

# Racial Equity in Communities

## 2023-2024 Summary Report



# ABOUT RACIAL EQUITY IN COMMUNITIES (REIC)

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Racial Equity in Communities (REIC) is a leadership development program for residents, staff, and elected officials from jurisdictions in Johnson County. This program was designed and is managed by United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS).

The goal of REIC is to support Johnson County local governments and communities that want to move beyond a symbolic awareness of racial equity toward substantive analysis, action, and accountability.

First launched as a pilot in 2021, REIC provides a customized series of capacity-building workshops, learning opportunities, and customized technical assistance over approximately six months. Participating organizations are then charged to continue exercising culturally responsive leadership in their organizations and communities to bring about sustainable change.

Through this facilitated program, REIC supports leaders' capacity to:

- learn—define key racial equity terms and concepts,
- respond—address residents' needs/call for action related to racial equity, and
- govern—shape and adopt a policymaking framework that centers racial equity.



## 2023-2024 REIC PROGRAM

The most recent REIC program year began in August 2023 with funding from the Health Forward Foundation, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the participating jurisdictions: the City of Leawood and the City of Overland Park.

UCS recruited residents, staff, and elected officials from the participating cities for a total program cohort of 20 people. UCS guided the effective recruitment of a diverse group of city representatives from each city, considering factors such as demographic/identity characteristics, leadership tenure, and role in the organization or community.

UCS convened a roundtable of Thought Partners including the University of Kansas' Public Management Center, Kansas Leadership Center, and the Meriweather Group to assess the current state of participating cities, including readiness for change and awareness of key concepts. REIC Thought Partners worked collaboratively to leverage expertise and knowledge along with evidence-based insight from the readiness assessment to develop an interdisciplinary culturally responsive leadership curriculum for the program. Thought Partners facilitated workshops. Each partner contributed content and expertise in leadership, public service, and cultural responsiveness to support participants in both cultivating and navigating organizational change.

The program was implemented over the course of six sessions facilitated by the Thought Partners. Facilitated sessions lasted for 4-5 hours and took place between October 2023 and March 2024. Each session built upon the prior session, and participants received intersession homework to support applied knowledge and sustainability of the learning that was happening in the workshops.



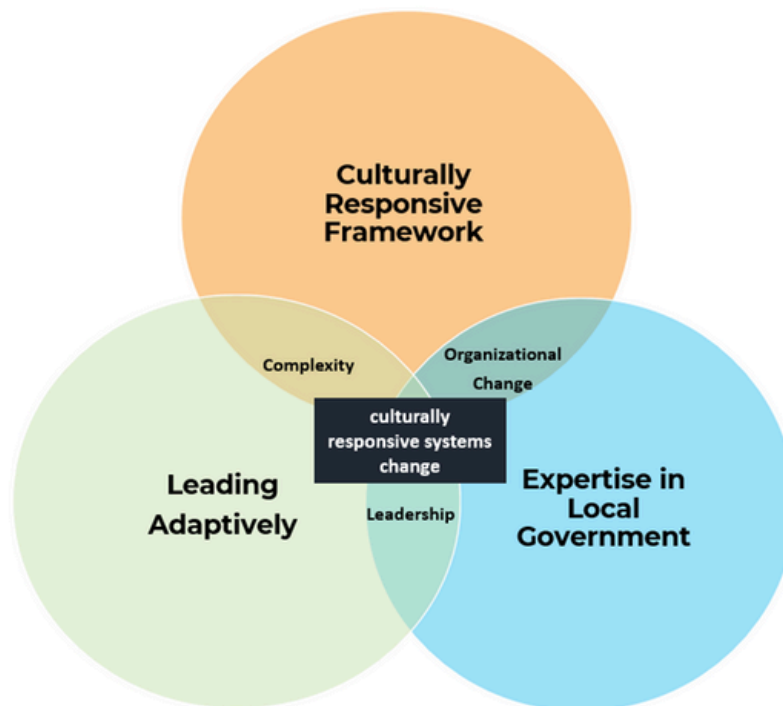
By the end of the pilot, each city had collaboratively developed a preliminary plan for next steps for racial equity systems change. Equipped with the leadership competencies and content knowledge gained in the workshops, jurisdictions have continued to activate their plans with ongoing technical assistance from UCS and its partners.

## THEORY OF PRACTICE

**Culturally responsive leadership** means understanding and using people's cultural backgrounds, experiences, and ways of doing things to make learning and engagement more relevant and effective. This approach ties racial equity and inclusion directly to how organizations operate, helping them provide fair and better services. It's crucial for making lasting, positive changes at all levels of an organization.

**Leading adaptively** is necessary when we encounter large, daunting challenges that seem unsolvable or too hard to address. Addressing these challenges requires curiosity, learning, engaging others, speaking to loss, managing ourselves, iterating, and experimenting. Our mindset shifts toward making progress on the challenges rather than fixing them.

