

COMMUNITY REPORT

SUMMER
2022



LITTLE ROCK
EQUITY LABS

OUR COLLABORATORS



OFFICE OF DIVERSITY
EQUITY & INCLUSION
CITY OF LITTLE ROCK

November 2021 through March 2022 the City of Little Rock's new Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) invited people who live and work in our city to come together to identify priorities for equity work. Our office is incorporating what we learned through this initiative, dubbed Little Rock Equity Labs, into our work. In all, 17 volunteers from 14 public and private collaborator organizations facilitated a series of seven Labs with a total of 80 participants from all seven wards. We facilitated Labs in neighborhoods and online. All Labs were accessible to both English and Spanish speakers, and one Lab featured Spanish as the primary language.





LITTLE ROCK EQUITY LABS

Each **Equity Lab** opened with a brief introduction to the ODEI and our staff. Next, we invited participants to engage in [Reflective Structured Dialogue](#) around themes of belonging and identity. Said one participant, “I especially enjoyed the discussions we had...the participants gave honest responses that reflected their thinking.” After this opportunity to listen deeply and identify shared values, participants listed their top concerns related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in Little Rock and then prioritized them as a group. Next we invited participants to share their ideas for solutions, asking, If you were 10 times bolder, what big idea would you recommend to address these concerns? Finally, participants assigned scores to the ideas, ranking their top choices.



Residents and volunteer facilitators participate in small group dialogue in Ward 2.

STATEMENT

This Lab was productive.

Our work today was meaningful.

Throughout the Lab, I felt included.

I learned something new today.

I would attend a workshop like this again.

AGREE/STRONGLY

AGREE

97%

92%

95%

92%

94%

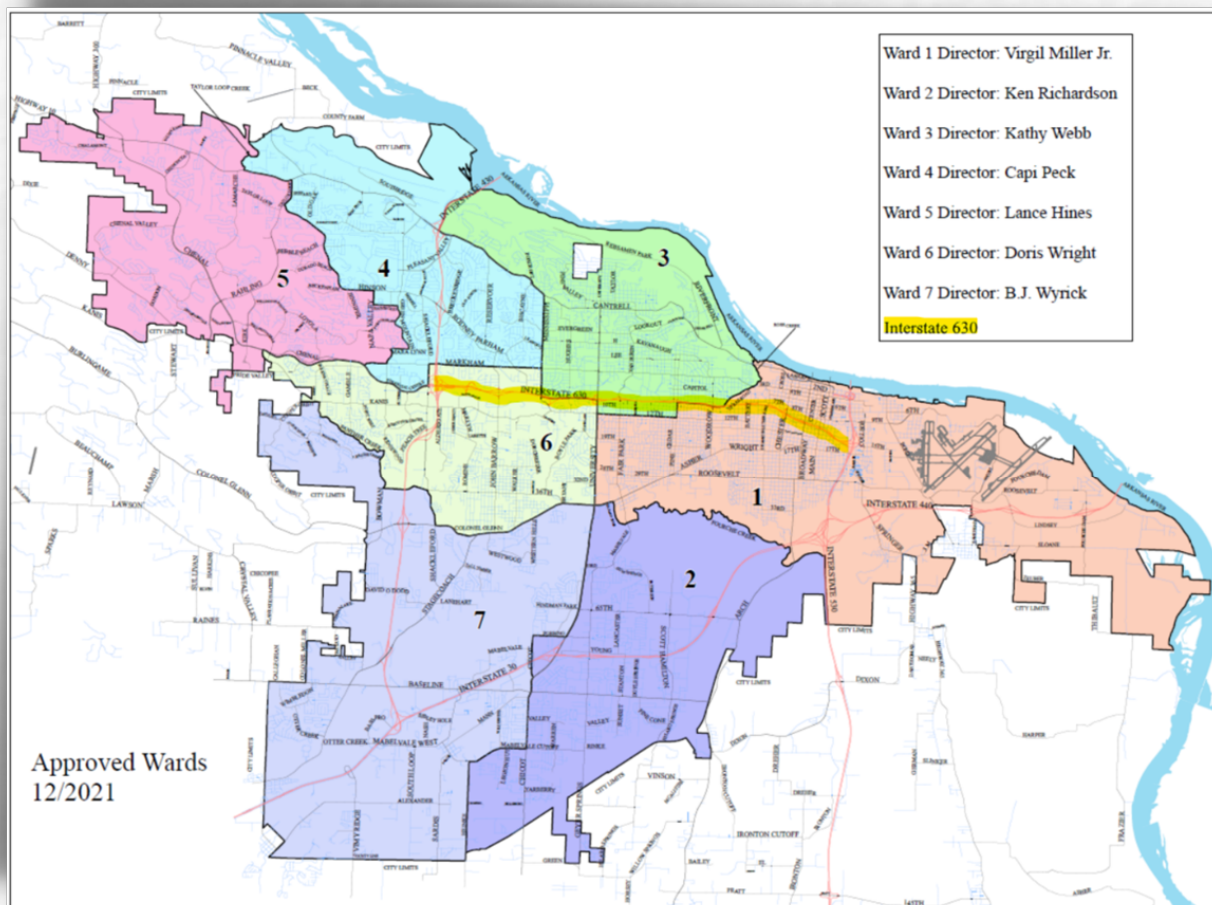
Feedback from participants was positive, with one participant asking for “more organized events like this one that bring together people who are passionate about communities to connect and share ideas.”

