

City of Chicago RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Chicago Department of Buildings (DOB)

Under the City of Chicago's Municipal Code (Ch. 2-4-100), all City of Chicago departments must create and maintain Racial Equity Action Plans (REAPs) "to articulate and guide strategy aimed at advancing equity and making it a permanent pillar in all departmental workstreams."

Progress on all REAPs are accounted for annually as a part of the City of Chicago's budget process. This document outlines the components of the REAP and ensures that all strategies are aligned to Chicago's citywide vision: ***All people and all communities have power, are free from oppression, and are strengthened by equitable access to resources, environments, and opportunities that promote optimal health and well-being. (HC2025)***

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THE CITY OF CHICAGO'S DEFINITION OF EQUITY

Equity is both an outcome and a process:

As an **outcome** equity results in fair and just access to opportunity and resources that provide everyone the ability to thrive. Acknowledging the present and historical inequality that persist in our society, equity is a future state we strive to create where identity and social status no longer predestine life outcomes.

As a **process**, equity requires a new way of doing business: one that

- (1) Prioritizes access and opportunities for groups who have the greatest need.
- (2) Methodically evaluates benefits and burdens produced by seemingly neutral systems and practices.
- (3) Engages those most impacted by the problems we seek to address as experts in their own experiences, strategists in co-creating solutions, and evaluators of success.

Further, our focus is on evaluating our own strategies, interventions and resources in a way that prioritizes those who are most negatively impacted by current policies, procedures & practices.


Racial equity focuses on the social construction of race and how it has been used (historically and presently) to unjustly distribute opportunity and resources based on a person's skin color, heritage, ethnicity, and/or national origin. Advancing racial equity requires an analysis of systemic racism inclusive of the ways harm is created at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. It also requires a commitment to dismantling systems that perpetuate racialized outcomes and rebuild systems that produce systemic inclusion.🔗

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The coordination of the development and implementation of City of Chicago REAPs is led by the Office of Equity and Racial Justice. For more information about REAPs and/or the work of the office visit www.chicago.gov/equity.



RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #1 - DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS

The City of Chicago's Vision: All people and all communities have power, are free from oppression, and are strengthened by equitable access to resources, environments, and opportunities that promote optimal health and well-being. (HC2025) 

Citywide Priority Area & Desired Result:

HOUSING: All Chicagoans have healthy, accessible, and affordable homes

Indicators Examined:

Community Data

Housing Cost Burden; Household Income

Program/Department Data

Minor Maintenance Violations

Community Feedback and Narratives

The insights gleaned from our community engagement stimulated our desire to see our project grow. We presented the idea for a pilot plumbing repair initiative to non-profits. They were very supportive of our plan and interested in how they could support our initiative. 1) They provided balanced and objective information. 2) They presented an overview of what they provide and how it may help us. 3) They invited feedback on the progress of this initiative. One area identified as a place for collaboration is providing minor repairs on single-family homes.

Define the Problem

Residents (homeowners and tenants) on the South, Southeast, and West Side are the most burdened by violations, administrative hearings, and court cases - resulting in fines and fees to a population already facing financial hardship. This cycle perpetuates existing housing insecurity among these affected/impacted individuals. Further, 40-63% of residents who live in these areas of the City are rent-burdened. In addition, violations indicate that buildings are in desperate need of repair.

Identify Root Causes to the Problem

Institutions helped create the outcomes we see today through redlining, contract sales, block busting, and federal highway construction that segregated/isolated communities by race, where communities with white residents received resources and communities of color received less investments. These institutions have since abandoned any responsibility to the communities most impacted. In addition, there is little to no accountability for financial institutions to maintain properties. DOB is a regulatory department because of the Great Chicago Fire which was a response to the fire giving cause to the creation and implementation of the Chicago Building Code (CBC). Inspectors are burdened by the number of quality of life complaints versus the number of life safety issues which causes delays in inspection response times.

Define Your Department's Opportunity

We have the opportunity to work with the trade unions to develop, in tandem, an apprentice training opportunity that can serve the most vulnerable in the community, and advance our collective work in advancing our commitment to achieving racial equity. In addition, DOB plans to partner with City departments such as DOF to address debt caused by a lack of maintenance by homeowners which result in violations.