**Expertise in local government** involves understanding the functionality of governmental systems and how it is key to the implementation of REI transformational change. Utilizing evidence-based strategies through assessments and coaching brings awareness to and focuses attention on areas (e.g., stakeholders, structure, policy, resources, etc.) that need strengthening and development.



# The purpose of REIC is to equip you to lead culturally responsive systems change in your city.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Most of the concepts introduced to the participants from the City of Leawood and the City of Overland Park during the 2023-2024 program year can be found in the REIC Resource Toolkit (Appendix A). This section summarizes the key learning themes and highlights from the series.

### Session 1 - October 2023

The first session of the REIC program year functioned as a program orientation for participants. Attendees were introduced to the Thought Partners, who then provided an overview of the REIC purpose and the anticipated journey ahead.

Participants discussed the group's expectations for the program, which were captured in the pre-session readiness assessment and explored more deeply during the first session.



Facilitators introduced group agreements and working definitions for foundational concepts (such as race, equity, racial equity, inclusion, and the difference between technical and adaptive work). Finally, participants learned about how social identity influences the way we show up to conversations about race. Participants were encouraged to approach the work of having courageous conversations from all angles: intellectual, moral, emotional, and relational.

## Session 2 - November 2023

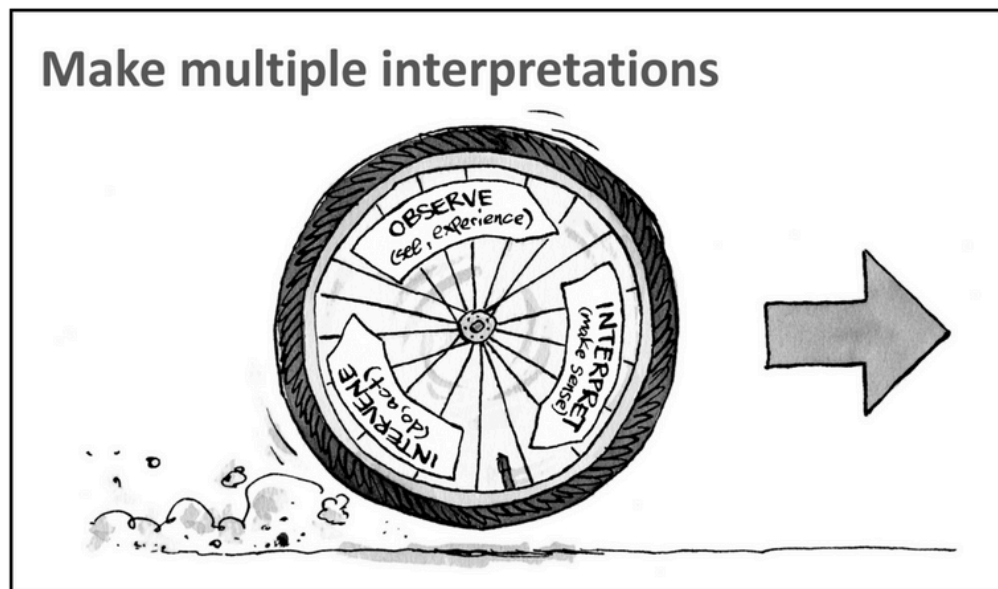
This session invited participants to explore the Courageous Conversations Compass more deeply.

Additionally, we discussed noticing and naming patterns of race, gender, and other social identities as a critical first step for addressing racial inequities: if we don't see it and name it, we can't change it!

Participants had an opportunity to practice *observing patterns* and offering *multiple interpretations*.

Facilitators offered working definitions for systems change, power, and racism before leading a deeper discussion on how racism operated at individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels.

The group discussed residential redlining, which is a significant part of Johnson County's racial history, to better understand how racism operates and has lasting impacts.



