



# Ashland Racial Equity Initiative (REI Report)

January, 2022

**Prepared by**

Suffolk University Institute for Public Service

**Prepared for**

Steering Committee, Town of Ashland



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## About the Team and Our Work

This Report outlines the areas in which the Suffolk University Institute for Public Service (IPS) Team provided technical assistance (TA) to the Town of Ashland Racial Equity Initiative (REI). The TA included working with Ashland's Steering Committee to gather data and conduct an analysis of community and stakeholder perspectives on race and equity within the Town of Ashland, MA. The Report provides an Executive Summary and is organized into two sections – process and results from the online survey, and insights from focus groups and interviews.

The Institute for Public Service (IPS) is located in the Sawyer Business School at Suffolk University, Boston, MA. The Suffolk IPS Team partnered with the IPS's National Center for Public Performance (NCPP) in this effort. The NCPP is an interdisciplinary research and public service center, devoted to improving performance in and of public and nonprofit organizations. The NCPP brings together faculty, staff, students, and partners (local, national and global) to collaborate on a variety of diverse initiatives, including research, education, conferences, community engagement, training and technical assistance.

The Suffolk Team consisted of IPS Faculty Sonia Alleyne, MA, Brenda J. Bond-Fortier, PhD., Marc Holzer, Ph.D., Aimee Williamson, Ph.D., along with Research Assistants Ruha Adelkar, Isabella Fierimonte, Maranjelys Cortijo and Julia Stergas. NCPP Managing Directors Samantha Stringer and Mary Gibson served on the Team.

This comprehensive Report offers an overview of our scope of work, our collection and analytical methodologies, a summary of findings and observations, and recommendations. This report reflects the views of participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in our community listening and survey efforts. As a result, the observations reflect the perceptions, experiences, and feedback of these individuals.

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## Letter to the Reader

Dear Ashland Partners,

We are delighted to share the results of our community listening project from the past several months. We are inspired by the work in Ashland and hopeful that it will inform positive change. Upon listening to the voices of Ashland community members, we have put forth recommendations and best courses of action for Ashland's consideration.

Over the summer of 2021, The Suffolk University Team conducted interviews, surveys and focus groups with residents of Ashland to assess current mindsets and beliefs about diversity and inclusion in the community. Utilizing data acquired from this research, we produced recommendations for best possible practices going forward. This report encourages not only Ashland to deliberately pursue ideas of diversity and inclusion for all, but it also serves as a model for the remaining cities and towns across the Commonwealth.

We hope this report will be helpful to sitting members of the Steering Committee as well as residents who are lucky enough to call Ashland, Massachusetts home.

Sincerely,

**Sonia L. Alleyne, MPA**

**Brenda Bond-Fortier, PhD,**

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## **Executive Summary and Recommendations**

The technical assistance (TA) provided to the Ashland Racial Equity Initiative (REI) Steering Committee was grounded in a commitment to understanding the experiences and perceptions of members of the Ashland community relative to race, equity, and inclusivity, and to gather feedback and ideas to help build a more equitable and inclusive community. The TA project was conducted between March and September 2021. The report provides a snapshot of insights gathered from members of the Ashland community during this time.

### **Recent challenges:**

Recent years have seen increased tension in most parts of the country around race, equity, and justice in communities, institutions, and society more broadly. The town of Ashland is not isolated from the challenges facing other communities but has taken the necessary first steps to understand community experiences, perspectives, and interests as it relates to race, equity and justice. This TA project began with an intention to document the experiences and views of community members from diverse backgrounds, providing the space to have conversations around these and other issues that may naturally emerge.

### **The Technical Assistance Process:**

The Suffolk University Team worked closely with the REI Steering Committee in the design and implementation of the community listening and learning effort. We distributed an electronic survey through formal and informal channels (e.g. town mailers, social media, flyers), and received just over 200 responses. We conducted virtual and in-person focus groups and interviews, meeting with just under 40 community members from diverse backgrounds. We also conducted a netnography-or a review and analysis of common social media accounts that focus on Ashland. A best practice review informed our process and our recommendations.


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## **Findings and Themes:**

The community listening sessions and the online survey asks respondents to share their experiences and engagement with “Town Government”. Conversations and the survey referred to town government as: Town Hall offices, recreation/ community education/library/ public safety/ social services/ public works/ public spaces (playground, woods, corner spot), so as to ensure that participants had a common understanding of what town government meant in these discussions. As Ashland community members move forward on improving REI efforts, it would be beneficial to look at each unit within town government to identify specific unit strengths and opportunities for improvement. For instance, how the Ashland Police Department improves their REI work may differ from how the Ashland Library does so, and so on.

Feedback and community input included a range of opinions and ideas, reflecting the diversity of needs and interests across the community. There was wide-ranging awareness that the community and nation are at a critical moment relative to race, equity, and justice. One of the most notable themes from our community conversations was the desire for more conversation and engagement relative to race, equity, and justice. Community members were overwhelmingly pleased to join the conversations, and are ready to more deliberately engage in conversation and change to help Ashland build on an already strong foundation of community. We recommend continued efforts to engage a truly diverse collection of community members, utilizing community leaders and ambassadors such as faith-based, public, and private representatives, and individuals from the broader community interested in contributing to Ashland’s future. (Community Tool Box, 2021) Encourage folks in the community either to sit on existing town committees or to establish new committees to address issues of the town going forward.

Efforts such as the Farmer’s Market, the Corner Spot, open space and geographic accessibility were highly regarded and noted as some of the best of what Ashland has to offer. Many shared positive experiences volunteering for various town committees and



in their interactions with town leaders and staff. Even those who recognized the need for more diversity and inclusion noted their great interest in increasing and strengthening engagement and community activities to improve the community of Ashland. In addition, according to our survey, 61% of the respondents expressed a strong or very strong sense of belonging in Ashland while 26% felt a weak sense of belonging.

### **Online Survey Themes:**

To raise awareness of the REI's survey, a notice about the survey, and the link to the survey, were sent to all Ashland water service customers. This mailing provided the information to complete the survey. The survey information and link were also shared through social media, traditional paper flyers and word of mouth. While we recognize that 2021 created challenges for collecting information from the community through in-person activities, the REI shared the survey (and focus group) information through many channels to gather community feedback.

Notable themes were revealed through our web-based survey. From June 25th to August 31st, 2021, 201 Ashland residents completed the Racial Equity Initiative's online survey. Of these participants, 60.94% self-identified as female, 33.59% self-identified as male, and .78% identified as nonbinary. Moreover, 72.09% of these participants self-identified as white or Caucasian, 9.3% as Asian, 6.98% as Black or African American, and .78% as biracial or multiracial.<sup>1</sup>

### **The responses of these residents highlight six main areas of concern related to diversity and inclusion in the town:**

- the school system;
- the business sector;
- town government;
- specific forms/instances of discrimination;

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix - attachment A for a demographic comparison between Ashland residents, and survey participants

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- accessibility and development;
  - community engagement/outreach.

Two of these areas seem to be particularly important to survey respondents and will be expanded upon in this summary. Firstly, the school system, despite demonstrating hopeful progress in recent years, seems to be one major area where residents report that incidents of discrimination occur. Over half of the survey respondents either strongly disagreed, somewhat disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that “BIPOC students have equal educational opportunities in Ashland.” This means that there is sizable room for improvement in this area. Some residents report that homophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-black forms of bullying have not always been adequately addressed by school administrators and teachers. Concerned residents recommend diversifying school staff members and giving teachers the flexibility to freely discuss issues of racism with students in the classroom.

Another major area of concern is the lack of diversity in town gatherings, meetings, and government. These concerns may be further supported by the demographic make-up of survey participants. Over 72% of participants self-identified as “White or Caucasian.” Although this is 10% less than the percentage of white residents of the town as a whole, the number of BIPOC respondents (12 Asian respondents, 9 African American or Black respondents, 1 biracial or multiracial respondent, and 4 that self-identified as another race or ethnicity) still demonstrates a lack of engagement by black, indigenous, and other people of color in this community project. In order to bolster this engagement for the future, community members recommend: expanding outreach beyond internet sources to ensure accessibility; broadly sharing a free town publication to advertise town events and happenings; and organizing monthly town events where participants are actively encouraged to speak with new and unfamiliar folks. (Keleher, 2018)

Additionally, concerns of accessibility and development (or areas of improvement) are a common concern of respondents. In this report, accessibility refers

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to a level of comfort engaging or communicating with different groups or units. It also captures if and how respondents are informed (e.g. some do not have access to social media, or printed newsletters). To Ashland respondents, accessibility to town hall meetings, gatherings, and happenings is not ideal. Developing better marketing practices for town hall proceedings will allow for better access. This could be done by having a stronger social media presence, increasing advertisements for meetings (such as more ads in local papers), televised/online/recorded meetings for future consumption and distribution. Making all town-related business more accessible for public consumption (e.g. diverse mechanisms for information sharing) will foster an environment where community members feel comfortable voicing their opinions and suggestions for improvement and development.

Despite these concerns, there is an overarching sense that the town has been improving in recent years; when asked for words that came to mind when thinking about Ashland, various community members shared that it was “growing,” “learning,” “evolving,” “striving,” and “wanting to do/be better.”

### **Focus Group & Interview Themes:**

In terms of areas of improvement, we note the following themes from the focus groups and interviews:

One consistent theme centered on the diversity of public-facing community actors. For instance, community members perceive that town representatives do not reflect the diversity of the community population. We heard similar views on the perceptions of business owners. Feedback suggests that the population of business owners does not reflect the diversity of the community, nor are the types of businesses reflective of the diverse interests of those we spoke to vis-à-vis services, food, and culture. We heard through several conversations that there is a desire for more information on the diversity of school personnel and diversification efforts within the school system.

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We also learned of many school-related needs in these listening sessions. We learned that many parents do not feel appreciated or well received in the schools and that it is difficult for people of color to navigate formal and informal school systems (e.g. access to athletics, parent-teacher efforts, parent groups). We reached out to the Ashland school department but unfortunately were unable to connect with faculty or staff. It is important for open communication, conversation and dialogue to occur between school board members and parents or family. We highly encourage these lines of communication to remain open, and diversified, to promote comfortability and positive relationships.

Communication was a main theme from discussions. Some participants noted the value of communication from the Town Hall, while others were unaware of Town communications. Some utilize social media, while others do not. Efforts to enhance and diversify communications to and from Town Hall, and within the community would go a long way in increasing understanding of REI efforts.


The main recommendation among many is the value of creating consistent space for residents to engage in meaningful dialogue so that they understand the experiences of their neighbors, and celebrate those differences that bring them together. (Community Tool Box, 2021) The ultimate goal is to develop a sense of belonging in the town, which has opened its arms to all residents.

### **Best Practices:**

Our community listening and learning efforts revealed a number of suggestions about how the community and formal town structures can facilitate greater community engagement, equity and inclusion.

### **The Importance of Committee Membership**

The Town of Ashland must manage their interest in short-term action with sustainable and adaptive engagement and growth. Best practices suggest that community change happens through deliberate and intentional efforts, facilitated by



community leaders; both formal and informal (Keleher, 2018). One way to be a catalyst for positive change is to encourage members of your community to run for town committees or to establish committees of their own. In our online survey, we noticed trends that occurred with community members who identified that they were current sitting members on town committees. Current committee members answered (more than participants who were not sitting members on any committees) that they were more likely to interact with other community members and to utilize town services. Gaining a more diverse membership for various committees will promote feelings of inclusion and make town residents feel more represented at official hearings and meetings.

Community planning and change start with a community assessment. The current assessment, combined with previous data collection efforts, provide a starting point for community change. A good model to study is Community Tool Box's Model of Change: *Building Capacity for Community and System Change*.<sup>2</sup>

Moving from assessment to planning and action should be an REI Steering Committee priority. The assessment conducted by the Suffolk Team offers a range of suggestions, centered within a number of themes. The findings reveal concerns, as well as ideas for improvement. Our primary recommendation is to share the results of this assessment with the community as part of a comprehensive plan for community action (Community Tool Box, 2021).

As the REI Steering Committee continues their work, we want to emphasize the need to learn more about community interactions with various town offices and representatives. As noted, our listening sessions asked about interactions with town government more broadly, but we know that different community members and constituent groups interact with different offices for different reasons. It is worth learning more about interactions with different units (e.g. Town Hall offices, recreation

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1. Our Model for Community Change and Improvement | Section 3. Our Model of Practice: Building Capacity for Community and System Change | Main Section | Community Tool Box (ku.edu)

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department, community library, public safety, social service, and public works). The ultimate goal is to develop a sense of belonging in the town, which has opened its arms to all residents. Capturing the voice of diverse community members, especially those that are not currently engaged, is critical to creating an inclusive community.

The REI Steering Committee must identify the best way to communicate the findings, but do so within the context of an intentional and comprehensive plan.

### **Strategic Plans**

A comprehensive plan requires both vision and a mission. Does such a vision and mission already exist? Should the vision and mission be created by the REI Steering Committee, or a broader group of community? How will the vision be achieved, and who is to be involved? These are complex questions. The Suffolk Team cannot answer these questions or even articulate goals and priorities for Ashland. The community must articulate what these concepts mean for Ashland and how to best effect change. The Suffolk Team is contributing to the community assessment through the current effort, and offering suggestions on how to proceed. However, we realize that we are not part of the Ashland community or the formal structures of Ashland, therefore our recommendations to the REI Steering Committee are considerations and are best understood and acted upon within the context of your vision and goals.

**Below we offer resources for strategic change in community contexts. These resources offer insight on strategic leadership, vision, participation and collaboration:**

The *City of Salem, MA* provides an example of the comprehensiveness and complexity involved in the type of change that Ashland seeks. See <https://.org/raceequitysaalem>

→ This site offers a helpful section: “Conversations About Race” and “Reading for Change”. It provides book recommendations from BIPOC authors. This would be a great suggestion for a book club

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or book talk series; this literature is an excellent way to stimulate community conversations about race.

The *International City/County Managers Association* (ICMA) provides a repository of resources for communities; large and small. The organization aims to promote healthy and operational communities through strategic change. <https://icma.org/topics/equity-inclusion>

- This site includes a helpful “toolkit” (see link below) that will provide you with a checklist of necessary practices when exploring better tactics of inclusion and diversity.

The IMCA website’s strategic toolkit for improving and promoting diversity and inclusion within your community: <https://icma.org/documents/icma-equity-inclusion-toolkit>.

- Please also take extra note of the article entitled: “7 Ways City Leaders Can Address Inequities” for specific response examples.

The *National League of Cities* provides a portal for resources and training largely based around case studies. This non- partisan organization is devoted to improving quality of life city and town residents and promotion of equity and justice [National League of Cities - Cities Strong Together \(nlc.org\)](http://nlc.org)

- This site also includes a resource library for helpful literature regarding diversity and inclusion. Particularly, “A Path toward Safe and Equitable Cities” should easily assist you on this path.
- This site also has a page devoted to examples of “Cities in Action”. This includes strategic steps that other cities and towns have utilized to promote inclusion; helpful and useful models.

The *Urban Institute* proposes strategies for models of more inclusive neighborhoods and how to actively promote them. UI also highlights policy propositions to further facilitate change [Promoting Neighborhood Diversity: Benefits, Barriers, and Strategies \(urban.org\)](http://urban.org)

→ Identifying barriers on your journey toward a more inclusive city is imperative and sometimes difficult. This deliverable provides such assistance in identifying struggles on your path.