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #1

Our department will advance the following strategies:


1. Department Strategy: Develop relationships with community organizations to assist and serve communities most impacted by maintenance violations			
Measures of Impact: # of people served by new initiative; # of apprentices participating in the initiative; reduction in maintenance violations in communities served			
Actions	Implementation Plan	Timeline	Status
1.1 Partner with a variety of unions' apprenticeship programs to help with home repairs called in by tenants.	1. Meet with union officials to discuss and co-design a pilot plumbing repair program. 2. Create criteria and scope for realistic home repairs. 3. Collaborate with DOB administrative support, supervisors, and chiefs to identify homes that need home repairs during site visits, inspections, etc.	Launch Q2 2024	
1.2 Collaborate with non-profits who work on the South, West, and Southwest sides of Chicago to assist with minor repairs for single-family homes.	1. Engage non-profits to understand the challenges single-family homes are experiencing. 2. Develop scope for continued engagement and home repairs with non-profits.	Launch Q2 2024	
1.3 Explore securing supplies with Big Box Retailers and suppliers for home repairs.	1. Meet with retailers and suppliers to build relationships and determine how they can support the initiative. 2. Collaborate with non-profits to build a scope for this partnership and help advocate for supplies.	Launch Q1 2024	

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #1

Our department will advance the following strategies:

2. Department Strategy: Apply best practices from the plumbing repair pilot program to other areas of the department			
Measures of Impact: # of apprentices assigned 311 complaint repairs - Shared data between the department and Union Apprenticeship Officer - Monthly tracking of program impact.			
Actions	Implementation Plan	Timeline	Status
2.1 Assess the strengths and challenges of the minor repair program and identify opportunities to improve it.	Collaborate with union apprenticeships programs and non-profits to track and collect data on services provided and whether or not they are reducing financial burden. Share program data with senior leadership and identify teams and organizations who can support analysis. Implement changes identified before piloting in other divisions.	Launch 2025	
2.2 Scale the maintenance repair program up	Work with commissioners and deputy commissioners to identify divisions within the department that are most prepared to implement a similar maintenance repair program. Share best practices and procedures from the plumbing pilot with deputies who will implement the program.	Launch 2025	

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #2

The City of Chicago's Vision: All people and all communities have power, are free from oppression, and are strengthened by equitable access to resources, environments, and opportunities that promote optimal health and well-being. (HC2025) 



Citywide Priority Area & Desired Result:

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE & ENERGY: All Chicagoans breathe air free from pollutants and have resilient and sustainable communities.

Indicators Examined:

Community Data

% of government buildings retrofitted; % of commercial buildings retrofitted, air pollution

Program/Department Data

of homes retrofitted via CRP programs, DOB participation in key policy initiatives (Building Decarbonization, Cumulative Impact Assessment, etc.)

Community Feedback and Narratives

A survey conducted via The Climate Action Plan process represented 70 community areas and engaged over 2,000 residents. The top three outcomes that mattered most to residents (including BIPOC residents) was making it easy for families and businesses to sign up for renewable energy, ensuring better access to renewable energy, and ensuring better access to reliable transit. As one resident participant stated, "Investing in clean energy will reduce bills, reduce air pollution, and reduce the risk of climate disasters."

Define the Problem

(Excerpts from The Climate Action Plan; please refer to pages 18-21 for data and original source) . Vulnerable Chicagoans are at a higher risk to injury or death from the effects of climate-change-related extreme weather events than most people. An increase in hospital admissions of people with respiratory, heart, and kidney disease can occur during significant heat events or where people are socially isolated, lack mobility, and are unable to self-evacuate during heavy snows, rains, and floods. In addition, unstable energy prices can be particularly challenging for families experiencing economic hardship. Factors such as the rise of cost of electricity and natural gas in combination with home inefficiency (for example: poor insulation, aging appliances, and outdated equipment) make it difficult for residents experiencing economic hardship to pay their bills, thus putting them at risk of being disconnected or having an additional economic burden such as a bad credit score. Home inefficiency and moderate wages disproportionately cause energy burden in west, south, and far south communities—home to many Black and Latinx residents. Chicago's residential, commercial, and industrial buildings account for nearly 69% of the City's carbon footprint. In 2017, more than 42% of Chicago's greenhouse gas footprint came from electricity consumption. Coal and natural gas generate more than half of the electricity on the regional grid that serves Chicago. Transitioning from those sources to 100% renewable energy will dramatically reduce citywide emissions and improve air quality.

