

CITY OF GASTONIA  
**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**  
**STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

2023 - 2028 | Adopted 2023





# INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the City of Gastonia's leadership in collaboration with City Council, embarked on a transformative journey, driven by the realization that our community was ready for a change. At the heart of this change was a commitment to fairness and inclusion, rooted in the voices and experiences of those we serve. Leading this effort, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator began laying the groundwork for a future in which we celebrate diversity with our community and prioritize equity.

The DEI Coordinator took significant steps in evaluating the organization's practices, processes, and procedures through a critical lens of equity and inclusion. This comprehensive evaluation served as a vital starting point in our journey towards becoming a more inclusive city. It was a process that involved close collaboration with community partners, and a commitment to building internal capacity for fostering diversity and inclusion.

City Leaders, guided by the invaluable insights from our community members and the dedication of the DEI Coordinator, began working with City Council to develop a DEI initiative. This initiative marked a pivotal moment in the history of our city, fueled by the collective desire to foster fairness and inclusion for the entire community that we serve. It was shaped by the real stories, experiences, and aspirations of the people who make Gastonia their home.

The City of Gastonia recognizes that embracing diversity, promoting equity, and fostering inclusion is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity. We believe that it's not enough to simply exist as a community; we must thrive as one, with every member of our city experiencing the opportunities and respect they deserve.

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Guiding Principles

The City of Gastonia is committed to creating and maintaining a work environment that is inclusive, equitable and welcoming. We value diversity and promise to honor your experiences, perspective and unique identity.



# THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

This Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan represents our commitment to the communities we serve as we work towards building a better, more inclusive future for Gastonia. It stands as a testament of our continued work to shape a city that not only reflects the diversity of its residents but also actively harnesses that diversity as a source of strength, innovation, and unity.

This Plan is based on a year-long strategic review of our organization's culture, hiring and retention practices and community engagement activities through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is also informed by the testament of the voices of our community, the insights and experiences of our employees, and the commitment and insight from the City's DEI Champion Team a working group made up of City employees from a representative mix of departments, who are committed to championing DEI within their departments.

Over the next three years, we will continue on the path set in 2018, a path grounded in the understanding that achieving diversity and inclusion requires conscious effort and a fundamental shift in the way we operate as a local government. It is about tearing down barriers, building bridges, and fostering a deep sense of belonging for all who call Gastonia home as well as those who visit our great city.

Our DEI Action Plan is a blueprint, a roadmap to guide our city through this transformation. It outlines specific goals, measurable objectives, and actionable strategies that will help us create a more equitable and inclusive community. By the end of this five year commitment, our aim is not only to have met these goals but to also have fundamentally shifted the culture and operations of our city in favor of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In addition to outlining the key goals and measurable objectives, we also emphasize our commitment to transparency and accountability, with the creation of a DEI dashboard, regular reporting, and continuous dialogue with employees and community members.

Our community is our greatest asset, and we are committed to involving our employees, residents, organizations, and businesses in this journey. We believe that by actively seeking input, building partnerships, and engaging in ongoing dialogue, we can create an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered.

The City of Gastonia is on a mission to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. We know that this mission is not a one-time effort but a commitment that will require constant attention and evolution. We invite everyone to join us on this journey because, in Gastonia, we believe that we can build a stronger, more vibrant community when we thrive together.

Let's embark on this journey together, a journey towards a Gastonia that celebrates the beauty of its diversity and the promise of a truly inclusive and equitable future.



# CITY OF GASTONIA DEFINITIONS

City Leadership believes it is important to ground the work in some commonly agreed upon definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to help future DEI conversations be more clearly understood and productive.

**DIVERSITY** – is expressed in many forms and includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing different characteristics like race and ethnicity, gender identity, age, socio-economic status, religion, political affiliation, physical and mental ability, personality, work-life issues, learning styles, etc.

**EQUITY** – is the just and fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people across all systems (economic, healthcare, housing, education, workforce, environment, social and community). Equity is distinct from equality and fairness. Equitable environments address disparities and strive to eliminate unique and systemic barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized groups. Such environments are free from discrimination, harassment, and bias.