**Our suggestions and recommendations that lend themselves to shorter-term action are provided here:**

1. Sharing of findings with School leadership to guide a review of parent and community engagement in school activities, as well as curriculum efforts. We understand from some of our conversations that efforts in the schools are underway, but these efforts may not be communicated adequately to the community.
2. Formal efforts by Town officials to improve the following:
  - Deliberate and advertised efforts to offer small business development workshops for members of the community, especially people of color who may have an interest in the business. Additional support is needed to assist with process and registration protocols. (Curren, Nelson, Marsh, Noor, & Liu, 2016)
  - Creation and adoption of a Diversity and Inclusion Plan that details and guides a comprehensive approach to recruitment, hiring, training, and professional development of personnel and volunteers – across all community entities. Collaboration with personnel and labor is needed in some areas. (Community Tool Box, 2021)
  - We recommend that Town Leaders revisit the use of technology and social media with multiple benefits in mind: 1) use communication as a tool to brand Ashland as an inclusive community; serve as a conduit for increasing awareness of current REI efforts, and 3) support ongoing data collection to allow for community-informed decision making. In that vein, exploring the addition of a web-based page or portal that serves as a repository of information and supports information dissemination and transparency. For instance, demographic data on town personnel, advertisements about open paid and volunteer positions, or other like content can serve as one communication mechanism.

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3. Given that there is hunger for more conversations and discussions and therefore, such projects should be done on a continuous basis. Have more proactive conversations about race, equity, and inclusion to give people an outlet to anonymously share their experiences around discrimination. Given that there may be existing groups in place in support of community engagement (e.g. Ashland Town Library, AREA, Ashland is United, as examples), the REI Steering Committee should facilitate how continued conversations can occur.

Overall, this was a very rewarding and uncertain experience for the REI Steering Committee to embark upon, and we were honored to be a part of this emerging process. This leadership shows that there is an understanding of the complexities that exist in developing a town that is welcoming to all who seek to reside and conduct business there. Furthermore, there is an acknowledgement that residents approach the issue of race and equity from various vantage points, and respecting that, not everyone may choose to come along with you on the journey.

## **1. Background and Methodology**

The Suffolk Team facilitated a number of data collection efforts to gather feedback and ideas from Ashland community members. Members of the Ashland REI Steering Committee, and many others, have been talking about and planning for broader community engagement for some time. However, the past year has revealed a number of interests about race, justice and inclusion. In collaboration with the Ashland REI Steering Committee, there was a particular interest in the community's reflections about race, equity and inclusion before and since the racial uprisings of 2020, and certainly, pre and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to stressed racial climate in the country, in the spring of 2021 Suffolk University's Institute for Public Service in partnership with the National Center for Public Performance was selected in response to an RFP led by the Racial Equity Initiative in the town of Ashland. The contract was to conduct a comprehensive



process to support Ashland’s efforts to improve multicultural competency and better understand the equity and racial issues facing the community. The objective of the project was to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative information to determine to what extent the spirit of diversity and inclusion was knitted into the fabric of Ashland.

In order to get a more holistic and concrete understanding and analysis for this project, we conducted a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. The Suffolk team utilized four different research methods:

**Qualtrics online survey**

**Focus Groups**

**One-on-One Interviews**

**Netnography**

These research methods were conducted over a four-month period (May to August.) All of the research methods consisted of town residents and stakeholders who had a business interest in the town. It is important to note that all of the responses from the respondents were strictly confidential and their names were not shared in the findings and recommendations to the Ashland REI Steering Committee.

**Across the various data collection efforts, the Suffolk Team sought to capture perceptions, experiences and ideas relative to various identifiable themes. The table below defines these themes:**

<b>Interactions with town</b>	We asked the participants to reflect or comment on their interactions with the Ashland Town Government. such as with Town Hall offices, recreation/community education/library/public safety/social services/public works/ public spaces (playground, woods, corner spot, etc.,).
<b>Business/Commercial Community</b>	These questions asked about the experiences with or perceptions of the business community and those that conduct business in Ashland and if the businesses in the town represent its residents in terms of diversity and interests.
<b>Community</b>	These questions asked about the experiences with or perceptions of the community in general, and the overall thoughts on the community of Ashland as a place to live, work, and visit.
<b>Community Improvement</b>	This gave an opportunity to share ways to improve the Town of Ashland in terms of the schools/ committees/ businesses.

**The table below provides a summary of the qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts implemented in support of the technical assistance effort.**

	<b>Qualitative (Exploratory)</b>	<b>Quantitative (Descriptive)</b>
<b>Technique</b>	In-depth Interview, Focus Groups	Survey
<b>Sample Size</b>	39 Participants	201 responses

<b>Purpose Of Technique</b>	One-on-one insightful conversations to understand resident and community member experiences and behavior complemented by follow-up probes to get deeper	Formal and structured questionnaire with an objective to make more accurate predictions about relationships between market factors and behaviors and validate existence of relationships.
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Data Reduction: Categorization and coding to identify common themes	Descriptive, Associative and Differences Analysis
<b>Collection Mode</b>	Virtual meetings via Zoom & In-person meetings in Ashland	Online survey using Qualtrics

**Community Survey:** To reach a broader group of Ashland community members, the Suffolk Team created a web-based survey and administered it during the month of August 2021. The survey instrument included focus group and interview questions with structured answer options, but also included optional demographic questions about survey respondents. Respondents had the option to add comments via one open-ended question. The web-based survey link was shared via formal town mailers to all Ashland households, via the official town website, through social media, and through flyers distributed by Steering Committee members.

**Interviews & Focus Groups:** Town of Ashland residents were asked to participate in focus groups and /or interviews as part of Ashland's efforts to understand and improve multicultural competency and better understand the equity and racial issues experienced by and facing the community. Focus groups allowed us to gather information from the community on a small number of critical areas that would help inform Ashland's efforts in this area. The focus groups were led by members of the Suffolk University Institute for Public Service and were confidential.

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**Netnography:** We also conducted a Netnography, which is a research and analytical technique that monitors naturally occurring communications of people on online platforms (i.e. social media) (Belk et al., 2012). A netnography broadens an understanding of the REI’s objective, with a specific interest in gaining insight into the nature and types of “conversations” or information sharing focused on Ashland.

**Review of Model and Promising Practices:** The Suffolk Team also researched and identified a number of model approaches and programs to inform decisions and actions of the Ashland REI Steering Committee. These best practices and model change approaches are integrated throughout the report.

## 2. Surveys

### **Purpose and Goals of the Online Survey**

After conducting various in-person and online one-hour focus groups, the Suffolk team decided to craft an online survey. The team felt that an online format could offer three important benefits that in-person meetings could not. Firstly, the online survey offers participants a much faster way to offer their feedback and recommendations. Instead of engaging in a focus group discussion that would last for one hour or more, online survey participants were generally able to share their experiences in approximately fifteen minutes or less. Secondly, the online survey offers participants an increased sense of anonymity. Instead of joining a focus group and introducing themselves to other community members, the online format allowed participants to engage in this town project in total solitude. This allowed certain community members to share their thoughts more openly and freely, without fear of judgment or intimidation. Lastly, the online survey offers greater scheduling flexibility for participants. Instead of pre-registering for a live focus group, participants could decide when to complete the survey on their own time. This helped to ensure that the project was more accessible for those who are unable to take time from work, childcare, and so on. The team was hopeful that these three benefits of an online survey would collectively help to increase the level of community engagement with the project.

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## **Methodology of the Online Survey**

The online survey instrument was developed directly from the questions designed for the project's focus groups. These questions were manipulated where needed to ensure their relevance for multiple-choice answers. See a copy of the survey instrument can be found in addendum 1.

- The online survey was designed on, and hosted by, the Qualtrics software platform.
- The team utilized the U.S. Census Bureau's categories for the collection of demographic statistics (see question 28 of addendum 2).
- The online survey was promoted by the Ashland town website, through flyers distributed physically the town and on town social media accounts, and by a postcard in Ashland's Town Water bill, distributed in early August.
- The survey data displays participant's answers exactly as they have inputted them into our online survey software. We have not manipulated or amended their answers in any way.
- The raw survey data, found in the 2nd addendum, is completely anonymous. Any information that may seem to identify a participant in one response cannot be matched or found to be relevant in any of the following questions/ answers.
- When analyzing respondent answers and choosing quotes to include in the following "Summary of Survey Results" section, the team focused on responses that seemed to encapsulate general thematic concerns. Rather than highlighting quotes demonstrating exceptional experiences in town, we have listed quotes that demonstrate more common concerns that were brought to our attention by multiple respondents.

## **Summary of the Survey Results**

In total, 201 Ashland residents completed the Racial Equity Initiative's online survey. Of these participants, 60.94% self-identified as female, 33.59% self-identified as male, and .78% identified as nonbinary. Moreover, 72.09% of these participants self-

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identified as white or Caucasian, 9.3% as Asian, 6.98% as Black or African American, and .78% as biracial or multiracial.

The responses of these residents highlight six main areas of concern related to diversity and inclusion in the town: the school system; the business sector; town government; specific forms/ instances of discrimination; accessibility and development; and community engagement/ outreach. Please find survey quotes below that represent each area of concern in community members' own voices, as well as specific recommendations that these individuals have for helping the town to transcend these issues.

Two of these areas seem to be particularly important to survey respondents and will be expanded upon in this summary. Firstly, the school system, despite demonstrating hopeful progress in recent years, seems to be one major area where residents report that incidents of discrimination occur. Over half of the survey respondents either strongly disagreed, somewhat disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that "BIPOC students have equal educational opportunities in Ashland." This means that there is sizable room for improvement in this area. Various residents report that homophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-black forms of bullying have not always been adequately addressed by school administrators and teachers. Concerned residents recommend diversifying school staff members and giving teachers the flexibility to freely discuss issues of racism with students in the classroom.

Another major area of concern is the lack of diversity in town gatherings, meetings, and government. These concerns may be further supported by the demographic make-up of survey participants. Over 72% of participants self-identified as "White or Caucasian." Although this is 10% less than the percentage of white residents of the town as a whole, the number of BIPOC respondents (12 Asian respondents, 9 African American or Black respondents, 1 biracial or multiracial respondent, and 4 that self-identified as another race or ethnicity) still demonstrates a lack of engagement by black, indigenous, and other people of color in this community project. In order to

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bolster this engagement for the future, community members recommend: expanding outreach beyond internet sources to ensure accessibility; developing a free town publication to advertise town events and happenings; and organizing monthly town events where participants are actively encouraged to speak with new and unfamiliar folks.

A concerning trend revealed in the Qualtrics online survey was that the majority of African American, black, multiracial or persons of color answered that they have experienced some form of discrimination in the Greater Ashland community. Only about a quarter of white residents answered that they had experienced the same. We have provided visuals for this deeper analysis in the Attachment section of the Addenda (pg. 29-30).

Despite these concerns, there is an overarching sense that the town has been improving in recent years; when asked for words that came to mind when thinking about Ashland, various community members shared that it was “growing,” “learning,” “evolving,” “striving,” and “wanting to do/ be better.”

### **Thematic Overview of Survey with Excerpts**

#### **1) The School System**

- *“The discrimination we have experienced has been in the schools. We are advocates for our children because of this and have regularly reported incidences when they arise. On occasion, we’ve ignored instances because it’s so exhausting to confront it all the time”*

According to respondents, Ashland teachers have occasionally failed to respond to reports of white students using racial slurs against students of color.

- *“Usage of n-word in academic settings”*
- *“I graduated from Ashland High School in 2007. At this time, the school may have had a policy of non-discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people but did little to foster a culture of inclusivity among its student body. As a gay teen, I was frequently the*

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*subject of homophobic bullying by many of my peers. I do not know how school culture has changed since then, but it was definitely a major problem at the time”*

## **2) Businesses**

- *“Some businesses with women and people of color are housed in a historic building our government wants to turn into apartments. They will be forced to find a new location.”*

## **3) Town Government**

- *“Town government is an insiders’ game and completely non-inclusive”*
- *“Lack of local government listening... doing what they want regardless of resident input”*

## **4) Forms/ Instances of Discrimination**

- *“Swastikas found at the middle and high school”*
- *“No support for the deaf in local government; meetings are not close captioned, no headsets at meetings”*
- *“Racially loaded flags/ paraphernalia displayed in front yards”*
- *“Racial profiling”*
- *“Held by police without cause other than sitting in a parking lot while black”*

## **5) Accessibility and Development**

- *“For the last 70 years, the town has done everything it could through zoning housing in attempts to control schools’ financial needs and increase individual home values. This has resulted in eating up green spaces and preventing low or reasonable housing costs”*

- 
- *“Our neighborhoods are very segregated”*

## **Thematic Occurrences**

### **1. The School System**

- “Increase the number of teachers and staff of color (there’s just no way you can do proper equity work without having people of color in teaching/ administration positions). It was clear to me that the school district had given up in that area (I was told they were on par with other schools -- that’s not a good excuse)”
- “Teachers should be able to discuss these issues in the classroom and be supported by administrators.”

### **2. Businesses**

- “Support businesses of color and women-owned and immigrant-owned by not joining in forcing them out of town”
- “Support the development of minority-owned businesses”

### **3. Town Government**

- Have “town officials organize via specific invitations to people in the town for a purpose that would encourage conversation and getting to know people you wouldn’t otherwise know. Then when committees needed members it would be easier to reach out to people because you would have met them”
- “Active (and sustained!) effort to diversify every board and committee in town”  
“Avoid re-appointing the same people on committees over and over”

### **4. Forms/ Instances of Discrimination**

- 
- “Ensure that when there is an incident of reported discrimination within a town office or business, there is a clear process to investigate and levy a penalty if appropriate”

## **5. Accessibility and Development**

- “Stop building mansions and stop tearing down the wooded areas” Develop “more consistency of public roadways and walkways”
- “Change zoning laws to provide for high-density lower-cost housing while protecting our undeveloped town land”
- “Overall work on socioeconomic status - provide more affordable housing, increase sustainability efforts significantly (do compost pick-up), etc.”

## **6. Community Engagement/ Outreach**

- Organize “initiatives to encourage people to learn about other people’s ethnicity or culture, and to increase awareness of unconscious bias”
- Develop a “better weekly town newspaper. Informative about all sectors of town (like the TAB used to be). People would get it for free and they would have a better understanding about what the town is doing when we can’t be out and about”
- Organize a “potluck get-together to discuss an issue a month and have folks switch who they’re sitting with for dessert”
- “I think the town has done a reasonably good job with outreach to people who use the internet regularly and know how to navigate social media... but I think initiatives are needed to develop other means of outreach to reach as many people as possible. For example, the message signs that are usually seen near town hall should be used on the other side(s) of town too”.

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**Note: Please reference the Appendix, Addendum 1-2 for Survey Materials**

### **3. Interviews, Focus Groups and Interaction**

We sought to engage with a diverse group of community members with the intention of having conversations about their experiences around racial equity and inclusion. A diverse set of participants helped us capture the perspective of community stakeholders from all walks of life. We spoke to individuals and heads of households who had recently moved to Ashland, parents of young adults attending Ashland schools, residents living in the town for over decades, senior citizens and retired residents. Many of the participants were actively participating in the various volunteer based committees in the town such as Ashland is United, AREA, library, farmers market, church, political town committees, Selectboard members, to name a few examples.