Identify Root Causes to the Problem

(Excerpt from The Climate Action Plan p. 17) The patterns of disproportionate pollution burden and climate inequities within Chicago follow familiar lines. Tonika Johnson's Folded Map Project explores how the practice of redlining in the 1930s—and other racist policies—set the stage for harmful race-based segregation, leading to underinvestment in Black neighborhoods that can be readily seen by comparing the buildings, streets, and community spaces in different Chicago neighborhoods. The consequences continue nearly 100 years later as climate vulnerability, pollution burden, and economic insecurity bring new and old threats to those same communities. The tragedy of climate injustice is evident in Chicago's history, with the city's 1995 heat wave remaining one of the deadliest climate disasters in the United States. Many of the 739 victims were elderly, low-income, and Black, living in apartments without ventilation or air conditioning in neighborhoods lacking social infrastructure and critical resources. An extreme-heat event in 1999 was also deadly, revealing a pattern of greater risk to those living in neighborhoods in more industrialized parts of the city. In these areas, with less greenspace and more asphalt, heat islands spur devastating health challenges for people battling a combination of worse air pollution and higher temperatures.

Define Your Department's Opportunity

DOB does work doing active building code updates directly correlated to the safety and energy usage of buildings. There are numerous opportunities to drive success aligned with the mission of DOB, the boldness of Chicago's Climate Action Plan, and the unprecedented federal resources from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Act and the Chicago Recovery Plan. DOB's immediate opportunities are in three areas: developing new codes to eliminate fossil fuels in new construction; building retrofits -ETF that applies to levels 2 and 3 alterations; tracking and enabling buildings to be solar ready, and promoting solar readiness on city, corporate, and resident rooftops.

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #2

Our department will advance the following strategies:

1. Department Strategy: Expanding Solar Adoption

Measures of Impact: Number of solar installations; and location of solar installation.


Actions	Implementation Plan	Timeline	Status
1.1 Expand solar readiness requirements to more building typologies	In the 2025 building and energy code update cycle, add additional solar readiness provisions that target large commercial and multifamily buildings in order to encourage broader adoption of solar in low-income and disenfranchised communities.	Launch: Q4 2024 End: Q4 2025	
1.2 Tracking solar permits	Tracking the number and location of solar permitting and final arrays throughout the City. Communicate or coordinate communication of that information geo-spatially for public access via the data portal. Tracking these metrics will allow for the accurate tracking of solar permits across community areas, which can inform outreach strategies and align equity-focused grant-making processes to advance solar adoption. This requires that the Department of Assets, Information, and Services (AIS) complete the upgrade of DOB's IT systems.	Launch: Q3 2023 End: Q3 2024	

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #2

Our department will advance the following strategies:

2. Department Strategy: Create building decarbonization policy and drive effective, equitable implementation			
Measures of Impact: Passage of new construction fossil fuel phaseout ordinance; passage of building performance standard; permit tracking of alternative code compliance applications.			
Actions	Implementation Plan	Timeline	Status
2.1 Pass a new construction fossil fuel phaseout policy	Working with the Office of Climate and Environmental Equity, DOB will work with OCEE on options to reduce fossil fuels which will directly support better air quality and will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Chicago.	Launch: Q1 2023 End: Q3 2023	
2.2 Explore greater building performance standards to improve energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and improve indoor air quality and comfort in existing buildings	DOB will explore the development of a Building Performance Standard for buildings larger than 50,000 square feet in Chicago. These performance standards will ensure that the safest, most energy-efficient building systems will be installed in existing buildings, which will benefit tenants and residents by potentially improving air quality, resilience to climate change, and lowering utility bills.	Launch: Q1 2023 End: Q2 2024	

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #3

The City of Chicago's Vision: All people and all communities have power, are free from oppression, and are strengthened by equitable access to resources, environments, and opportunities that promote optimal health and well-being. (HC2025) 



Citywide Priority Area & Desired Result:

WORKFORCE: The City of Chicago's workforce reflects the demographics of the City, and all employees are connected to training and advancement opportunities.

Indicators Examined:

Community Data

Education attainment, unemployment

Program/Department Data

City of Chicago workforce demographics were disaggregated by race, age, and gender.

