

CITY PROFILE ON RACIAL EQUITY

New Orleans, Louisiana



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REAL RACE, EQUITY AND LEADERSHIP

New Orleans City Profile on Racial Equity

When New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu set out to remove a series of confederate monuments lining the city's spaces, it sparked national conversation—and action. But while the story captured the nation's attention, the Mayor and the city's efforts to address racial inequities and begin a process of racial reconciliation in New Orleans were both broader and more comprehensive than removing monuments celebrating the confederacy.

More than Just Monuments: Developing a Strategy for Racial Equity

In 2016, the City of New Orleans created the Equity New Orleans strategy, designed to embed racial equity into the DNA of city government. The strategy examined the existing conditions impacting racial disparities by engaging the community and developing the infrastructure to act on the findings.

Beginning in 2016, in the city that once housed one of the country's largest slave markets, Mayor Mitch Landrieu directed the city's Deputy Mayor for Citywide Initiatives to create a process that would build racial equity into the fabric of city government. "Because of race, we are too often a block away from each other but a world apart," said Mayor Landrieu. Key to designing the strategy was identifying the structural inequities experienced by the city's residents and the institutional approaches that can address them. The city's Director of Equity Strategy led a small team that collected and analyzed data from a broad cross-section of the city, holding four community listening sessions and hundreds of interviews and focus groups. Through a snowballing set of conversations, stakeholders answered questions like "What do you see as the key



A group of men play jazz music as people sit in Jackson Square in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana. (Getty Images, 2018)

barriers or challenges for the city integrating equity throughout its activities?" and "What is important to you about an equitable city government, and why does this matter to you?" The data would establish a baseline understanding of equity across the city and inform a series of recommendations.

In addition to these primary data, the city used existing data from external reports, national data sets and metrics from ResultsNOLA, the city's performance management system, to build a picture of current inequities in New Orleans. Finally, a survey of 1,000 city employees was conducted to better understand perceptions about equity as a priority for city government.

Equity New Orleans: Tools to Institutionalize Equity Across Administrations

Using the data collected, the city was able to develop an equity strategy and identify future indicators that will be collected and reported by the city beginning in 2018.

The Mayor's leadership prioritized the City's work around racial equity in a way that would ensure it reached beyond his administration and continued to move forward by solidifying philanthropic funds for strategy implementation and engaging the community from the beginning by:

- Making a solid investment in equity from the City's

General Fund

- Finding private funding
- Putting senior leadership in charge of oversight
- Partnering with the private sector
- Engaging communities from the beginning

The equity strategy builds on work that started at the beginning of Mayor Landrieu's administration to: expand employment and business opportunities for communities of color, make reforms to the municipal justice system, expand affordable housing through the city's Assessment of Fair Housing, reduce the historically high murder rate for Black men (NOLA for Life), plan for health equity, and develop a comprehensive resilience strategy. Knowing that a set of tools would be needed to help the city act on the data, the city set out to study the racial equity plans of other cities like Oakland, Seattle, Portland and Grand Rapids, along with Multnomah and King Counties, guiding New Orleans as it developed tools that would most suit the city without reinventing the wheel.

At a large event in April 2017, the city launched its equity strategy. Implementation of the components is ongoing, including:

- Establishing an Equity Office to work with entities across city government and beyond
- Working with all city departments to create equity teams
- Engaging leadership and staff throughout each department to implement use of an equity assessment tool
- Incorporate equity as a component of the budgeting process