WARD INFORMATION

	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2019)	% RESIDENTS OF COLOR** (2020)	% EQUITY LAB PARTICIPANTS FROM WARD*
Ward 1	\$29,529	79%	18%
Ward 2	\$34,518	87%	14%
Ward 3	\$70,577	23%	4%
Ward 4	\$61,191	37%	8%
Ward 5	\$87,686	33%	4%
Ward 6	\$46,168	67%	6%
Ward 7	\$45,120	79%	11%

Source: Metroplan. *35% of Equity Labs participants' wards were unreported.

**Residents of color include those who describe their racial/ethnic identity as anything other than "white alone".



It is important to our team to find ways in which community members can continue to engage in our work. We invited a handful of Equity Lab participants to assist with compiling the lists of concerns and ideas and help us identify themes for this report. We are grateful that two of our community members answered the call. The following contains a summary of what we learned.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Priority #1: Education

Education-related needs topped the list of priorities in nearly every Lab. While participants noted the progress with Little Rock's [community schools](#) efforts, free and effective out-of-school and workforce development programs for youth and young adults were of top concern across the city. Important too was education related to minority-owned small business development.

Priority #2: Transportation

Transportation-related issues were the second most cited concern.

Infrastructure including sidewalks, streets, lighting, crosswalks, bus stops, and drainage was a top concern in Wards 1, 2, 6, and 7, while bike lanes, public transportation, and walkability were noted as important in Wards 3 and 4.

Priority #3: Affordable Housing

Across the city, residents want public and private development of safe, affordable, community-focused housing for people of all abilities and increased access to housing programs for low-income homebuyers.



Did you know?

Rent prices in Little Rock have increased more than 15% since the start of the pandemic. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Participants also expressed deep concern for our community members experiencing homelessness and a desire for additional innovative public services for this vulnerable population (see ideas [here](#) and [here](#)).

Priority #4: Communication

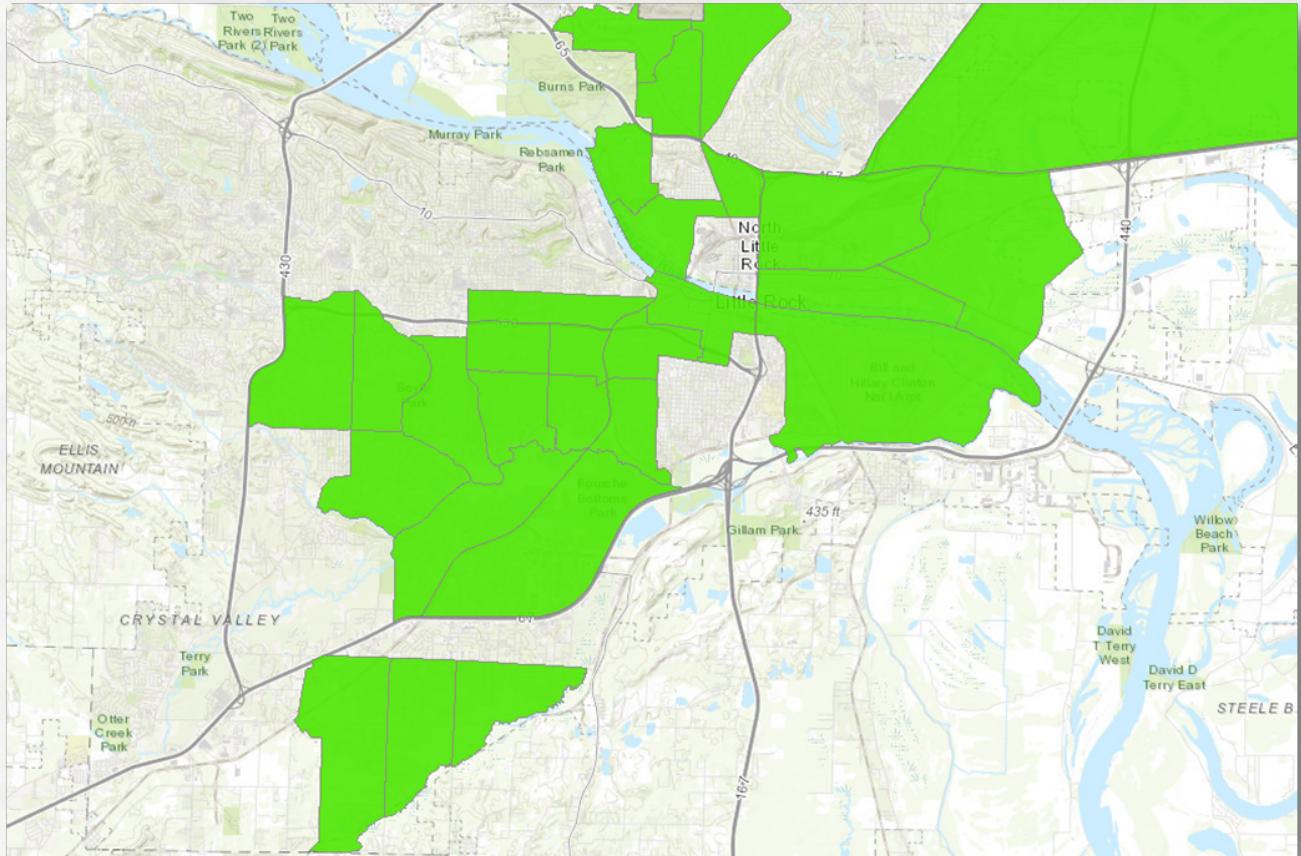
Participants expressed concern that we are not meeting the need for timely and effective communication between city government and residents, particularly as it relates to events, programs, and funding opportunities. Of special note was that the city's adult residents, approximately 6,000 of whom speak only Spanish (PolicyMap, 2019), have little to no access to basic public services and meetings.