We met with 39 people during focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Of these individuals, 97% were residents of the town of Ashland, while others had a work or business affiliation. Just over 10% of these individuals worked for the Town of Ashland. We recruited community members through a multipronged process, utilizing the network of REI Steering Committee members, but also through a broader communication strategy that included traditional flyers, social media, and word of mouth. We created web-based registration links for the focus group sign ups and embedded the link into flyers which were shared with the community via online platforms. Flyers were also posted on the community center softboard and Ashland's Corner Spot. We utilized a list of community organizations and existing mailing lists to reach members of formal and informal community groups and organizations, such as business groups, formal school and parent-teacher groups, faith-based communities, town employees, volunteer organizations, and town officials.



For our interviews, we started our list of contacts from the various lists provided to us by the Steering Committee and generated through our own research. These contacts were gathered throughout our work and included recommendations from the Steering Committee as well. We randomly selected a group of 46 to contact. After communicating with 23 from the list, only five individuals responded with an interest in being interviewed. While the response and participation in interviews is very limited, the insights gained in these conversations reflected similar themes in focus group conversations.

### **Findings: What we learned through community conversations**

In our focus groups and interviews, Team members took notes, but did not document the names of individuals. In this section, we present the themes that arose across these conversations. Importantly, and despite a list of suggestions from the community about how to improve equity and inclusivity in Ashland, our focus group and interview participants provided positive views of the community, and the process led by the REI Steering Committee.

One of the most notable themes from our community conversations was the desire for more conversation and engagement relative to race, equity and justice. Community members were overwhelmingly pleased to join the conversations, and are ready to more deliberately engage in conversation and change to help Ashland build on an already strong foundation of community. Efforts such as the Farmer's Market, the Corner Spot, open space and geographic accessibility were highly regarded and noted as some of the best of what Ashland has to offer. Moreover, there is great interest in increasing and strengthening engagement and community activities to improve the community of Ashland.

In addition to positive views on Ashland, focus group and interview participants shared concerns that offer opportunities for improvement. The themes from these conversations are detailed in the bulleted list below:

#### **1. Government and Schools**

- 
- Limited representation of diversity
  - Communication gaps
  - Desire for leadership around diversity, inclusion, and belonging

## **2. Business & Commercial**

- Business offerings (nature of and ownership) are not diverse
- Desire for more support of diverse business development

## **3. Community**

- Desire for more opportunities for learning and engagement to foster awareness, understanding and relationships

## **4. Improvement**

- Potential development and growth plans by residents
- A “smaller” place compared to other surrounding towns

**Note: Please reference the Appendix, Addendum 3 for Interview Materials**

## **4. Netnography**

Netnography is an observational method that is a direct adaptation of ethnography to the dynamic technological realities of the internet. Netnography helps the researchers understand the naturally occurring behaviors of individuals on online platforms like social media discussions, lifestyle concerns, or particular events. (Belk et al., 2012).

### **Methodology of the Netnography**

With so many active social media users online, there has never been a better time to conduct a netnography. The chances are that relevant topics relating to the field of interest are being discussed through social media right now. For an extensive social media analysis of the Town of Ashland, we followed the following methodology:

- 
- First, we considered all of the social media communities and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the town's official website which we wanted to study in detail for the observational analysis.
  - Next, we considered and researched the communities, groups, and pages on each of the platforms which we could then study and observe.
  - We started reading the current messages regularly and in real-time along with archives of messages until some sort of temporal or topical pattern appeared.
  - Followed communally shared links to other pages and communities for deeper understanding of the content people shared with each other.
  - Followed community relevant postings on other sites, such as Twitter, or in Facebook groups to understand the importance of each platform and if information is shared equally or not.
  - We also tried rating and evaluating relevant community-related work and tried to understand how active and involved people are on the various platforms.
  - We also tried to analyze the quality and frequency of posts shared by the admins of each group and rate them in terms of diversity, equality, and inclusion.

### **Netnography: Recommendations**

Before we reflect upon the learnings we discovered from the themes and experiences shared by the residents on online platforms, let us look at what does it mean to be an inclusive community and what steps should be taken in order to achieve this goal.

According to the Community Toolbox research studies, an inclusive community:

- Does everything that it can to respect all its citizens, gives them full access to resources, and promotes equal treatment and opportunity.
- Works to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

- 
- Engages all its citizens in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Values diversity.
  - Responds quickly to racist and other discriminating incidents.

It is important to consider the motivation behind an individual, a group, or a community's desire to build an inclusive community because the motivation affects the following:

- Types and sequence of strategies selected – if there were a crisis, you might have to start with a strategy that transforms the conflict. If there were no crisis, but rather the vision of a community leader that sparked the effort, you might consider starting with a public education campaign.
- Resources available - more resources could be mobilized if the motivation came from a large institution or a local foundation.
- Amount of support and obstruction – if the dominant group in the community is just as motivated as any other group, there is likely to be more support. If, however, the dominant group has no interest in changing the status quo, there are likely to be more barriers.
- Rate of progress – if the major leaders and groups support the effort, progress is likely to be faster.
- Expected outcomes – if the goal is to raise awareness, everyone involved is likely to be satisfied if they learned new things about other groups. If the goal is to promote fair treatment of every group, everyone involved is more likely to be satisfied by policy change.

Through numerous focus groups there seems to be this hunger to have conversation regarding diversity, inclusion and belonging. The community toolbox outlined some important factors and key indicators on how to establish that on a community level. So how can the town of Ashland do this? We laid out a roadmap or a checklist for the town of Ashland to look at and keep as a template for future posts and events to make sure they are including all audiences.

---

## Netnography: Roadmap

According to the Pew Research center, more than 50% of American adults get their news from social media sites, and social media users are an incredibly diverse group across race, gender, income levels, and community type. (Anderson & Caumont, 2014) (Social Media Fact Sheet, 2021)

We recommend the below checklist for the Town of Ashland's social media and webpage platform which could be referred to before posting or streaming on multiple platforms. (Ross, 2019)

- Language & Imagery:

This is important since the way we convey ourselves and the way the audience conveys what is being portrayed. Make sure the language can be perceived the way it is intended to be.

- Does it use gender-neutral language?

The use of pronouns is being used appropriately. It is important to not use gender bias and be gender inclusive!

- Do you use diverse imagery and icons? Are the pictures taken inclusive? Are the pictures representative of the community? Will those who see the pictures feel included?
- Are your emojis inclusive?

Emojis are a fun and new way to communicate in today's social media sphere. It is important that emojis used do not have multiple meanings and are used appropriately. Using non-gendered emojis and yellow emojis when depicting a universal audience, or multiple colors of emojis when depicting a broad audience, can go a long way to creating an inclusive social media presence.

- Do you ensure any offensive comments are removed?

It is important that comments are monitored to ensure a safe space.

- 
- Do you engage with a diverse range of voices?

A fun way to engage the residents and businesses would be to have a day where the town's Instagram can have a special feature day. For example, "A Day in the life", can be a day wherein a resident or business owner can live stream or upload stories of diverse events. Those who are conducting and curating the content can be of diverse backgrounds to be inclusive.

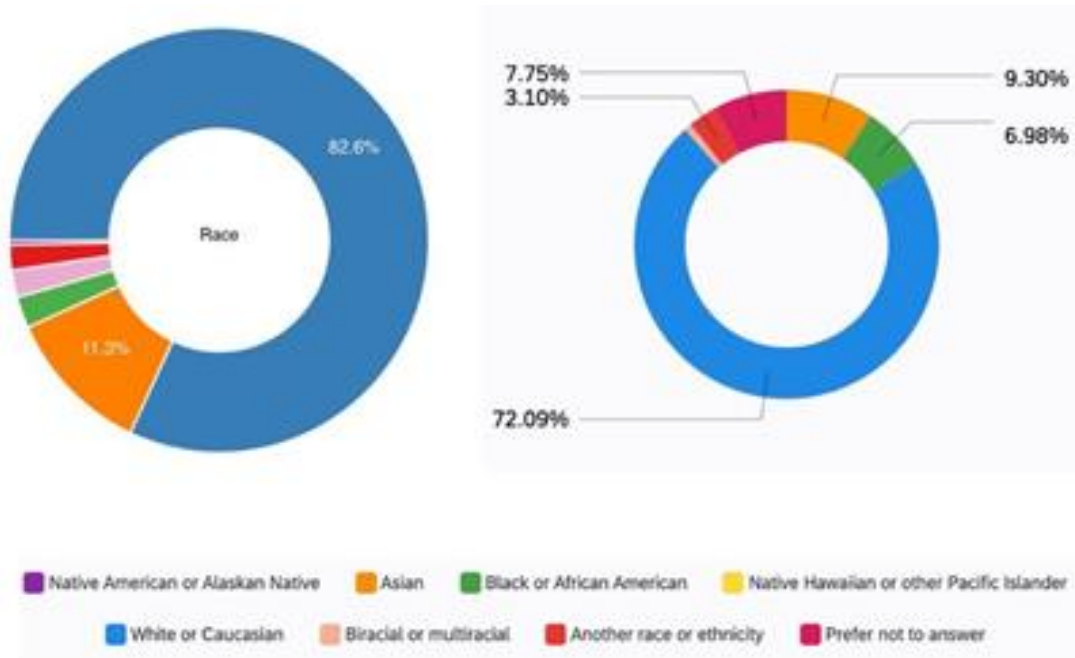
**Note: Please reference the Appendix, Addenda 4 for Netnography findings.**

## 5. Appendix

### Attachment A

1. Comparison between the demographics of Ashland's resident population, and the demographics of REI survey respondents.
2. Charts of African American, Black, Multiracial and Persons of Color who answered "yes" to forms of discrimination compared with white members of the same community.

1.



ASHLAND  
POPULATION BY  
DEMOGRAPHICS

SURVEY  
PARTICIPANTS BY  
DEMOGRAPHICS

2.

Native American or Alaskan Native

NO DATA

Asian



Black or African American



Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

NO DATA

White or Caucasian



Biracial or multiracial



Another race or ethnicity



Prefer not to answer



■ Yes, I have experienced occurrences of discrimination

■ No, I have not experienced occurrences of discrimination



## Addendum 1 - Survey Instrument One

### Introduction:

**As part of the Ashland racial equity initiative, Suffolk University's Institute for Public Service is asking community members to share their experiences and reflections surrounding race, equity, and inclusion. This survey will aid in local government efforts to better understand the issues facing Ashland's multicultural community. Your name will not be recorded in the course of this survey.**

**If you have already participated in one of Ashland's racial equity focus groups, you do not need to complete this survey.**

**Thank you for your time.**

#### Question 1:

Are you a resident of Ashland?

- a. Yes
- b. No

#### Question 2:

Are you an employee for the Town of Ashland?

- a. Yes
- b. No

#### Question 3:

Are you a member of any formal or informal committee in Ashland?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Question 4:

Are you a business owner in town?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Question 5:

Do you work in some other capacity in town (for example, a realtor; someone that provides services to members of the community (e.g. landscaper, etc.)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- i. If yes, please list (Blank spot in Qualtrics for them to fill in)

Question 6:

How frequently do you utilize town services, or interact with representatives or offices of the town (e.g. Town Hall offices, recreation/ community education/ library/ public safety/ social services/ public works/ public spaces (playground, woods, corner spot, etc.)?

- a. I never utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices
- b. I rarely utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices (once a month)
- c. I regularly utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices (once a week)
- d. I frequently utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices (multiple times a week)
- e. (Optional) Which one of these services do you most frequently use?
- i. Blank paragraph for them to fill in

Question 7:

Do you feel comfortable interacting with and sharing your interests and/ or concerns with town representatives (Town Hall workers, community educators, librarians, public safety officers, etc.) or offices to access these services?

- a. I do not feel comfortable
- b. I feel somewhat comfortable

- c. I feel very comfortable
- d. I feel extremely comfortable

Question 8:

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:

The town of Ashland is inclusive in terms of listening to and valuing the voices of diverse community members.

- a. Strongly disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Agree
- d. Strongly agree
- e. I do not know

Question 9:

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:

The town of Ashland treats black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) with respect.

- a. Strongly disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Agree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. I do not know

Question 10:

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: BIPOC students have equal educational opportunities in Ashland.

- a. Strongly disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Agree

- d. Strongly disagree
- e. I do not know

Question 11:

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:

Businesses in Ashland are friendly, helpful, and inviting to all community members.

- a. Strongly disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Agree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. I do not know

Question 12:

Are businesses in Ashland representative of its residents in terms of diversity and interests?

- a. Ashland businesses are not at all representative
- b. Ashland businesses are somewhat representative
- c. Ashland businesses are very representative
- d. Ashland businesses are extremely representative

Question 13:

This question is for business owners in Ashland. If you are not a business owner, please skip to the next question.

As a business owner, do you feel supported by the town of Ashland, its business association, and non- BIPOC customers (i.e. do non-BIPOC community members make a point to support BIPOC businesses)?

- a. I do not feel supported
- b. I feel somewhat supported
- c. I feel very supported
- d. I feel extremely supported

Question 14:

How frequently do you interact with other community members?

- a. I never interact with other community members
- f. I rarely interact with other community members (once a month)
- g. I regularly interact with other community members (once a week)
- h. I frequently interact with other community members (multiple times a week)
- i. (Optional) Briefly explain the ways in which you interact with other community members
- i. Blank paragraph for them to fill in

Question 15:

Does the town of Ashland give you a sense of belonging?

- a. I do not feel a sense of belonging in Ashland
- b. I feel a weak sense of belonging in Ashland
- c. I feel a strong sense of belonging in Ashland
- d. I feel a very strong sense of belonging in Ashland

Question 16:


How often does the town of Ashland provide the space to have conversations regarding race and equity?

- a. Ashland never provides this space
- b. Ashland rarely provides this space
- c. Ashland occasionally provides this space
- d. Ashland frequently provides this space

Question 17:

How often do you, your family, friends, and colleagues talk about issues of race, equity, inclusion, and discrimination (whether it be based on race, faith, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexuality)?

- a. We never talk about these issues
- b. We rarely talk about these issues

- 
- c. We occasionally talk about these issues
  - d. We frequently talk about these issues
  - e. (Optional) Please briefly explain the context in which these conversations typically arise.
  - f. I do not know

Question 18:

Have you experienced any occurrences of discrimination in the greater Ashland community?

- a. Yes, I have experienced occurrences of discrimination
- b. No, I have not experienced occurrences of discrimination

Question 19:

If you answered yes to the previous question, please briefly explain what you did about the occurrence(s) of discrimination. If you answered no to the previous question, please skip to the next question.

- a. Blank paragraph

Question 20:

Please write two words or feelings that come to mind when you think about the town of Ashland.

- a. Blank paragraph

Question 21:

If you could change two things about the Town of Ashland, what would they be? Do you have any suggestions for how the town, or various committees, could improve your quality of life in Ashland?

- a. Blank paragraph

Question 22:

Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

- a. Blank paragraph

**The following questions are optional and intended to help us understand the diversity of survey respondents. Your information will be collated and reported in aggregate form only.**

Question 24:

What is your gender?