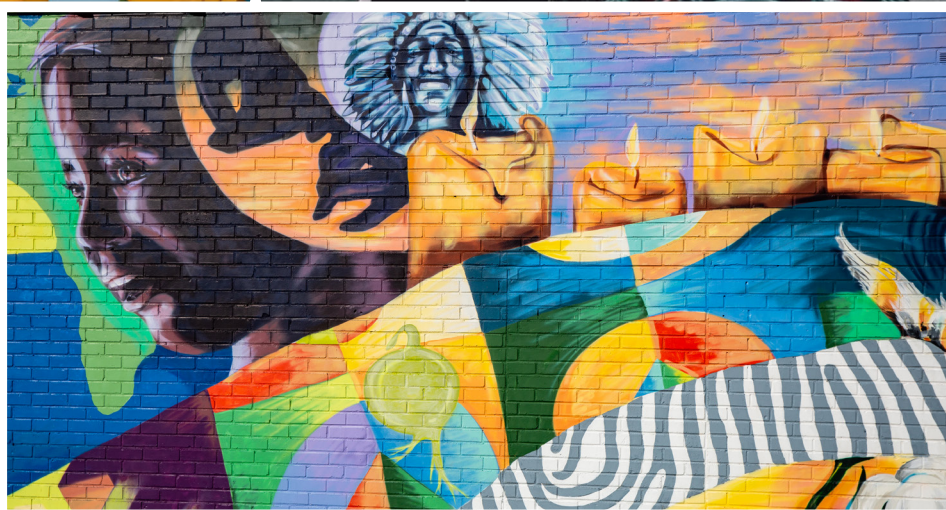
**INCLUSION** – is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, heard, and valued to fully participate.







# DIVERSITY EQUITY INCLUSION



## ***OUR VISION AND MISSION***

### **VISION**

**An inclusive and equitable organization and community where diversity is celebrated, and everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered.**

### **MISSION**

**Our mission is to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout all internal functions of the City's operations, policies, and services, fostering a sense of belonging and equal opportunities for all residents.**





## **GOAL 1: DEVELOP A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Increase the representation of underrepresented groups in the city government's workforce.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Conduct a workforce diversity assessment to identify current gaps.
- b. Implement targeted recruitment efforts to attract diverse candidates.
- c. Conduct implicit bias training for all hiring managers.
- d. Establish mentoring and professional development programs.

## **GOAL 2: EVALUATE SERVICE DELIVERY TO IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE DISPARITIES**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Measure level of satisfaction with city services and work to achieve 10% increase in overall satisfaction rates for city services among all demographic groups within the next five years.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Conduct equity assessments for all public services to identify disparities.
- b. Allocate resources to areas with the greatest need based on equity assessment findings.
- c. Enhance language access services for non-English speaking residents and customers.

## **GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Establish partnerships with at least five local community organizations focused on diversity and inclusion over the next 3 years.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Host regular town hall meetings and forums to gather feedback from community members.
- b. Collaborate with community partners/groups to co-design and implement inclusive initiatives.
- c. Launch an online platform to solicit public input on diversity and inclusion matters.





## **GOAL 4: ENHANCE EQUITY IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Review and revise at least 10 policies to incorporate equity considerations within the next three years.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Conduct policy reviews to identify areas for improvement.
- b. Integrate equity impact assessments into policy-making procedures.
- c. Work with each city department to identify equity action to incorporate in the annual equity action plan.

## **GOAL 5: PROMOTE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Implement diversity and inclusion training for all employees, elected officials, and appointed boards and volunteers and conduct public workshops and presentations.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Develop a comprehensive diversity training curriculum in collaboration with subject matter experts.
- b. Offer online training modules accessible to all employees.
- c. Organize community workshops on inclusive practices in collaboration with community partners.

## **GOAL 6: PUBLIC AWARENESS AND RECOGNITION**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Launch at least four public awareness campaigns annually to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Publish annual DEI Awareness calendar.
- b. Develop creative messaging and materials to highlight the diversity of staff and the community and share success of DEI strategies.
- c. Share success stories through local media and social channels.



## **GOAL 7: MONITOR PROGRESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Establish a DEI dashboard to track and report progress on diversity and inclusion goals and initiatives annually.

### **ACTIONS:**

- a. Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) for each goal to measure success.
- b. Appoint a DEI committee to oversee implementation and progress tracking.
- c. Publish annual reports on the city's DEI efforts for public transparency.

## **GOAL 8: RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE SUCCESS**

**MEASURABLE GOAL:** Recognize at least five outstanding initiatives or individuals promoting diversity and inclusion each year.