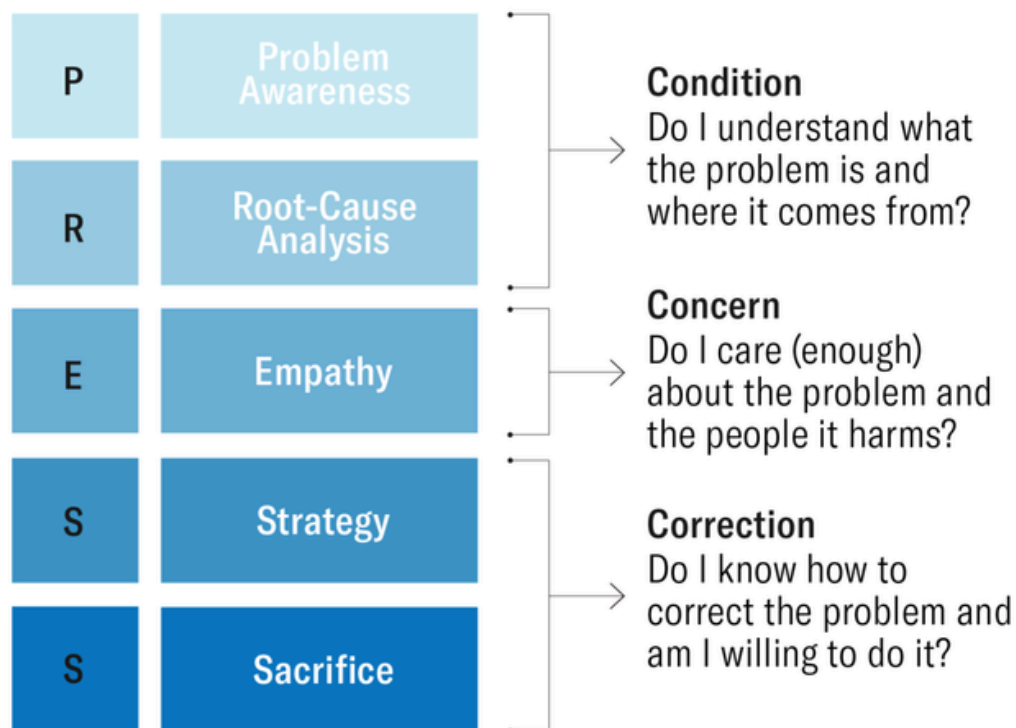
## Session 3 - December 2023

This session was designed to help participants learn to effectively assess what kinds of interventions might influence systems change within organizations and communities.

A deeper conversation about the dimensions of power (personal, social, institutional, and structural) and examples of types of power (such as expert power which comes from unique insights, information, experience and/or knowledge) led participants to consider how their own social identities translate to privilege - which can be used to influence systems change.

Facilitators then taught a model on the Neuroscience of Bias, grounding participants in an understanding of how their own internalized fears and blind spots might be hindering them from seeing or acting on opportunities for systems change.

Finally, the group explored the PRESS model as a way to identify what's getting in the way of racial equity systems change.

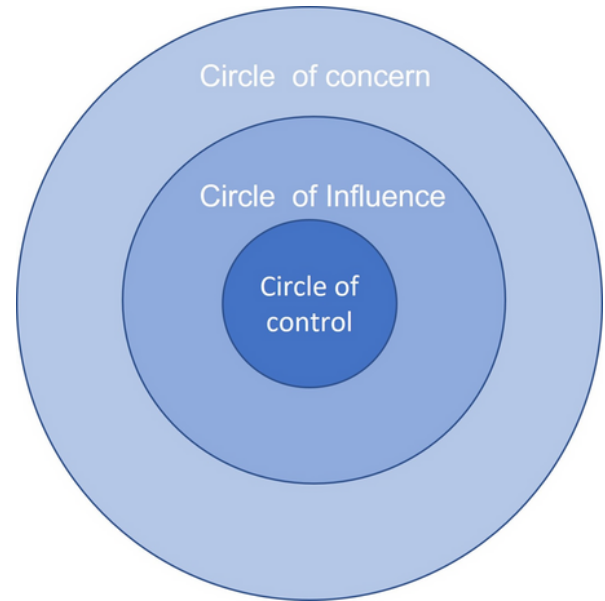


## Session 4 - January 2024

This session focused on the dynamic challenges of systems change, particularly when there is a fear of change. Facilitators helped the group articulate the fear of loss that underlies fear of change, which looks different for each person in an organization.

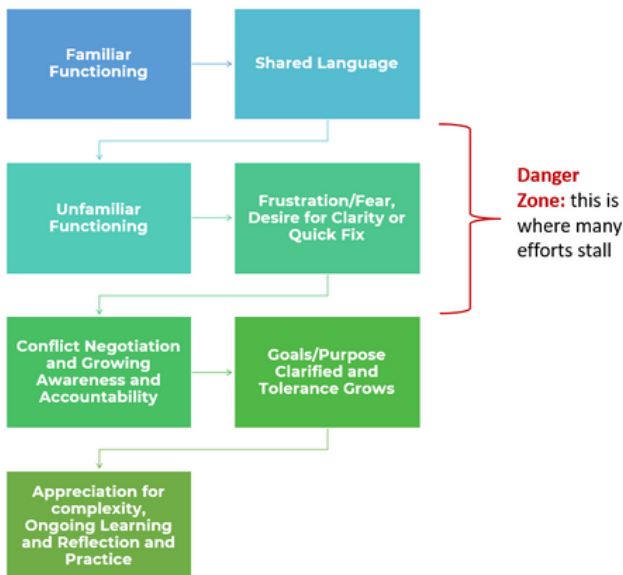
Participants explored the idea of working toward change by focusing on their circle of influence, where small actions like doing something new/different or changing our behaviors can have a big impact.