Participants from Ward 2 work together to prioritize equity-related concerns.

Priority #5: Access to Healthy Foods

Participants highlighted food deserts as a critical issue of concern in four of seven Labs. Ideas for addressing this issue included incentivizing grocery stores to come back to inner-city neighborhoods and providing resources for the community to convert vacant lots to community gardens. For more information about the grocery gap, click [here](#).



The grocery gap: Areas in green highlight low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket. Source: USDA, 2019.

Next Steps

We are sharing these findings with stakeholders across the city, including City Directors, staff, and boards and commissions, as well as our partners in finance, nonprofits, healthcare, transportation, and education. We heard participants' ideas, and we are making commitments to effect change in the identified areas. We are also sharing ways that you, the public, can compound our impact by addressing the same issues at the same time. As one facilitator told us, "I think the participants were interested in seeing Little Rock become a better, more inclusive city. I also got the impression that they would be willing to participate in seeing that outcome."

ODEI Commitments

- **Assist entrepreneurs of color with establishing and growing businesses.** This community-sourced big idea falls right in line with our efforts in supplier diversity, including [OpportUNITY Little Rock](#) and the launch of Emprende, a new pathway of [BUILD Academy](#) for our Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs. We also have plans to leverage collaborations with community organizations to expand our minority- and women-owned business enterprise education series this fall.
- **Increase access to housing programs for disadvantaged groups.** Partnering with the City's Housing and Neighborhood Programs Department and other community-based organizations to guide low-income homebuyers and older adults toward and through [existing programs](#) is a natural first step, and this work aligns with our efforts to engage with community collaborators.
- **Coordinate with the City of Little Rock Communications team** to build capacity among City departments and make communication about programs, events, and funding opportunities more accessible online. This work aligns with our goal to empower engagement through effective communication, including increasing language access for our Spanish-speaking community.

Community Action Steps

- **Volunteer your time in youth-serving programs** across the city. Commit to meaningful, long term engagement to share your skills and wisdom and make a difference in the lives of Little Rock's young people. Visit littlerock.gov/volunteer to view current opportunities under Parks and Recreation and apply. For questions about specific volunteer opportunities, contact our volunteer programs coordinator at 501-442-7320.

- **Build community:**

- Organize cookouts, games, and meet 'n greets on your street.
- Participate in a [neighborhood association](#).
- Engage in the broader community by exploring restaurants, shopping, and events outside of your ward.
- Participate in [R.O.C.K. Academy](#) to meet residents across Little Rock and learn about how your city government works.
- If you live near a Neighborhood Resource Center, get to know your local [Community Oriented Police Officer](#).

Did you know?

There are 7 wards in Little Rock. Find your ward by searching your home address at the link:

<https://www.littlerock.gov/city-administration/board-of-directors/find-your-representative/>

- **Serve on a City board or commission.** Volunteering on one of 32 boards and commissions allows adult residents to impact City policies and activities, as these bodies advise the Little Rock City Board of Directors and City staff. Apply online via the City's website: littlerock.gov. Opportunities for youth include the [Mayor's Youth Council](#).

Thank you to all who volunteered and participated in Little Rock Equity Labs. With your help, we will continue to work toward ensuring that Little Rock is an equitable place to live, work, and play. Join us later this year as we convene Equity Lab participants and collaborators to share progress updates and additional opportunities for involvement.





To stay in touch, follow us
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