City: New Orleans, Louisiana

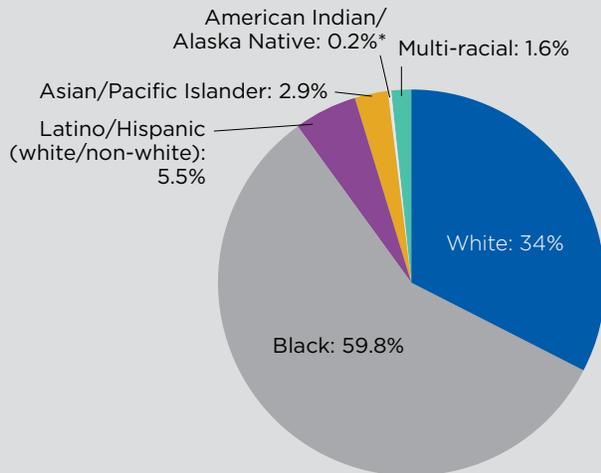
Year Starting Racial Equity Work: 2006

Mayor: Mitchell J. Landrieu

Form of Municipal Government: Mayor-Council

Population: 382,900 (2016)

Demographics:



**5-year community estimates*

- Creating city-wide and departmental equity plans
- Tracking progress over time by embedding equity in the city's performance management system
- Requiring racial equity training for all employees and for those residents sitting on boards and commissions
- Expanding inclusive engagement strategies and access to civic processes through training and a guide for inclusive outreach and public engagement
- Launching a Racial Equity Community Roundtable including leaders from all sectors that will help to increase the use of an equity lens within the community and their own organizations
- Prioritizing workforce equity through training and a dashboard to examine and eliminate disparities in human resources
- Creating a public awareness campaign

Since the strategy was launched in April, 2017, city staff have continued to work with internal stakeholders and peers in other cities to provide information about the Equity New Orleans model and technical assistance to department heads in furtherance of their equity work. Department heads have received training on the development of equity plans and tools that would allow them to consider equity when building their department budgets. In December, 2017, the New Orleans City Council demonstrated great leadership by unanimously



adopting the Equity New Orleans strategy by resolution and promoting equity as a key value of city government. In 2018, the City will begin to implement the strategy fully.

Engaging the Community to Begin the Healing Process

The city's racial reconciliation work did not begin with the confederate monuments. Beginning in 2014, the city laid the groundwork for a comprehensive reckoning with race. In addition to a public apology from Mayor Landrieu for the historical and systemic racial barriers that impacted Black people across the country, the city launched the Welcome Table New Orleans. Using a model developed at the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, based at the University of Mississippi, as a starting point and partnering with the Urban League of Greater New Orleans, the City developed a three-year process that brought people from different backgrounds together to share

their experiences with race. The discussions led to action taken by eight resident circles from across the city and the creation of 22 reconciliation projects.

The Winter Institute provided technical assistance during the first year of the city-wide initiative and trained New Orleans residents to lead discussion circles in the final two years. As a result, residents who participated were more comfortable talking about race, including the impacts and root causes of structural racism.

Summarizing the process the city has gone through, Mayor Landrieu said, "If you scratch just below the surface like we did, there is hidden from view a very deep cut that goes to the very heart of our nation. Centuries old wounds are still raw, because they never healed right in the first place. There is a difference between remembrance of history and the reverence of it. Monuments that celebrate a fictional, sanitized confederacy, but ignore the death, the enslavement and the terror

Summary: New Orleans

1 Making Racial Equity More Than Monuments: Mayor Landrieu took a key step in reckoning with the racialized implications of New Orleans' history by not only taking down confederate monuments but using this as an opportunity to question historical narratives.

2 Developing a Comprehensive Equity Strategy: New Orleans undertook a significant community-wide and city government-wide wide process to develop its comprehensive equity strategy.

3 Prioritizing Racial Healing as a Key Strategy for Advancing Racial Equity: The Mayor's public apology and the city's commitment to using the Welcome Table process lay the foundation for the city's racial reconciliation and racial equity work.

that it actually stood for are an affront to our true history."



REAL RACE, EQUITY AND LEADERSHIP

NLC's Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) initiative serves to strengthen local elected officials' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities. Learn more at www.nlc.org/REAL

This City Profile is part of a larger series made possible through the generous contributions of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.