Participants practiced something that we can all do to advance systems change – listen to others mindfully – by splitting into pairs and telling stories and perspectives based in their own social identities.



## Session 5 - February 2024

During this session, the focus was setting City-based teams up to think about their ongoing work beyond the REIC program. The conversation centered around understanding the “why”—the reason that each person and team is committed to ongoing efforts to lead racial equity systems change. This is important because it can keep the group focused even when there is resistance.



We also considered that certain factions might either support or resist teams' ongoing efforts, and discussed what accountability to the broader community could look like. Using a consent-based decision-making process, each city team decided on a draft “why” statement to serve as a guidepost for the next phase: planning for systems change. The group also explored different roles (such as agitator, innovator, and orchestrator) that they could embody in their ongoing efforts.





A key highlight of Session 5 was a panel of representatives from the REIC pilot in 2021-2022.

Panelists representing Johnson County Government, the City of Lenexa, City of Prairie Village, City of Mission, and City of Roeland Park shared their unique perspectives on what it was like to implement racial equity systems change following their pilot program year.

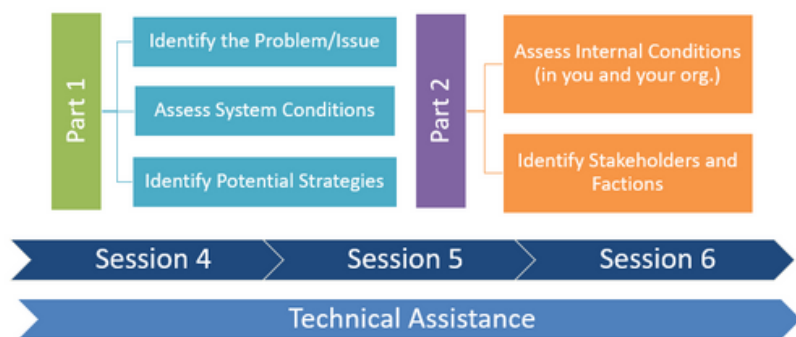
They shared their biggest takeaways and other memorable aspects of the REIC experience, as well as significant challenges they encountered or witnessed while working on systems change efforts.

## Session 6 - March 2024

The theme of the final session was sustainability and celebration. Participants spent a majority of the time in their city teams, working through a Planning for Systems Change framework to begin putting their ideas on paper. Facilitators discussed the importance of knowing your needs and attending to them so that the work of systems change does not create burnout.

The group closed the program year with a celebratory community lunch, where we used an appreciative inquiry process to share what we learned about ourselves and the various aspects of racial equity systems change, and shared hopes for the future.

### Planning for Systems Change: The Process



# Key Takeaways from an Appreciative Inquiry of the REIC 2023-2024 Program



## What new things have you learned that changed the way you think about race?

The responses highlight eye-opening historical events like redlining, the Tulsa race riots, and the suppression of accurate history education. There was a recognition that different households have different narratives, and there is a need to amplify marginalized perspectives. Many felt their education had gaps when it came to learning about race.

## How did talking with others help you?

Participants valued hearing diverse personal stories to understand different lived experiences. The discussions promoted intentional listening and asking "why" instead of just following instructions. There was an appreciation for the tools provided to navigate challenging race-related situations.

## What did you learn about yourself?

Participants reported increased self-awareness, bonding with others, ability to have vulnerable yet kind conversations across differences, and recognizing personal blind spots. Some felt empowered to step out of their comfort zones and valued the space to wrestle with discomfort.

## What do you want to remember most?

The diverse perspectives highlighted the limiting nature of identity boxes/categories. There was appreciation for the common goal that united the group despite differences. Some stressed the need to build awareness through storytelling of the progressive journey.

*Detailed insights from REIC 2023-2024 participants can be found in Appendix B.*

## SUSTAINABILITY

Even though the learning series ends after six sessions, UCS recognizes that racial equity systems change requires continuous learning as ideas are tested in the field.

Therefore, teams from participating cities have an additional nine months of access to Thought Partners for tailored coaching and technical assistance to support implementation of racial equity systems change plans.

Additionally, UCS convenes Racial Equity Roundtables to provide continuing education to the growing REIC Community of Practice, which includes past participants in REIC and their colleagues.

These Roundtables are designed to help the REIC community stay connected, learn new skills and knowledge, and grow opportunities for advancing racial equity in organizations and the broader community.

### THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



## APPENDIX

**A:** [REIC Resource Toolkit](#)

**B:** [Racial Equity in Communities Post-Assessment Report](#)