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Non-binary
- d. Prefer to self describe
- i. Blank paragraph spot
- e. Prefer not to answer

Question 25:

What is your race/ ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

- a. Native American or Alaskan Native
- b. Asian
- c. Black or African American
- d. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- e. White or Caucasian
- f. Biracial or multiracial
- g. Another race or ethnicity
- i. Blank paragraph spot
- h. Prefer not to answer

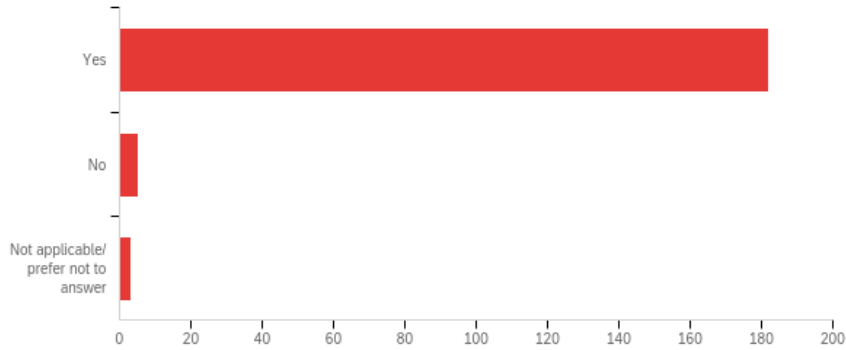
Question 26:

Do you identify with the LGBTQIA+ community?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to answer

**Addendum 2 - Raw Survey Data (not all answers = 201)**

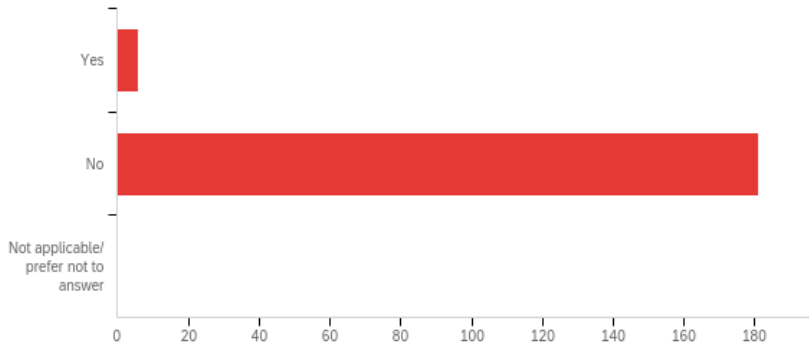
**Q1 - Are you a resident of Ashland?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	95.79%	182
2	No	2.63%	5
3	N/A	1.58%	3

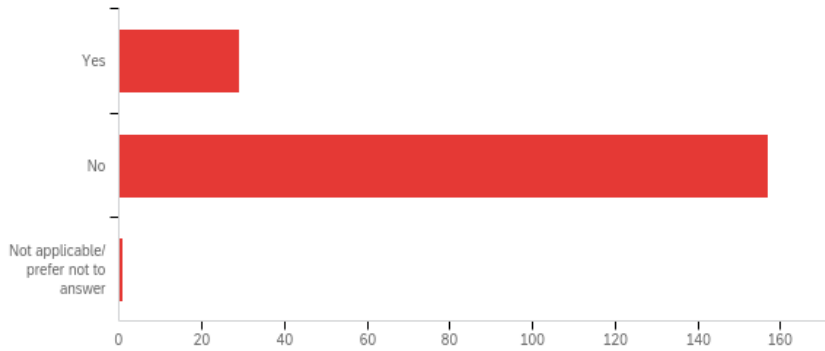
**Total 100% 190**

**Q2 - Are you an employee for the Town of Ashland?**



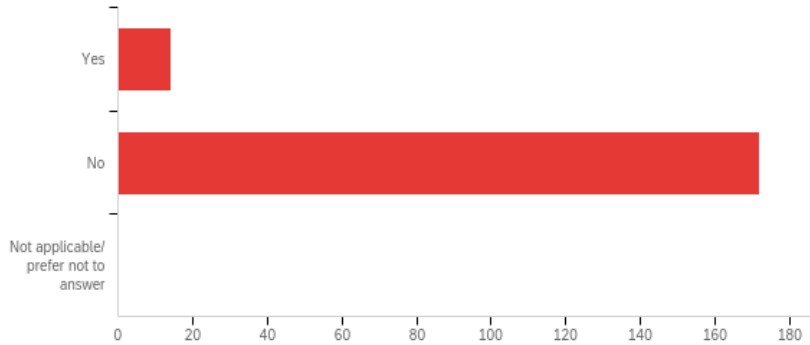
#	Answer	%	Count
3	Yes	3.21%	6
4	No	96.79%	181
5	N/A	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>187</b>

**Q3 - Are you a member of any formal or informal committee in Ashland?**



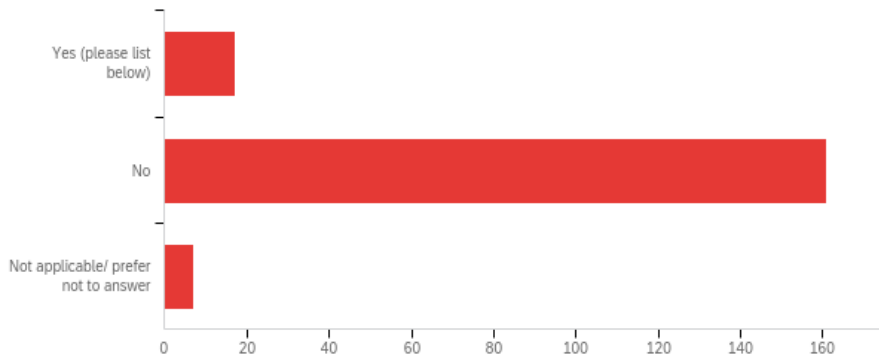
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	15.51%	29
2	No	83.96%	157
3	N/A	0.53%	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>187</b>

**Q4 - Are you a business owner in town?**



#	Answer	%	Count
3	Yes	7.53%	14
4	No	92.47%	172
5	N/A	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>186</b>

**Q5 - Do you work in some other capacity in town (for example, a realtor; someone that provides services to members of the community (e.g. landscaper, etc.)?**

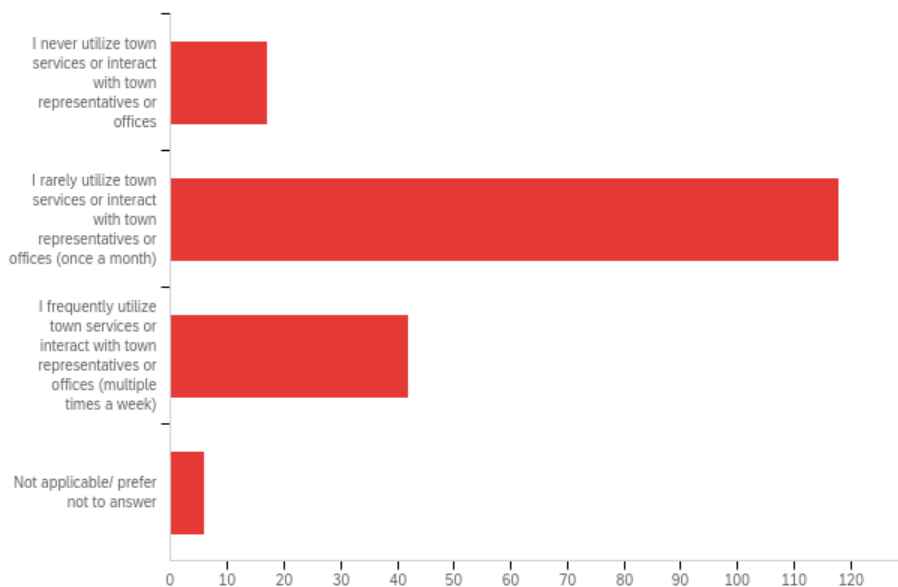


## Q5\_1\_TEXT - Yes (please list below)

### Answers:

- Dog walker/Pet sitter
- Photographer
- Youth Sports Coach
- Founder, Ashland-based nonprofit
- Collaborative
- Reiki Practitioner
- Landscape design and installation. But my company does little work in Ashland
- carpenter
- Ymca
- I'm a business owner in town, who also works in town w/a couple of clients
- Substitute teacher
- Yes
- Select Board
- Retail Store
- Forest Committee -maintain the forest
- Food
- Real Estate Broker

**Q6 - How frequently do you utilize town services, or interact with representatives or offices of the town government (e.g. Town Hall offices, recreation/ community education/ library/ public safety/ social services/ public works/ public spaces (playground, woods, corner spot, etc.)?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	I never utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices	9.29%	17
2	I rarely utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices (once a month)	64.48%	118
3	I frequently utilize town services or interact with town representatives or offices (multiple times a week)	22.95%	42
4	N/A	3.28%	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>183</b>

**Q7 - Please tell us more about which of these services or offices you most frequently use/visit.**

**Answers:**

- library
- City hall clerks office
- Library, town clerk
- Open Spaces/ Trails
- Ashland State Park. Town Hall for Dog License.
- Playground, corner spot
- Library
- bill payment
- library
- Re taxes
- farmers market, library
- building inspector, town clerk, animal control, police, library,
- Kid spot, hiking areas, town hall
- Library, River Walk, Town Forest
- Excise tax, public work
- library, town hall

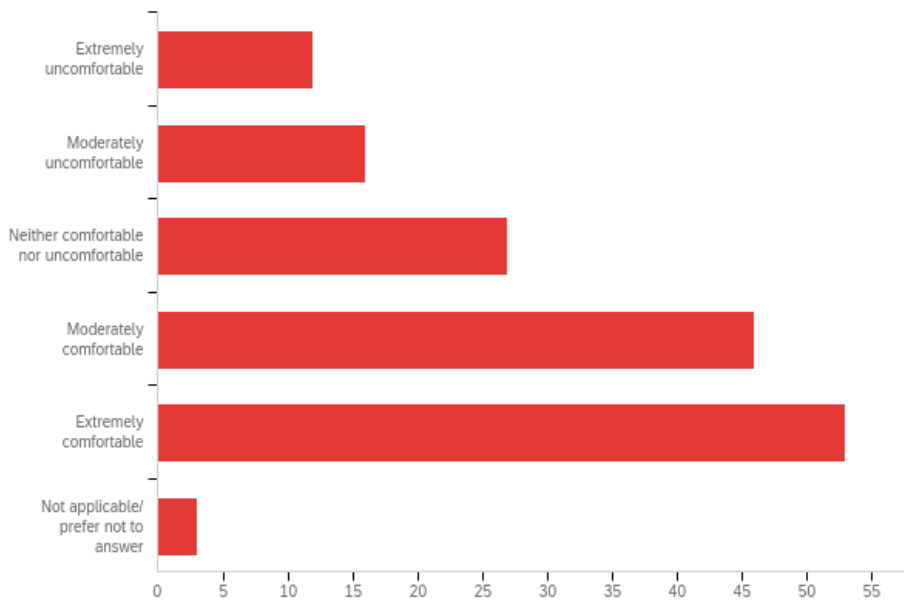
- I use/visit the public library, I use the Corner Spot
- library, parks
- DPW, SB
- Parks/ballfields
- Committee meetings
- Town clerk
- Not frequent
- Pay bills
- PD, FD, Schools, admin
- Planning, building, health and safety
- Library
- Recreation, library and corner spot
- None
- building dept & tax collector, town clerk office
- Town clerk
- You don't have a list here
- Tax department
- DPW
- Parks
- Town clerk
- Parks and recreation
- School
- Library,
- Library
- dpw
- No
- Ashland Youth & Family Svcs, Senior Center, town officials
- Senior Center
- Public works
- DPW, Town Hall
- town manager
- Water sewage
- There should be a choice for "occasionally " which is my service relationship with the town. Faulty survey question!
- City Hall services
- library
- Library
- Parks
- Town Hall
- public works / trash
- Occasionally interact with Business Dev. Offer.
- town hall
- Corner Spot, Farmers market.
- library & corner spot

- Clerk
- Select Board, Planning Board, Town Clerk
- library
- Police Station
- Library
- Pay taxes. So interact with front offices. Interact with town leadership in groups both formal and informal.
- police
- na
- I attend meetings such as ZBA, planning board or Select Board
- Farmers Market, Town Trails,
- Library
- Public Library
- town hall
- I'm on a town committee
- Playground
- Town hall periodically as needed
- Library
- I believe in participating in democracy- if there's a place I can contribute and educate, rather than complain I do. I serve on multiple committees and non- profits in town. Town Clerk, PB, Con Comm, BOH, WACA TV, Library, AFM, Corner Spot
- Library, town hall
- Clerks
- postoffice
- library
- This week I called the DPW and the Water Department to ask questions. I work on a committee with the Asst. Town Manager. I attend Great Decisions once a month which is now sponsored by the Library, I believe.
- library
- Library
- Community center, library, schools
- Town hall for voting, farmers market
- Town forest, farmer's market, library
- Clerk's office
- Senior Center; town clerk
- Had frequented the library in the pre-COVID times
- DPW, Town Clerk
- Public schools, parks, roads, dpw
- Police
- library senior center
- Ask recycling questions; was married by the Town Clerk; a few other miscellaneous things over 25 years
- Library

- I've contacted the DPW regarding matters on my street. They were immediate to respond.
- Clerk
- Library
- Library, corner spot
- Frequent visitor to Town Forest and Ashland Reservoir
- various
- Outdoor spaces
- ? ? ? ?
- I taught in the schools for 18 years. I still sub there. I am an amateur astronomer and hold town star parties.
- Library
- Tax collector
- Library
- Waste Management
- N/A
- Library
- Town Hall, library, schools
- parks and library
- Library, schools
- Pay my taxes
- Corner Spot, Community Garden, parks
- Town hall staff
- Library, town hall
- Parks, Corner Spot, River Walk.
- Parks and rec, library
- town hall
- Town Clerk, Assessor, Selectmen
- Library
- Ashland State Park
- none listed
- Library
- Concom
- Many
- Library
- Board of health, Selectman's office
- Town hall
- Town Manager email messages
- I feel free to contact Select Board members, Town Manager, DPW when needed and I use online library services often
- Multiple town staff at town hall and DPW
- Library, Schools, Recreation
- trash collection
- Library

- Library
- Post office, business development
- library, town hall
- Planning, Assessor, Clerk
- Public schools; parks; town hall
- Senior Center
- Town hall
- library
- library

**Q8 - Do you feel comfortable interacting with and sharing your interests and/ or concerns with town representatives (Town Hall workers, community educators, librarians, public safety officers, etc.) or offices to access these services?**



#	Answer	%	Count
6	Extremely uncomfortable	7.64%	12
7	Moderately uncomfortable	10.19%	16
9	Neither comfortable nor	17.20%	27