Define the Problem

The Department of Buildings' workforce is reflective of the national and local aging workforce in the skilled trades. For DOB, 55% of the workforce is 55 or older, 43% are between age 35 to 54, and 2% are under age 35. Further, 80% of the DOB workers are male, and 20% are female. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average age of a skilled trade worker was 42.4. The national percentage of women in the skilled trades is 10%, and the percentage of women at DOB is double the national average. DOB executive leadership is also at 37.5% for women. To be qualified to work at DOB, one must have years of practical experience in the field, which also explains the age of the DOB workforce. Therefore, DOB does not hire directly out of college or apprenticeship programs. There remains a national shortage of skilled workers in the U.S., which is exacerbated by the retirement of an aging skilled trade workforce. There also remain historical barriers to entry into the skilled trades for women and members of historical disenfranchise communities.

Identify Root Causes to the Problem

1. Historically, women have faced many barriers to careers in the trade industry. 2. The US Department of Education reports a critical workforce challenge in the United States: there is a skills gap, particularly among jobs that require either a high school diploma, postsecondary certificate, or associate's degree. Jobs requiring these skills outnumber the adults in the workforce who possess them, and this gap presents a barrier to American economic competitiveness. There is a huge need to engage young people to gain these skills beginning in middle school. 3. The U.S. and Chicago are still recovering for the misguided policy that educational success was measured primarily on sending every student to college. That policy had the

devastating impact of dismantling skilled trade vocational programs and courses in our high schools and middle schools. 4. In addition, as mandated under Collective Bargaining Agreements, career advancement within the department is mainly based on union tenure and union positions account for 88.2% of the DOB workforce.

Define Your Department's Opportunity

To be qualified to work at DOB, one must have years of practical experience in the field. Therefore, DOB does not hire directly out of college or apprenticeship programs. This, again, is why the DOB workforce is older than other departments. For example, DOB plumbing inspectors must have a minimum of seven years of experience as a licensed plumber before applying to DOB for an inspector position. DOB is therefore, dependent on a steady pipeline of workers coming into and remaining in the skilled trades. DOB works closely with all of the relevant trade apprenticeship programs, trade contractor associations, the Chicago Public Schools, the City Colleges of Chicago, and non-profit organizations to promote recruitment into the skilled trades. DOB also works with Black Contractor Owners & Executives, Hispanic American Construction Industry Association, American Indian Manpower Association, Federation of Women Contractors, Chicago Women in Trades, Hire 360, Chicago, Industry Services Corp, and Powering Chicago to recruit women and minorities into the trades.

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #3

Our department will advance the following strategies:

1. Department Strategy: Build relationships with schools, colleges/universities, and trade programs to strengthen pipelines to employment at the Department of Buildings and increase underrepresented staff.

Measures of Impact: representation of women, moniorites, and young adults

Actions	Implementation Plan	Timeline	Status
1.1 Continue to cultivate strong relationships with organizations and programs that work with recruiting women, minorities, and young people into the skilled trades	Continue to work closely with all of the relevant trade apprenticeship programs, trade contractor associations, the Chicago Public Schools, the City Colleges of Chicago, and non-profit organizations to promote recruitment into the skilled trades. Continue to work closely with Black Contractor Owners & Executives, Hispanic American Construction Industry Association, American Indian Manpower Association, Federation of Women Contractors, Chicago Women in Trades, Hire 360, Chicago, Industry Services Corp, and Powering Chicago to recruit women and minorities into the trades.	2023	
1.2 Encourage CPS and City Colleges to expand vocational training, including pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship, courses and programs	DOB's workforce consists of workers from ten skilled trade collective bargaining units that can be a recruiting and instructional asset to CPS and CCC.	2024	

RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN: Priority #3

Our department will advance the following strategies:

2. Department Strategy: Build internal knowledge and capacity to advance racial equity

Measures of Impact: staff ratings/ satisfaction with racial equity training, progress on racial equity commitments

Actions	Implementation Plan	Timeline	Status
2.1 Provide foundational racial equity training to staff at all levels and across all teams	Partner with the Office of Equity & Racial Justice to share foundational racial equity training, Equity 101, with senior leaders in the department. Create a plan to ensure all staff review racial equity training and implement learnings into their daily responsibilities. Ensure new staff receives foundation training in the onboarding process in the years to come. Track the percentage of staff who participates in training.	2023	
2.2 Socialize the department's Racial Equity Action Plan within the department	Convene senior department leaders to discuss racial equity action plans, teams who can lead this work, and opportunities for senior leadership to support this work.	2024	
2.3 Build a team who will help coordinate the execution of department equity commitments	Build a work plan for racial equity commitments. Establish regular meetings to support execution and track progress.	2024	