 23, 2018