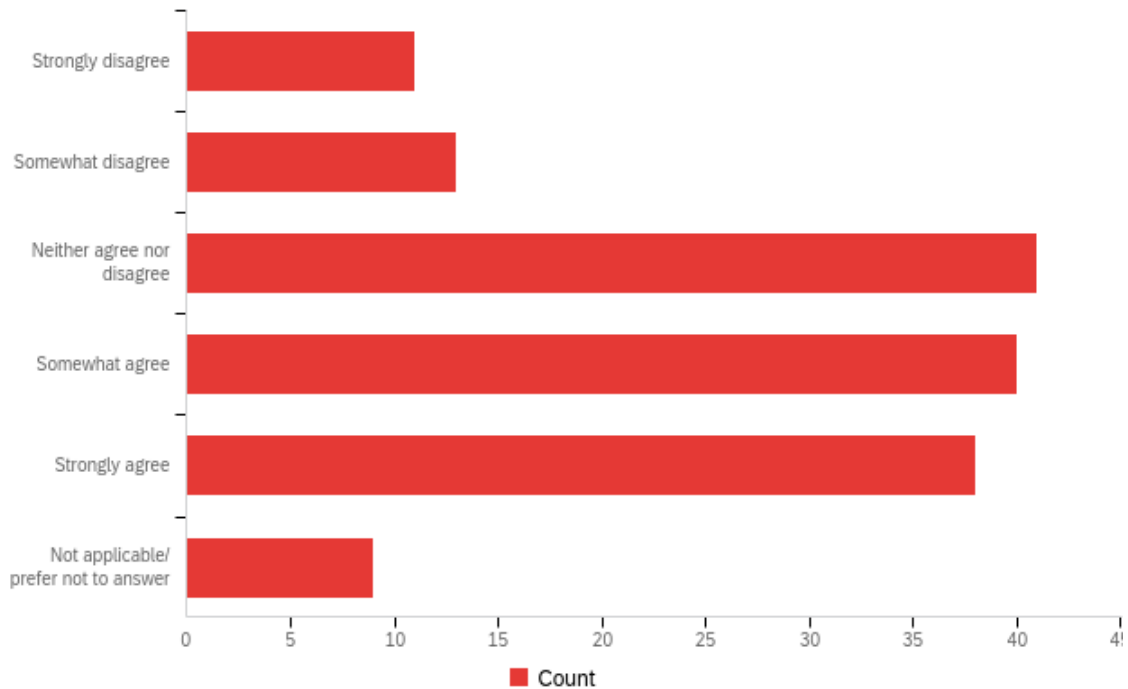
	uncomfortable		
10	Moderately comfortable	29.30%	46
11	Extremely comfortable	33.76%	53
12	N/A	1.91%	3

**Total**

**100%**

**157**

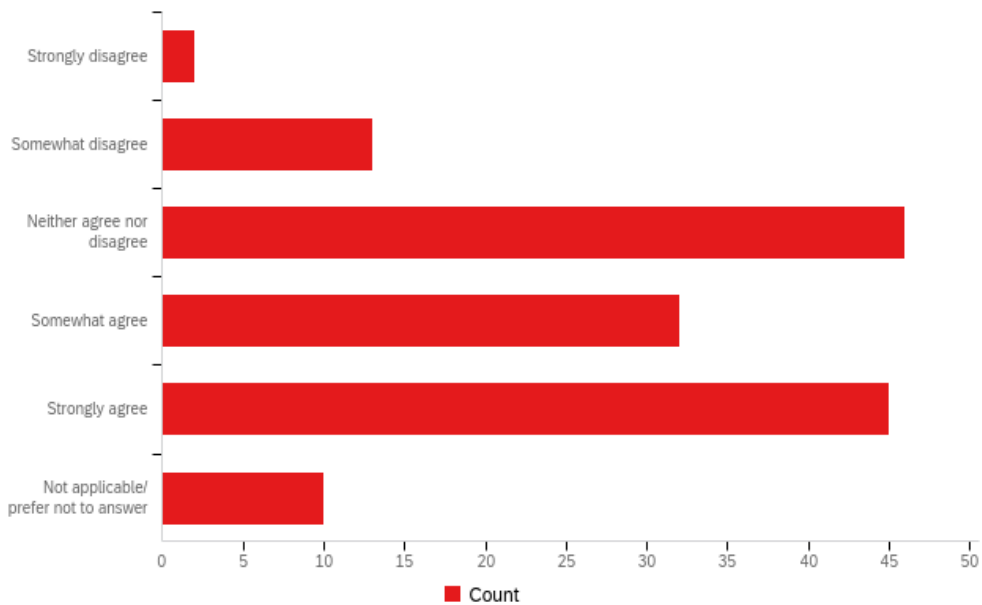
**Q9 - Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:  
The town of Ashland is inclusive in terms of listening to and valuing the  
voices of diverse community members.**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly disagree	7.24%	11

2	Somewhat disagree	8.55%	13
3	Neither agree nor disagree	26.97%	41
4	Somewhat agree	26.32%	40
5	Strongly agree	25.00%	38
6	N/A	5.92%	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>152</b>

**Q10 - Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: The town of Ashland treats black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) with respect.**



#	Answer	%	Count
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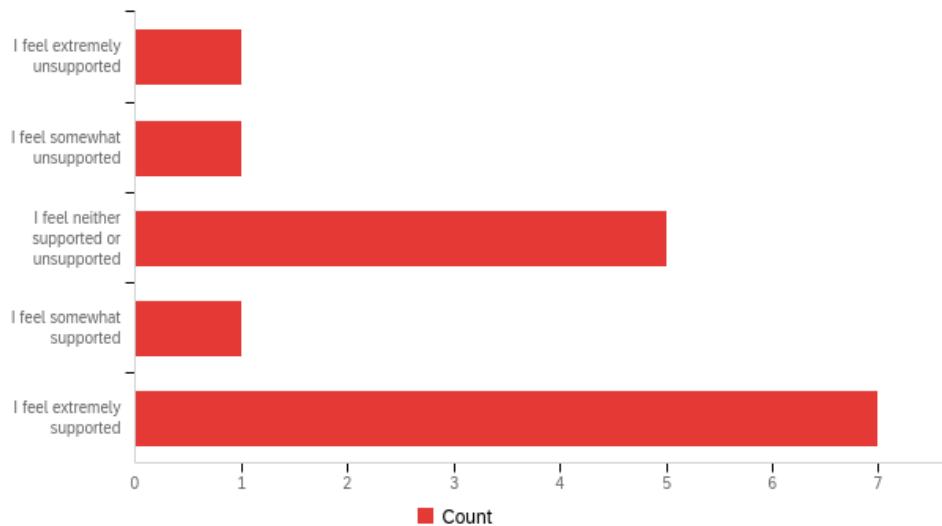






	unrepresentative		
2	Somewhat unrepresentative	23.94%	34
3	Somewhat representative	45.77%	65
4	Extremely representative	14.79%	21
6	N/A	9.15%	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>142</b>

**Q14 - This question is for business owners in Ashland. If you are not a business owner, please skip to the next question. As a business owner, do you feel supported by the town of Ashland, its business association, and non- BIPOC customers (i.e. do non-BIPOC community members make a point to support BIPOC businesses)?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	I feel extremely unsupported	1.56%	1
2	I feel somewhat unsupported	1.56%	1
3	I feel neither supported nor unsupported	7.81%	5
4	I feel somewhat supported	1.56%	1
5	I feel extremely supported	10.94%	7
6	N/A	76.56%	49

**Total**

**100%**

**64**

**Q15 - How frequently do you interact with other community members?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	I never interact with other community members	4.20%	6
2	I rarely interact with other community members (once a month)	20.28%	29
3	I regularly interact with other community members (once a week)	36.36%	52
4	I frequently interact with other community members (multiple times a week)	37.76%	54
5	N/A	1.40%	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>143</b>

**Q16 - Please briefly explain the ways in which you interact with other community members:**

**Answers:**

- Committees, town services, the schools
- I am not a business owner
- Neighbors
- While walking on the street, saw someone I knew and start talking
- networking events
- Shopping
- on committees and town issues and as friends
- conversations with neighbors, using post office, local stores and restaurants, going to the library, going to the farmers market and the corner spot
- neighbors
- sports activities, farmers market, library

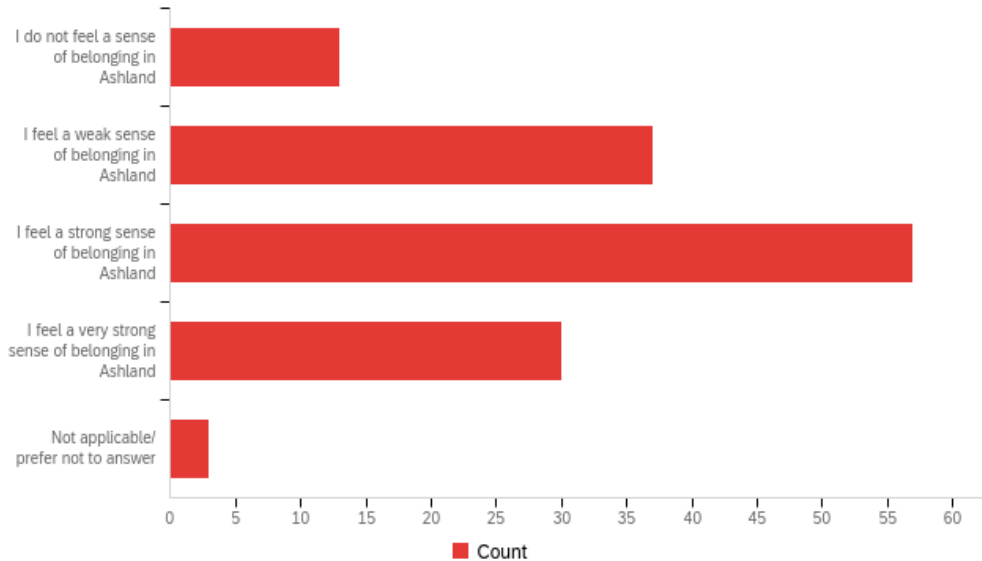
- Stores, live in a condo association, restaurants
- conversations
- Attend community events and engage in conversations with community members, ensure residents I personally know of are being looked after during the pandemic, have personally visited with a few of
- these individuals safely, work with colleagues to ensure residents are provided with resources
- Farmers market, neighbors, stores/restaurants
- AFM, ACG, AGC, neighbors, Sustainability Com
- patronize local restaurants and businesses
- Farmers Market, Committee Meetings, Play groups
- Friendly conversations
- Neighbors
- Neighbors
- NA
- Shopping
- AREA meetings and at corner spot
- Shopping and visiting neighbors.
- Meet for coffee or a town or school sporting event
- talking/chatting
- Shopping and walking
- I live in town
- Neighborhood and shopping
- Neighbors, stores, church
- Through the Democratic Town Committee
- I strongly support Ashland in terms of businesses, community needs, etc
- social settings
- Calls/ emails
- voting
- Neighbors friendly chat
- Meetings, email, social media
- corner spot, going into a local business
- through my job, with neighbors
- Library
- Hi to neighbors around my neighborhood, in parks, farmers market
- Businesses or public events
- Dining, shopping, neighbors, etc
- Mostly through ABA
- social
- In a social set up- at farmers market, Corner spot
- eat together
- Meeting and doing business
- Online, Phone, Email

- see them at the community garden
- Library
- In informal groups, farmers market, town events and meetings
- we go together to some meetings
- Neighbors and at local businesses
- I go for walks, visit neighbors, help with shopping, interact while doing yard chores, etc.
- I'm always seeing, talking and bring eggs to my neighbors. Great group of people. We even host dinners
- at each other's houses
- Committee work, farmers market,
- Friends of library
- As fellow parents (school events, playdates, athletics)
- events, meetings, market, corner spot
- talking to neighbors, hiking with town manager and select board members, talk on phone with other residents
- Neighbors
- See neighbors in neighborhood and on trails; in various businesses in town
- through my work, I serve many Ashland families. My son also attends AHS
- Committee meetings, AFM, other events
- Conversations at group events
- Conversations
- I drive in the same roads, infrequently shop at stores, receive communications, vote, use schools, meet neighbors
- neighbors and businesses
- Serve on Ashland Is United which has met once a week via Zoom during the pandemic.
- While shopping
- neighbors, library, farmers market
- Son's summer day camp
- Socially or related to my children's activities
- Neighbors, other people using town forest
- Neighbors, business owners
- Through participation in community organizations
- Middlesex Savings Bank, seeing neighbors
- Friends chatters, meetings, shopping
- conversation
- Speak
- library, church, book club, neighborhood volunteer, farmers market restaurants ashland day river walk
- Speak with neighbors; enter a local store or restaurant
- Social, businesses
- talking to neighbors, people in stores, people I see when walking

- I tried to shop locally whenever I can. The business owners in downtown seem very respectful.
- Events
- Library, children's play dates
- Talk with neighbors, Facebook group for other parents with kids in the same class
- I converse with neighbors and interact with people I see on my daily walks through my and neighboring neighborhoods, in parks and town forest. I shop locally on almost a daily basis.
- conversations
- In my development; Farmers Market; town events such as recent culture fest
- In passing or at local businesses
- On trails in the Town Forest
- ? ? ?
- Subbing in the schools, walking and bikeriding around town, public star parties, playing music at Corner Spot and Farmers Market
- Library
- Mostly neighbors
- Talking
- Farmers market, Local businesses, park
- Mostly the Facebook community pages
- Through visiting the library or via walks in around town and visiting local businesses. b
- Neighbors, friends, fellow board members
- Through school, informal gatherings, community events, at local businesses (friendly exchanges)
- Work for them.
- Farmers Market, Sports, Corner Spot
- Walks with neighbors, check in with neighbors, participate in community meetings, participate in community events, serve on community organizations
- Chat, meet
- Town committee, Business Transactions
- N/a
- neighbors
- In person, social media message boards, text
- N/a
- Farmers market , Corner Spot and library
- Neighbors
- at community events, shopping at local businesses, through activities such as youth sports or social
- gatherings
- Always have conversation with customers coming into my store.
- Meetings
- Farmers Market, Boy Scouts and other friends
- Talking to neighbors; interacting with school system

- People in the neighborhood walking or driving by, interactions with members of a local political and activist groups, patronizing local businesses
- I am an involved member of the community in many ways
- Friends, businesses, library, farmers market, schools
- Farmer's Mkt., library, parents of youth in the OMW youth groups
- Social
- School, library, neighbors, businesses
- Farmer's market, Ashland Facebook groups
- at the library, at the schools
- As an elected official and a member of different committees in Ashland
- Friendly with neighbors and parents of my children's friends
- at community center/library
- Customer
- Meetings
- library

**Q17 - Does the town of Ashland give you a sense of belonging?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	I do not feel a sense of belonging in Ashland	9.29%	13
2	I feel a weak sense	26.43%	37