### **ACTIONS:**

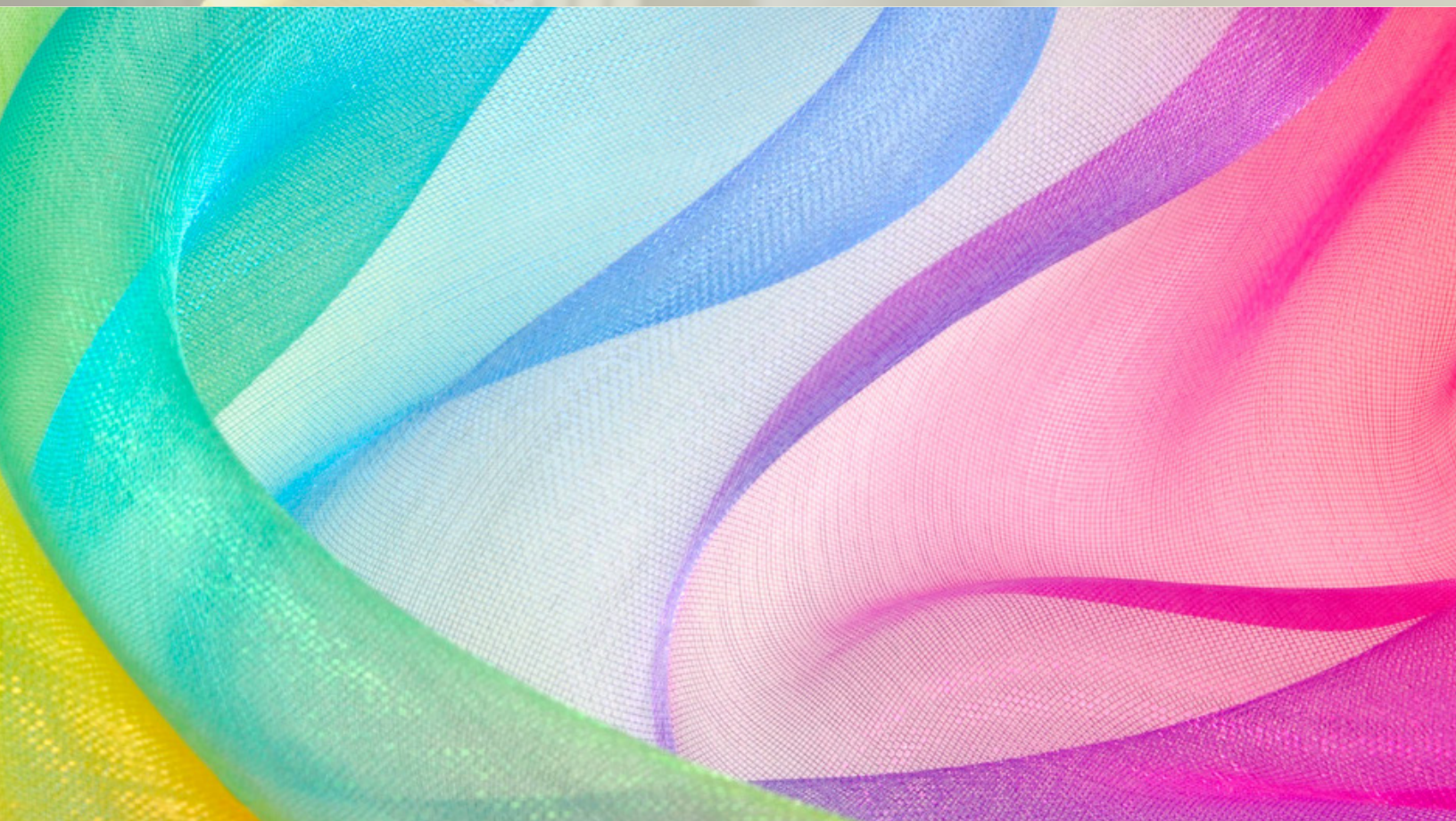
- a. Highlight exemplary DEI efforts in government publications.
- b. Establish an annual DEI award ceremony to acknowledge achievements.

By adopting this strategic action plan with measurable goals, the City of Gastonia can continue work to foster a more inclusive and equitable community, ensuring that diversity is celebrated and valued as a foundation for a thriving city. The continuous monitoring of progress allows us to to celebrate our successes, identify areas for improvement, and maintain transparency in our efforts.





# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



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