

# Envisioning a Racially Equitable Region

## A Report on Our Community Conversation in Montgomery County

***By Hanh Le, Executive Director, Weissberg Foundation & Co-Chair, WRAG's Racial Equity Working Group, and Jayne Park, Executive Director, IMPACT Silver Spring***

What would a racially equitable Montgomery County look like? On October 18, 2017 the Racial Equity Working Group of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers (WRAG) partnered with IMPACT Silver Spring to explore this question. We brought together about 40 community members and local funders diverse in race, ethnicity, age, affiliations, and vocations to connect with one another, learn about the historical roots of today's racial inequities, generate ideas for what is needed to advance racial equity, and envision how those advances might look in the county.

Many of us left the convening feeling connected, full, and hopeful, while also knowing the true test of success would be whether concrete actions would emerge and move the work forward. This written piece reflects on what happened at the community conversation and its significance, the state of current racial equity efforts, and what still needs to be done to advance the work.



## What? Highlights from the Community Conversation

To lay the groundwork for our visioning, we learned together about current racial disparities in the county and the historical roots of those disparities. We then worked collaboratively to name systems of power perpetuating inequity and brainstormed ways they could be interrupted.

Many forces resisting change were identified, including criminal justice, media, economic and financial systems, employment, healthcare, religion, transportation, and philanthropy, but the following forces garnered the most attention when participants were asked to prioritize and name countering forces for change:

Forces Resisting Change	Forces for Change
<p><b>Housing/Real Estate Developers/Planning &amp; Zoning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community voice to decide how community gets developed</li> <li>• Housing co-ops</li> <li>• Growth mindset of where we want to go</li> <li>• Demanding mixed and affordable housing</li> <li>• Abolition of banking and mortgage system</li> <li>• Reparations for denial of/access to affordable housing</li> <li>• Asking “what is it we value?”</li> <li>• Community organizing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Schools &amp; Education System</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay equity for teachers</li> <li>• Re-examining school funding formulas</li> <li>• Parent empowerment</li> <li>• More teachers of color</li> <li>• Community voice/local watchdog groups</li> </ul>
<p><b>Political Representation &amp; County Government</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public financing</li> <li>• Voter mobilization &amp; protection</li> <li>• Redistricting</li> <li>• Supporting candidates of color</li> <li>• Holding candidates accountable to racial equity</li> <li>• Advocating for government to get training on racial equity</li> <li>• Forcing those in power to take accountability for perpetuating inequities</li> <li>• Using an equity lens on every policy/decision</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local Economy/Economic development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating access to capital</li> <li>• Cooperative models</li> <li>• Community-owned franchise</li> <li>• Benefit corporations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Racism/Structural Segregation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassessing concept of “American Dream”</li> <li>• Correcting false narrative of human value</li> <li>• Teaching “un-whitewashed” history</li> <li>• Understanding our own history</li> </ul>

After the force field exercise, the meeting ended with a visioning activity. Groups worked together to develop vision statements for a racially equitable Montgomery County. Key components shared across many of the vision statements included:

- An inclusive and equitable community
- Equity in opportunity, access, and outcomes
- Dismantling racism and white supremacy
- Political representation



## So What? The significance of what we did

Our central takeaways from the Montgomery County community conversation revolved around three elements:

1. **People:** Participants clearly have been engaged in and have a strong grounding in the topic of racial equity, and they have a strong appetite for change. However, this initial group was kept intentionally small, and more people representing the county's diverse stakeholders need to be brought into an on-going process. For instance, this work needs to be deeply understood by elected officials and it currently is not.
2. **Systems:** Communities of color are still systemically disadvantaged. An understanding of history is necessary for understanding systems of power, as well as the presenting problems in communities today. Also, when policy and program decisions are being made, a racial equity analysis needs to be applied in order to identify the potential for negative impacts on

communities of color.

3. **Process:** Racial equity will not be achieved through any single event. Rather, it is a process that involves the intentional and thoughtful engagement of multiple stakeholders. We're not starting from zero: there is work already being done in the county that we can amplify. Philanthropy should engage with community more, help create space for these conversations, and be open to change.



## Now What? Current and Next Steps

Together, we are activating an engagement team of community organizations, residents, and funders invested in taking action to move racial equity in the county forward.

For IMPACT Silver Spring, we will continue to organize a people-led network and movement to advance racial and economic equity in Montgomery County. In addition to hosting candidate forums, the IMPACT Network is advocating for a racial equity resolution similar to the one recently adopted in Fairfax County, Virginia (see <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/one-fairfax>). Other network actions include efforts to re-shape the county's historical narrative by lifting up the truth of black history, and organizing to strengthen local economic development policies and efforts that will benefit micro-enterprise and worker-owned cooperatives in communities of color. You can follow IMPACT Silver Spring's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/impactss/>) to get regular announcements and updates on network activities. You can also email [keren@impactsilverspring.org](mailto:keren@impactsilverspring.org) to be added to IMPACT's listserv.

For WRAG's Racial Equity Working Group, we will continue to engage communities throughout the region. With the insights from these conversations, we will develop a broader vision for a racially equitable region that will guide our work to take action at the systems and policy levels to address racial equity. For more information about the working group, please contact co-chairs Yanique Redwood (Consumer Health Foundation, [yredwood@consumerhealthfdn.org](mailto:yredwood@consumerhealthfdn.org)) and Hanh Le (Weissberg Foundation, [hle@weissbergfoundation.org](mailto:hle@weissbergfoundation.org)) or Rebekah Seder with WRAG ([seder@washingtongrantmakers.org](mailto:seder@washingtongrantmakers.org)).

---

## **About IMPACT Silver Spring**

IMPACT Silver Spring's vision is for every resident to lead a full and quality life in a racially and economically equitable Montgomery County. IMPACT works to create equitable communities by breaking down racial and economic barriers, and by building community-based networks of mutual understanding, support, and action across lines of difference. For racial and economic equity to be achieved, IMPACT works for change at 3 levels – changing hearts and minds at the individual level (individual transformation); changing dynamics and practices at the neighborhood level (neighborhood transformation), and changing the greater systems and structures that impact residents' lives (systems transformation). Through its network-building approach, IMPACT nurtures community-based solutions and grassroots leadership by creating opportunities for people from all backgrounds to deepen their understanding and awareness around historical and structural racism, find their gifts and passions, connect and build relationships with each other, and generate action projects that advance equity goals.

Learn more at <https://impactsilverspring.org>

## **About WRAG's Racial Equity Working Group (REWG)**

Launched in February 2017, REWG is comprised of nearly 30 members of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, including independent, corporate, and family foundations, and other philanthropy-serving organizations. One thing that unites us is a mission to understand and address anti-black racism in our region.

REWG has three overarching goals:

- Develop a vision of a racially equitable region
- Engage the community (i.e., people with lived experience, nonprofits, foundations and governments) to inform the development of that vision
- Understand and take action at the systems and policy level to address racial equity

Learn more at <https://www.washingtongrantmakers.org/racial-equity>