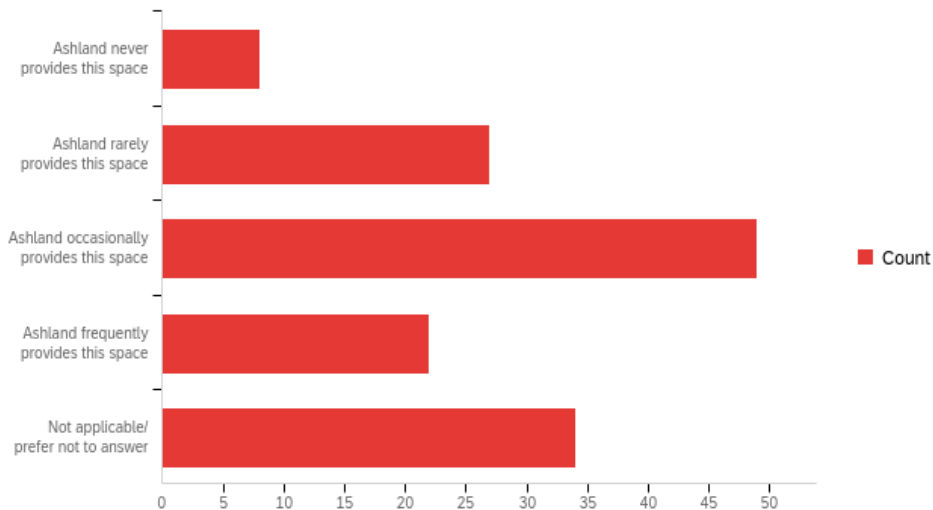
	of belonging in Ashland		
3	I feel a strong sense of belonging in Ashland	40.71%	57
4	I feel a very strong sense of belonging in Ashland	21.43%	30
5	N/A	2.14%	3

**Total**

**100%**

**140**

**Q18 - How often does the town of Ashland provide the space to have conversations about race and equity?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Ashland never provides this space	5.71%	8
2	Ashland rarely	19.29%	27



	about these issues		
3	We occasionally talk about these issues	31.43%	44
4	We frequently talk about these issues	51.43%	72
5	N/A	2.14%	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>140</b>

**Q20 - What types of topics or ideas do you talk about with these friends and family members?**

**Answers:**

- Equity, economic inequality, violence toward people of color, discrimination in the workplace and classroom, and the systematic nature of all of these things
- Incidents of hate crimes. Diversity represented in the community. Police interactions w minority groups
- Current events
- Known race discrimination against male Asian Americans for college acceptance, absolutely wrong. It should and must base on merit only to get it right.
- making sure we are being fully inclusive
- Gay rights & political discussions
- immigration and racism
- equity and representation at work, blm, racial justice
- n/a
- Lack of knowledge and interest to learn about other cultures among people who live here
- The tremendous diversication which has occured in Ashland over the last 70 years. The shocking national selfishness and open bigotry. Also the alarming rise of fascism as a politically acceptable mean of achieveing and holding political power by the republican party. ps I am formerly a republican.
- This past year has brought a lot of conversations about inequalities in my home life, and in my professional life. Major topics have included inequalities, implicit racism, subconscious biases,etc.

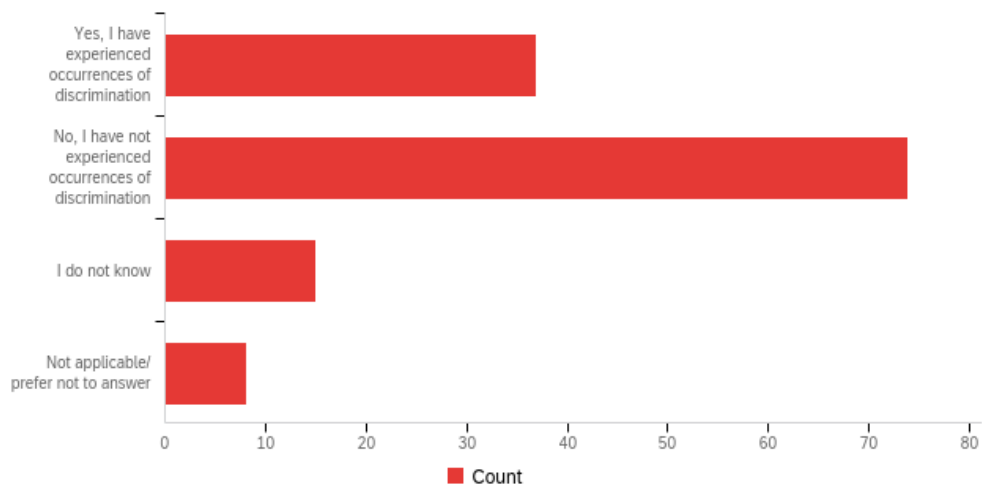
- gender/race equality
- How we feel about topic, how political structures can change, how Ashland can improve, how I can be a better person
- all topics of social justice, equity, and fairness
- With family, not much. At work, systemic racism, pay equity, gender and race gaps in hiring, police violence
- Everything
- Current events, racial justice, environmental justice, worker justice, womens rights
- Disability discrimination
- The instant bias against the heterosexual white male
- Immigration
- The way make everyone to reach his full potential i
- How to engage the community and make Ashland more inclusive
- immigration/LGBTQ rights
- Politics family activities
- How everything is blown out of proportion
- Meaning of equity
- Health issues
- Music
- Systemic and institutionalized racism, and how to counteract it
- Importance of: Diversity, human rights, BLM, equality, etc
- life values
- Kindness
- state of our country & effect of the virus
- Race, being treated equally, work equality. Visa restrictions
- Lack of local government listening, following by laws, doing what they want regardless of resident input
- race, how our biracial daughter will fare in Ashland schools, should we stay here or go to another country or state?
- race, inclusion, gender issues
- race, religion
- Race, inequality, gender and sexual preferences, current events and how it impacts parenting
- Race, equality
- Inclusion, systematic racism
- Acceptance of all races. Understanding of racism history
- current events
- Inclusiveness of diversity in local businesses, more opportunities needed to celebrate festivals of different cultures that the town represents
- racial equity
- The need to be neutral and stop promoting bogus race theory

- That some businesses with women and people of color are housed in a historic building our government wants to turn into apartments. They will be forced to find a new location. This one is affordable and filled with wonderful businesses.
- racial profiling
- None
- Opportunities
- Topics of national importance for instance during the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, women' rights, and often give feedback for town projects that take inclusion forward.
- mostly is the abuse and rudeness of the police dept
- Social challenges for minorities
- Race, gender, diversity, equity, bias
- We're a gay family so that comes up. Our neighbors are Native American from Oklahoma. These are touched on from time to time, but certainly don't define our conversations
- Equity, lgbtq acceptance, what we can do to improve racial diversity/equity
- Various
- The challenges of raising a child of color (being in a majority white population, being in a school district that has few teachers/administrators of color)
- skin color, race
- racial equity, wealth disparity, crime and prejudice in punishment, immigration
- Equity diversity
- Need for more inclusiveness in education jobs business. Issues with politics around this. How to simply make inclusiveness jus normal.
- equity, systematic racism, Christian privilege, etc.
- All the topics in the previous question, and current events of the day for the past few years, education institutions issues, policing issues etc
- Public and company policies
- implicit bias , ageism, sexism, old boy networks
- racism as part of the news, anti-semiticism
- How ever minority group in the country wants to be recognized as special and why this is causing more damage than good to their agenda
- diversity,
- White privilege, sexism, homophobia, equality, hate crimes
- We strongly believe in treating all people with equal dignity, regardless of what their identity might be. We are especially aware of the difficulties faced by people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and other identity groups that are significantly in the minority
- Race, equity
- Discrimination of certain groups
- Racial justice
- BLM
- We discuss how we are talking about it with pur kids, what the schools are doing or can do, what else we can do, feeling like what we do us not enough
- entitlement

- Discrimination
- covid19, politics, schools, race relations, climate change, past/future police actions, local events, church, violence in Boston,
- Am in a same sex marriage and occasionally discuss lesbian-gay matters
- Blm
- How we are feeling. What's happening in the news. What can we do?
- I've lived in this town for over 35 years and have seen changes in people's attitudes. Some of the new people are so snobby and unfriendly.
- Victim card
- All of the above
- Diversity in race, gender, sexual orientation, culture
- I was brought up in Ashland, lived most of my adult life in Boston, and moved back when I was in my 50's. I am now an older person. We talk about how the diversity of the town has increased, how people ( often based on lawn signs) seem open and tolerant and actually hungry for diversity, yet the town seems fairly segregated. I am unfamiliar with schools today. I see a lot of diversity when I walk and shop in town, but my interactions are superficial. We wonder how to change that.
- various
- Prefer not to answer
- Reaction to the news
- Opportunity to advance to middle class.
- ???
- Current National and local politics
- US politics
- News reports
- Current events
- Food and dumb people
- Racism, antisemitism, LGBTQ, economic inequality
- Importance of diversity and diverse perspectives, bias and the impact of default (white male) thinking,
- what it means to be inclusive, what is equity and how it is different from equality, what we can do to increase equity in our home, with our clients, and in our community.
- Examine our own bias in the wake of George Floyd
- Equity, inclusion, anti racist education
- Unconscious bias, white privilege, colonialism, etc
- Race, equity, gender discrimination
- Inclusion, acceptance
- Usage of the n-word in academic settings; lack of support for native people; police attitude; neighbour with racially loaded flags/paraphernalia displayed on front yards
- Race
- race
- Race, gender, religion, discrimination

- Social justice, equity and abhorrent right wing practices
- Overload of social justice and the rise of anti semitism all around us
- representation of minorities in school staff, antiracist education and what that means
- How some customers that make racial comments once in a while.
- Freedom of speech and social issues and concerns raised by all races
- identifying my bias
- race, faith, politics, public health, school
- Diversity, equity and inclusion issues from local to national; our concern about racism seemingly on the rise, social justice reforms- progress and barriers
- Discussions of national and state politics. Also immigration policy
- LGBTQ, race, white privilege and white fragility
- In book groups, in OMW staff meetings, where they are a prime concern
- Antisemitism
- Discrimination
- Being black in a white town
- lack of diversity in the school (teachers)
- Mostly glad that younger people today in the Ashland community have an opportunity to experience diversity as compared to older generations
- DEI; Race; Racism; privilege; white supremacy culture
- inclusion/opportunities
- Politics
- equity
- dinner

**Q21 - Have you experienced any occurrences of discrimination in the greater Ashland community?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes, I have experienced occurrences of discrimination	27.61%	37
2	No, I have not experienced occurrences of discrimination	55.22%	74
3	I do not know	11.19%	15
4	N/A	5.97%	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>134</b>

**Q22 - Please briefly explain what you did about the occurrence(s) of discrimination**

- After the fact communicated with a town official but did not pursue retribution, mostly due to the pandemic
- None
- n/a
- I have not seen it but that's because I am white
- anti-semitism
- I have mostly experienced exclusion by other parents when my daughter attended APS
- Invited the individual overlooked go before me in line; pulled my car over when I witnessed an altercation between a few white males and an African-American Male shouting at each other on the side of the road and acted as a witness- luckily APD did not have to respond to the scene it deescalated; encouraged acquaintances to seek feedback after they've felt discriminated against and provided community resources
- Let it pass
- posted on social media to raise awareness; condemned action
- I didn't see any
- Called neighbor out on racist statements

- Nothing formal
- Nothing can be done in our current political climate
- NA
- I am not sure there were any
- Stand in place and take it.
- Shared concerns with other community members
- avid discussions
- No support for deaf in local government, meetings not close captioned, no headsets at meetings
- had an open conversation with the person
- NA
- Not much one can do. Age is not on here, but it ought to be since it affects all the others.
- children in school
- not applicable
- Is it on ME to do something?
- Did not share as others will see it as "overreacting"
- Nothing
- I am an atheist and not Christian. There are times during the year where Christianity and belief in God is expected of all.
- Gender, and now race; gender I got nowhere with- and I presented it as a fairness transparency issue; race I am bringing to the attention of a civic group.
- Nothing
- ignored by chief of police and town manager when reporting safety issues in my neighborhood
- Swatistakas found at the middle and high school.
- I graduated from Ashland High School in 2007. At this time, the school may have had a policy of non- discrimination towards LBGTQ+ people, but did little to foster a culture of inclusivity among its student body. As a gay teen, I was frequently the subject of homophobic bullying by many of my peers. I do not know how school culture has changed since then, but it was definitely a major problem at the time.
- No answer
- NA
- I brought my concerns to the town manager, principal of the warren school, school committee, and cheif of police
- Job preference
- None
- I don't know
- ???
- It came up in the high school occasionally.
- Nothing.
- Stereotype and coded conversations about minorities
- No, details would take away anomimity
- Inclusion and acceptance
- Didn't do anything. It happened in a private business.

- Held by police without cause other than sitting in parking lot while black
- listened
- Very cautious
- I have not personally experienced or witnessed any overt discrimination
- Nothing to do just move on with the life. Can't let idiots get to you.
- nothing
- nothing I am aware of
- My son reported that someone called a POC student a "nigger" and I reached out to the teacher. I did not receive a response.
- I am white -- I do not experience such occurrences.
- Preferential treatment to others over me, bei
- When it's appropriate I will try to correct someone other times I just write them off as ignorant
- The discrimination we have most experienced has been in the schools. We are advocates for our children because of this and have regularly reported incidences when they arise. On occasion, we've ignored instances because it's so exhausting to confront it all the time.
- shared with family
- library

**Q23 - Please write two words or feelings that come to mind when you think about the town of Ashland**

**Answers:**

- Striving, changing
- Quaint. Inclusive.
- Nice, laid back
- hopeful promising
- welcoming and friendly
- My home
- vibrant, friendly
- fine town
- caring community
- Culturally limited
- positive progress
- Welcoming; Growing
- community, invested
- slow to change
- Evolving; community
- Community, Pride
- home
- Small, conservative
- Small, narrow-minded
- Unwelcome, Elitist

- Safe, friendly and respectful
- Nice sleeping town
- mixed residential
- My home
- Evolving, Safe
- comfortable/welcoming
- Great town
- Small, friendly
- Welcoming, quiet
- Quiet, safe
- Small, old-fashioned, segregated
- Diverse, inclusive
- my home
- Set in its ways, kind
- not being heard
- It is a nice and friendly town to be in
- Unresponsive governance
- a bubble with opportunity to grow
- Growing town
- safe and Very good school district
- It's fine
- Welcoming, active
- commuter town
- Welcoming and inclusive
- middle class
- Ashland is a good place to live for working professionals and families and we have an Engaging and receptive TownManager and Select Board members
- home peaceful
- Not listening
- Overdevelopment. Congestion.
- quiet suburban town with increasing diversity of residents
- No proper planning
- Great place
- Warm, welcoming
- does not keep its identity, public services like sewer disproportional expensive in regard of the service they provide
- Peaceful Safe
- Cliques, users
- Committed families
- Growing diversity
- Sheltered and privileged
- relatively progressive, trying hard

- 
- active community
  - safe and comfortable
  - Quiet White
  - Friendly. Unsnobby (is that a word?)
  - Community and wanting to do/be better
  - Inconsistent and frustrating
  - Quiet New England
  - poorly managed
  - open to all, caring
  - High Taxes
  - nice community
  - Warm, friendly
  - quiet, nice
  - Friendly comfortable
  - home; friendly
  - White, middle class, lovely setting
  - Home, safe
  - Striving and apathetic
  - quiet. growing
  - road construction
  - friendly quiet
  - Home town
  - Great town
  - Open and growing
  - Overbuilt and growing
  - Great town.
  - Suburb, friendly
  - Small, kind
  - Friendly and striving to be a great place to live
  - Constantly improveing
  - Belonging; local
  - Bright future
  - white people
  - low integrity
  - Home, community
  - Bedroom community
  - Upper class income for many not all
  - Friendly, safe
  - Clean and old
  - Close minded
  - Evolving,
  - Caring community

- Home, tight knit
- Over worried
- Small town
- Lacks community
- Growing, Learning
- 
- Frustration; Community initiative.
- Not welcoming
- small, suburban
- Residential, Friendly
- Suburban, white
- Nice place
- Excessive growth
- home, growing
- Home & Work
- Inclusive , freedom
- Nyanza and white bread
- welcome here
- Grateful that the town is acting on concerns about racial equity & concerned that the town is overdeveloping
- a sense of belonging and home
- Friendly and Improving
- comfortable, neighborly
- Friendly and comfortable
- Diverse
- Open tow
- small town
- Welcoming village
- Above average
- friendly quiet
- Quiet & stuck
- small
- white, black

**Q24 - Do you have any suggestions for how the town, or various committees, could bolster equity and inclusion in Ashland? If you could change two things about the Town of Ashland in this regard, what would they be?**

**Answers:**

- 1) need to continue to engage more minorities in civic activities 2) make sure that when there is incident of reported discrimination within a town office or business, there is a clear process to investigate and levy penalty if appropriate
- no
- None
- engage more people - all races to participate and reward such action
- keep having conversations and bringing awareness
- Stop building mansions and stop tearing down the wooded areas to build more mansions
- more diversity on committees
- no ideas
- diversity teaching and educational staff in schools
- Events about less talked about cultural events: International Women's Day, winter solstice, etc
- Change zoning laws to provide for high density lower cost housing while protecting our undeveloped town land. for the last 70 years the town has done everything it could to through zoning housing in attempts to control schools financial needs and increase individual home values. This has resulted in eating up green spaces and preventing low or REASONABLE cost housing. This a state wide phenomenon. Attending Ashland public hearing several years ago I listened to conservation minded avocates offering many zoning solutions while never mentioning the underlying zoning causes of our state wide problems I wil say that the drive to create A community and business frendly down town has had one positive effect in the creation of new business space with appartments above in an effort to generate a critical mass of customers to support al businesses in Ashland. by the way I am [REDACTED] an 80 year old life long town resident who has attended town meetings and been active on town committies for the past 65 year. Orestrict
- Ashland has the quintessential home-town charm, and the town and its people have continued forward progress and creating conversations and safe spaces to foster equity is the next step.
- train Town staff to be more open to change and act on resident proposals for improvement
- not sure
- Making efforts to engage diverse communities where they are. Greater representation on boards and town staff.
- no
- More inviting meetings, more promotion, less Facebook pettiness
- N/a
- Realize that socio-economic status has nothing to do with race in our town
- Have activities such as writing, discussions on immigration and how to promote diversity in the schools.
- I love it there
- 1. Engage town residents 2. Be open to have these difficult racial conversations.
- No
- no suggestions
- No
- No

- 1. Initiatives to educate and encourage people to learn about other people's ethnicity or culture 2. Increase awareness of unconscious bias
- No, I do not.
- Proactively assess our systems (policing, schools, town services) for institutional racism, and counteract it through policy changes.
- Affordable housing, continue what we're doing!
- open dialogue; promote togetherness
- Better weekly Town newspaper. Informative about all sectors of town. Like the TAB used to be. People would get it free and they would have a better understanding about what the town is doing when we can't be out any about.
- Need to look at people not by their race, nationality, gender. It should be all lives matter. Why should our children be blamed for what happened two hundred years ago and beyond their control. LOOK AT PEOPLE AS PEOPLE. DO NOT CATEGORIZE BY RACE. EVERYONE COUNTS.
- More diversity in terms of businesses
- Listen to the residents and be responsive to them
- overall work on socioeconomic status- provide more affordable housing, increase sustainability efforts significantly (do compost pick up), etc.
- not sure
- Hire diverse staff in public services
- Na
- N/A
- I don't know
- No suggestions
- nothing
- Promote more diverse businesses in the town and celebrate events from more cultures and ethnicities that we currently do
- Surveys like this and multi-cultural events at the Corner Spot are helpful.
- Appoint candidates who are qualified to town committees. Stop blocking
- 1) Support businesses of color and women owned and immigrant owned by not joining in to force them out of town. 2) Diversify the workforce. More people of color in the schools and town offices and also hire more older people in teacher roles.
- encourage minority participation in elections
- Need to work on diversity specifically bring in more African American Community
- Maybe celebrate voluntary efforts of people who relentlessly work on bringing people together without any support, and also develop some mechanism for evaluating local councils and committees.
- lighting, traffic signalization , waiste management
- I think an answer for this should come from minority interviews. From there strategies could be developed

- Honestly seek out, hear, and act on views that are not represented within the groupies. Stop blaming the people who are uncomfortable speaking up and find a way to open different avenues of inclusion.
- Given my limited interaction with town committees and members I'm not sure
- Active outreach to bipoc and lgbtq community members to participate in day to day town work and events
- Unable to think of any
- increase the number of teachers and staff of color (there's just no way you can do proper equity work without having people of color in teachers/administrator positions). It was clear to me that the school district had given up in that area (I was told that they were on par with other schools-- that's not a good excuse).
- more smaller businesses owned by different ethnicities
- I have never witnessed any level of bias or the exclusion of any group while a resident of Ashland these past 30 years
- Diverse town officials, police force, business owners
- More businesses owned by minorities. How to encourage more minorities to live here.
- not only provide places where people can share their stories with others, but also find ways to share the stories beyond those conversations so that everyone (even those not present) can learn and understand.
- Walk the talk with regards to participation in democracy and change it up about how issues are discussed in town. Like- potluck get together to discuss an issue a month, have folks switch who they're sitting with for dessert...
- Think and educate before expressing opinions in public
- transparency within govt departments, easy access to chain of command when voice is not heard.
- Perhaps having town officials organize via specific invitation to people in the town for a purpose that would encourage conversation and getting to know people you wouldn't otherwise know.  
Then when
- committees needed members it would be easier to reach out to people because you would have met them.
- Lower Taxes
- no suggestions
- Not sure
- I don't have much experience with town committees.
- Lower taxes would help
- More open discussions and more community input
- Opportunities for discussion across the community
- More diverse population
- Somehow engage the apathetic and egocentric crowds, possibly by using empathy or showing how there is impact to them personally and the whole community
- no answer
- stop pitting groups against each other
- hold parades have art shows downtown

- No idea
- More volunteers
- DK
- No
- Don't push race inequality when none exists. Promotes stronger negative response to racial disparity.
- Stop calling non-white people "diverse". That's not what that word means, and it's just another form of othering
- I don't know
- I'm not sure
- More culture fests with aggressive promotion
- NA
- More consistency of public's roadways and walkways
- don't know
- Go to city form of government
- Teachers should be able to discuss these issues in the classroom and be supported by administrators. School administrators must educate the community on these issues. People need to be aware that
- having these discussions will touch some raw nerves- people will disagree.
- 1. More town events 2. More vigils regarding national issues
- Work with a lot of minorities at Ashland Corp. but most live out of town
- More active listening to concerns
- No issues identified regarding race
- Educate leadership to the issues, promote diversity in every aspect of Town government and services
- Continue to seek and incorporate the interest, perspectives, beliefs, and values of all community members.
- More diversity in housing stock to be able to attract more diverse population
- Improve outreach and communication to underserved populations
- Stop worrying about no issue items like diversity
- Support the development of minority owned businesses
- Increase efforts for outreach. Actually engage people (communication as 2 way street). Make everyone aware of the ways and times the public can be involved in civic decisions. Put our money where our mouth is — diverse hiring. Active (and sustained!) effort to diversify every board and committee in Town.
- Heartfelt acceptance
- Avoid re-appointing the same people on committees over and over.
- N/a
- no
- I don't think it's as much about ashland providing equitable opportunities as it is about people taking advantage of those opportunities
- N/a

- Hiring more minorities
- Suggest not to assume different political philosophy is not racist. This is condescending and will backfire. Teach - don't preach.
- I think the town is moving in the right direction. Town selectmen's and officials need to spend time with
- different groups not at big functions but one on one to know the people of the town. In the big groups, a lot of things get sugar coated. One on one or smaller groups you get the real feel of the issues.
- None
- I don't know
- Continue to promote AREA, make sure funding for mental health support and other non-police resources is plentiful
- I think the town has done a reasonably good job with outreach to people who use the internet regularly and know how to navigate social media and/or the town's website and email subscription services- but I think initiatives are needed to develop other means of outreach to reach as many people as possible. For example, the message signs that are usually seen near town hall should be used on the other side(s) of
- town too, and for stuff like this.
- More info about how diverse the town is
- Improve the town website. Reduce the "defensiveness" on the part of long time residents.
- I bought a home here because Ashland was not completely white. Inclusion is a complex issue, and I have no easy answers. issue
- I don't know
- Increased representation in town government, boards
- Talk more about race
- increase diversity in school teachers/administrators
- Develop more affordable housing and change committee leadership more often
- More diverse representation in the schools. The privilege and ignorance of some adults in the system needs to be addressed.
- none
- Don't know
- More opportunities to discuss

**Q25 - Is there anything else that you would like to share with us regarding equity and inclusion in Ashland?**

**Answers:**

- NO
- None
- Our high school should continue to produce more and more inclusion-in-mind future adults.
- no

- with many bumps along the road we have made dramatic progress in my lifetime starting with one Jewish student in the school system to the only back resident to the cancelation of traditional mistral shoe in the 50s.
- Community organizations with the same mission to create an inclusive environment need to work alongside one another and support one another. Maybe the town can help bridge these groups through Town initiatives?
- -
- don't just give lip service to this first step
- no
- I want to help make Ashland a more inclusive place. We are better and stronger when we include diverse voices in town activities and government.
- no
- No thank you
- Currently the events and activities are advertised on social media, however not everyone is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. So if there are other ways to reach the people, that would be great. Thank you.
- Happy to see the town take a step to work on equity and inclusion but I also hope it's continuous and more frequent
- no
- no
- No
- No
- No
- Our neighborhoods are very segregated. We should investigate housing policies and practices that lead to that.
- Love Ashland!!
- no
- Older residents need to know what younger residents are doing. A weekly paper would achieve this. People in Ashland that cant make it to the farmers market need to get that feeling in another way.
- Poor oversight of committee scope of responsibility where they violate town bylaws routinely.
- I appreciate the discussion about it, as it seems from what we have experienced so far (We are a few years into living here) that there are not many black people in town or mixed race individuals.And, all our interactions with Ashland folks has been positive for the most part. I do not like identity politics and would like to see the conversation around equity and inclusion translate to real policies that reduce poverty, improve the climate, provide business opportunities for minority communities, allow people to be represented by those who have their best interest in mind and know their community
- Na
- No
- No
- does not seem to be an issue in this town

- No
- Town government is an insiders game and completely none inclusive
- Put people before revenue.
- no
- Thank you for initiating the effort to be inclusive and bringing a window to what Ashland is and can be looking in and out!
- easy permits, take down burocracy
- It is fascinating to watch the transformation of the diversity in Ashland.
- It's a process not a checkbox.
- When I see the number of SE Asians, OutMetrowest signs(gay org.) Blacks and working class whites, it seems the town is pretty well represented. But that just observational
- I appreciate the huge improvement in diversity over the last 10-15 years but we have a long ways to go
- Hard to be inclusive while the town is so white
- The school district is doing a wonderful job of trying to narrow the education/language gaps and they are in that way, pursuing equity and inclusion. But as I see time and again at town meetings and committees, I see few people of color. You can't just have them as token people in certain meetings. They need to be invited to all meetings. And please remember that people from certain cultures will not come to the table
- unless they have been invited.
- nope
- no - Ashland, like most of Massachusetts is populated by intelligent educated people who work hard and treat each other with fairness.
- Keep up this really important work. Just because many of us don't experience discrimination regularly doesn't mean it doesn't happen.
- Looking hard at these issues is long overdue and real change needs to be made here...
- No
- not now but thanks.
- In my experience, Ashland has encouraged all people to run for office and to volunteer for committees. In that way it is a very welcoming community.
- no
- Not at this time
- Equality and inclusion is something that takes constant work. If Ashland truely wants to be inclusive, it's going to have to keep on trying to be inclusive, even when most people's experiences are "good enough"
- I'd like to know what prompted this survey
- No
- No thank you
- No
- To me the community is filled with well meaning people who rrqlly do want equity and inclusion (there are exceptions to this) but there are many microaggressions ongoing and antiquated

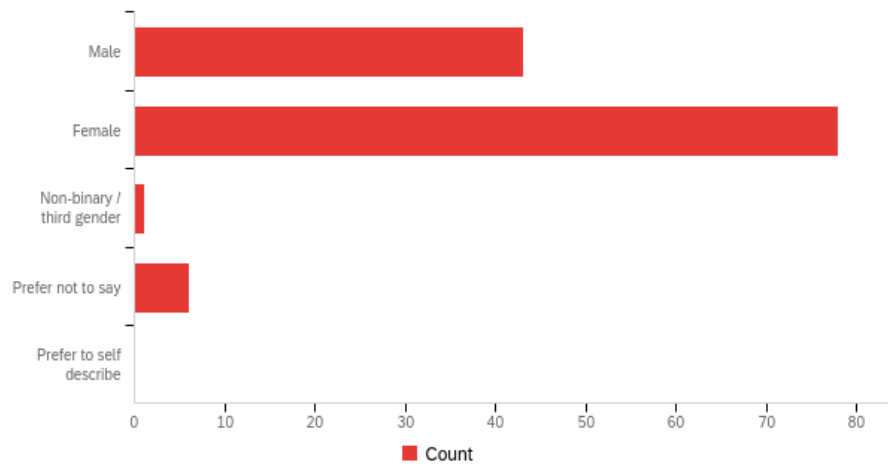
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systems and just general issues that need to be addressed. I'm glad to see all the steps the town and community is taking.

- no
- we are Americans. Period
- I feel all races are included. Never saw any evidence to the contrary
- No
- No
- I appreciate that we're starting to look at and talk about this topic and will be curious to hear the results of this survey and what it might mean moving forward.
- When I grew up here in the 1950's and 60's, the town was almost exclusively white and a lot of people liked it that way. That is thankfully not how it seems to me today. The political divide seems to me and my friends to be more toxic than any racial divide. It is essential that the town provide educational equality to all students. I am gay and have never in the 15 years since I moved back to Ashland felt that
- it was an issue with any neighbors or anyone else.
- NA
- No.
- No
- Income inequality is also an issue
- No
- Yes. Waste of tax payer money
- We could start by having some very real conversations about the issue
- No
- No
- There is no problem to begin with
- Study is a good start but means nothing without demonstrable and measurable changes.
- Superficial acceptance will never work
- No
- no
- I would like to see more POC in elected positions.
- No
- Keep up the good work.
- More activities which brings all races together
- thank you for starting this effort and promoting it
- I don't have children and have not had the opportunity to learn much about equity and inclusion issues in our schools system. So the perspective I've shared here is lacking that perspective. I am grateful that the town is supporting this project and hope the commitment and support will continue to evolve.
- no
- The residents of Ashland really care and are continuously working towards improvement. But there are still of lot of racial "blindness" that need to be exposed and removed.
- My Black, Indian, and Brazilian neighbors may have more to say.

- No
- No
- no
- Not at this time
- no
- No
- No

**Q27 - What is your gender?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	33.59%	43
2	Female	60.94%	78

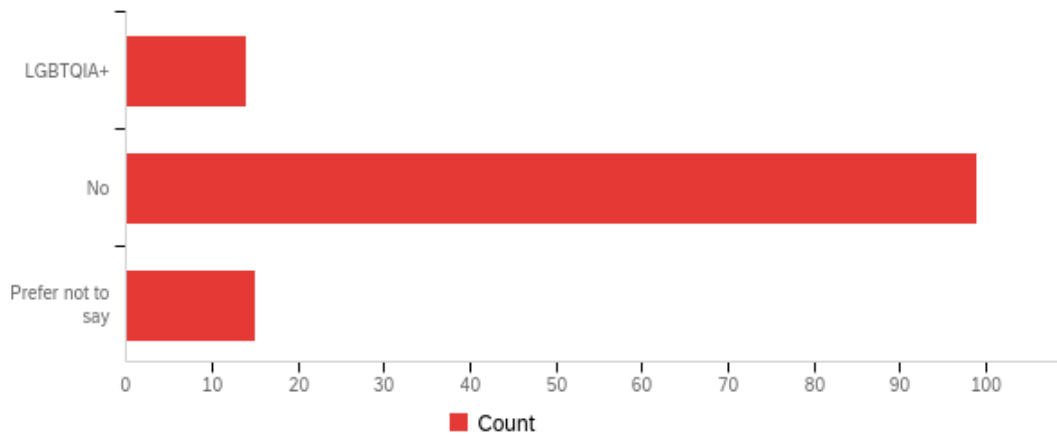


2	Asian	9.30%	12
3	Black or African American	6.98%	9
4	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
5	White or Caucasian	72.09%	93
6	Biracial or multiracial	0.78%	1
7	Another race or ethnicity	3.10%	4
8	Prefer not to answer	7.75%	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>129</b>

**If another race or ethnicity, please answer below:**

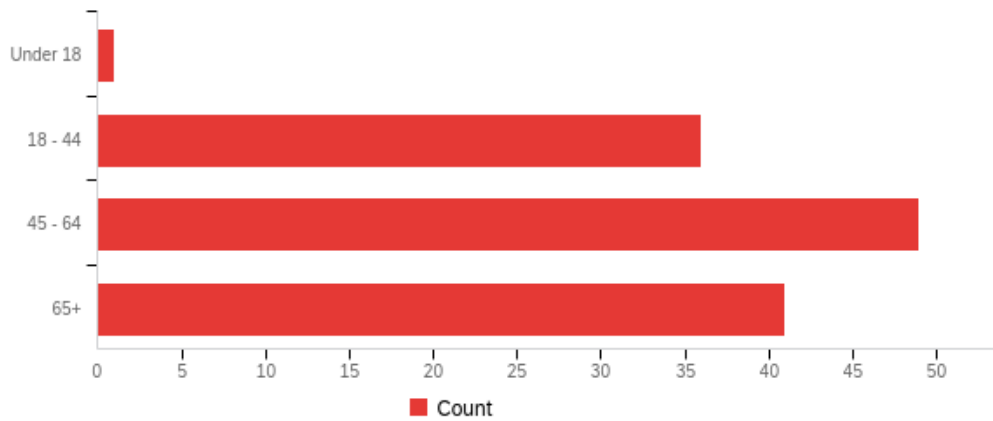
- Middle Eastern
- Russian Jew
- White skinned Jew

**Q29 - Do you identify with the LGBTQIA+ community?**




#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	10.94%	14
2	No	77.34%	99
3	Prefer not to say	11.72%	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>128</b>

**Q30 - What is your age range?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Under 18	0.79%	1



2	18-44	28.35%	36
3	45-64	38.58%	49
4	65+	32.28%	41

**Total**

**100%**

**127**

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## **Addendum 3 - Interview, Interactions and Focus Group Dialogue**

**While most of this section focuses on insights from interviews and focus groups, we have added relevant insights from the community survey.**

The majority of the people we interviewed shared various things they love about the Town of Ashland including location and access to the nearby cities, comparatively inexpensive housing, good public schools and various parks and access to recreational activities.

*“Location wise Ashland is right between the cities of Boston 6 miles. Availability of major highways like the mass pike. There a lot of great locations in town and as much open space as possible. A lot of history here too.”*

### **Comfortability while interacting with town representatives:**

According to our survey results, 34% of the respondents are extremely comfortable interacting with the town representatives, however, there are still 10% & 8% of the residents who are uncomfortable and our focus should be to reduce this number and take measures accordingly.

We also saw a strong theme emerging out of the various conversations we had with the town residents that town hall staffing does not represent people of color and there is limited diversity. Many people shared how they would like to see more people of color in the town hall, police as well as fire department. People are not coming forward and applying for any openings in the town because they do not see any other person of color and therefore feel the role is not meant for them or they're not the right fit.

*"It is strange when you go to town hall. It would be nice to see a black man or woman behind town clerk office. That is not happening. You go in and everything is white, But I'm so used to use to it now it doesn't even come into my head. One thing I keep an eye on though is firefighters here in Ashland. As far*

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*as my knowledge there is no black firefighter, there might be some auxiliary ones that help. However, that bother(s) me.”*

We also observed that many people are talking about a shift toward more conversations about race, equity and diversity but not enough, and hope to see more conversations in the future.

*“I have seen a lot of positive growth in how I feel when I interact with town and that includes the schools and the town, the general side of government, and I feel like until probably five years ago there were no conversations about any of these things. It never could have come up and whenever there was a town event it was very White and Christian. I feel like in the last few years there has been an awakening of awareness that you have to do more than that, you have to not just fail to be excluding people, you also have to work to include people. That feels like there has been a very strong shift.”*

According to our survey, when asked if the town of Ashland is inclusive in terms of listening to and valuing the voices of diverse community members, majority of the residents agreed with this statement. However, listening is not enough and there needs to be appropriate actions taken to make a difference in the community.

From our conversations with the residents, we observed that people think the town is slow about making decisions and having conversations and takes a lot of time to make things happen.

*“So my general feeling is that everybody cares but it's not being a priority, like i'd like to see so much more happening (in the) Community. I really believe in conversation groups and I suggested it and offered to be involved, to help be a part of equity, inclusion and it's just slow. I mean I know slow is important, but it's just nothing. I don't see a lot going on I don't think that there's a lot of space being made. I appreciate this is happening (focus groups), but this took a year to happen, I mean I'm disappointed.”*

The town does not provide an outlet to speak about diversity, inclusion and belonging. In our survey, many respondents shared that they do not have conversations about race or equity at home with family, or with friends and such topics only come up when something drastic happens in the country. People want to see more proactive conversations.

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*“I do not see much of that conversation. one could say that this is quite a welcoming place, Things are happening across the country, and it is also happening in the neighborhood and in the neighboring cities. I think there are issues that needs a proactive conversation. Not something that you should talk only when things happen.”*

Town hall seems to serve as the basis for the forming of perceptions about the town. Currently when those enter the town hall, they don't feel like they belong. There has also been a lack of diverse backgrounds in the fire department and in the police department as well.

*“When I am looking around, I don't see a whole lot of representation in local government. Like in the elections there are hardly any diverse people. I look at the police department and the fire department and I do not know if there are anybody from a diverse community or a minority. I don't think the government represents those numbers. Not as the police and fire department.”*

### **Insights from the Business/Commercial Community**

According to our survey, 42% respondents strongly agree that the businesses in Ashland are friendly, helpful, and inviting to all community members.

We heard of diversity in restaurant offerings, but also a recognition that there is less diversity across other types of businesses in town. A theme emerged out of our conversations saying that the businesses do not represent the diverse community of the town.

*“The restaurants are the place that has sort of the most diversity. In terms of who's operating businesses, we now have in the last few years, not just pizza shops and a couple of Chinese restaurants. And, then Americana restaurants. We do have a greater array of some different ethnic kinds of food, but I still think that is probably the only place that I experience a lot of different business owners that have a diverse background.”*

*“The actual businesses in town do not represent the community. That is where there is a lack of balance. Most of the prominent businesses in town are white owned. I tried to go to support ethnic businesses. There is still work to be done. ”*

Community members reported that they do not see much diversification of businesses in the Ashland community. Additionally, in several conversations, we heard from the community about the concerns over aid in registering for businesses or

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waiving of fees as a need to motivate people of color and economically struggling residents to start new ventures in the town.

*“I don't see a lot of black and brown business owners and Ashland. I also don't see a lot of businesses in Ashland. There may be some Latina businesses, but I don't see any black owned businesses. So I don't see (businesses) thriving, I don't see a good diversity. There are business owners at the farmers market who are black and I appreciate that and buy from them as much as possible. It does seem like there's not a lot of people purchasing from them, there might be lines at a lot of the other stalls and not necessarily at others (black-owned), so I don't know if they're feeling (like) they are thriving here and also I'm just wondering if to support them more to be able to succeed on wondering if the farmers market waives or reduces the rent or the fee to attend & be a part of the farmers market for black & brown owned businesses.”*

Just about 11% of the business owners responding to the survey feel supported by the town of Ashland, its business association, and non-BIPOC customers (i.e. do non-BIPOC community members make a point to support BIPOC businesses).

According to our survey, those who would like to start a business here in Ashland have many hurdles to overcome. Although there are grants or other financial supports, there may be a lack of advertising for said funds. It has been noted by members of the community that there are barriers for those of diverse cultures to start a business.

*“One of the members looked through the grants and saw a lot of the barriers that people of color would experience uniquely and shared with business development person. So they have these grants that says this is for people of color specifically & preference will be given to minority businesses. But, AREA didn't even know about it till after the fact. Why wouldn't you access a group of people of color to tell them about it? There's this inconsistency, I guess.”*

There may be a perception that the town is not adequately supporting small business owners. As a result, small business owners have this lack of information regarding supporting and promoting them financially. Moreover, we learned that small business owners, or those interested, have a hard time accessing the right persons and procedures for business development.

*“I don't think they (small business owners) would ever think the town has anything that can help them.”*

*“Many are trying to figure out a forum for businesses for people of color. I mean small business to take these opportunities and figure out how they can make it accessible and learn about all the details*

*of it, so that they don't feel like there's an incentive tied for them for taking those grants and things to assist them with their businesses. But, I love seeing the new small businesses, like the little Indian grocery store, we now have at market basket. A number of Brazilian restaurants.”*

Many see that the town has made steps towards being more diverse and inclusive. They have done so by utilizing the newsletter and creating AREA and Ashland is United. These groups can also help with business. There still needs work to be done for example having more opportunities for businesses of diverse backgrounds to speak on a forum and access grants.

In the focus groups, there were participants who wanted to start a business but did not know how. How can one start a small business when there is a gap of information needed? Also, there was real concern expressed that if someone who is African American created a small business will the community support it...as shown in the quote below.

*“It is so difficult to get information about businesses around here. I wanted to start a business here, but it is so hard to do that. Black people don’t get this information. Fear of...if I start a business will customers come here.”*

### **Perceptions of the Community**

According to our survey, 61% of the respondents expressed a strong or very strong sense of belonging in Ashland while 26% felt a weak sense of belonging.

*“I think they think they are doing something, because they sent out an anemic statement. I don't know if you know about the death of a young girl in Hopkinton. So our community is very much like Hopkinton in a lot of ways and I figure it could of happened here too. They were so slow to put a statement, and anemic, but they did some signaling like we are doing this racial equity thing so we are better than Hopkinton. It was cringy. Because their experience is from one lens.”*

The town of Ashland should do more when there is an issue. There have been statements that were put out in an untimely manner. Such statements lacked empathy and were criticized since their experience is from “one lens”.

In terms of active engagement in formal and informal town positions, there is a perception that diversity is not a priority, or that recruiting diverse participants is a

passive process. The quote provided here by a community member shows how much of a challenge engagement and inclusion can be for communities like Ashland.

*“Feels to me it is a chicken and egg thing people of color do not apply to leadership positions because they do not see other people of color in leadership positions. So how do we break the chicken and egg cycle? For instance, my immediate experience is with girl scouts. There are tons of troops but only one of them is led by someone who is not white, and scouts does not represent the diversity of people who live in this town. But, it is all volunteers so how do we encourage diversity working in this town to be represented among the leadership of the town? I do not know the answer, but is there something I can do to break that cycle?”*

*“Somebody was putting swastikas in high school; a bunch of women got involved in school to do something about this and started a group called “Ashland Is United” all white women and the mission is equality and working with everyone. So, in the last couple of years this group was deferred to when the town had a inclusivity policy like it was represented as a diverse committee yet they are all white women. So again, they are missing the mark. They are doing a positive thing; it is just not representative of diversity.”*

The challenge of diversifying volunteer groups is not one that Town officials can resolve on their own. Volunteer and interest groups must recognize the value and importance of engaging diverse members who share similar interests. The Town, and leaders such as the REI Steering Committee, could support engagement by offering trainings, supporting recruitment efforts and in collaboration.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

The town of Ashland needs a plan. The plan should have many steps involved such as strategic plans, goals, action steps, and accountability. The town of Ashland should hire a dedicated person to take initiative. This was emphasized during out of our community conversations, where the conversation was sparked by this resident’s comment:

*“This is Community Engagement 101. If they are dedicated to community engagement, there has to be a strategic plan with goals and action steps and accountability to take responsibility to make it happen. It takes a dedicated person to go to churches, temples, mosques etc. religious institutions are one of many places. Farmer’s market is a great spot.... a lot of folks to share communications and perhaps people who can take surveys. There are different ways to go about it and you can see results. That dedicated person needs to get permission from Shaw’s and Market Basket to talk to residents and collect data.”*

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The pandemic has hampered REI efforts, but many of the individuals that we spoke with recognized that the Town of Ashland have made positive steps toward improvement in areas of REI. Importantly, there seem to be different views on the level of improvement, whereas some see progress, but others press for more.

*“I mean Ashland has certainly gone leaps and bounds since I first moved here as far as diversity. One thing that was very nice in voting for the people who were elected, that there were a lot of people of color and certainly those who come from different cultures, are elected to positions of government in the Board of health and the planning board. That was nice.”*

*“The whole point of having diverse representation and reflection of the community at large is Ashland had significant changes in who lives here. The residents are people of color, Asian and a large Indian population. It is not reflected in the employees of the town or school system or even representatives of people who are supposed to be in groups that are supposed to be inclusive and diverse.”*

*“There are a lot of events that the Council has like “Ashland Day” was quite popular now, that is, I think sometime end of summer that is when you get to meet a lot more people in Ashland that aspect was helpful. I would say it is a little quieter than the other cities but anytime there's been forums or meetings it's been quite friendly.... it's a very friendly community.”*

*I have never been made to not feel that I do not belong here, but yet I can't 100% say that I do. I also felt like I have never really belonged anywhere even when I was living in Indiana and living in Chicago and then moving to Boston. For me it's more of an identity struggle, not feeling like I'm part of one Community versus the other and to say*

*that I belong in one Community is hard for me. I hope that my children would not feel that way, I would hope that if they do grow up in Ashland that they feel like they belong there.”*

## Addendum 4 - Netnography Data and Findings

### Social Media Findings:

#### 1. The Ashland Police Department (Facebook Page):

- The page has 6,829 followers.
- It is a very active group with posts that engage the viewers. The page highlights diverse set of topics such as Car Temperature dog safety chart, updates on Ashland Public Safety Building with a video showcasing the construction site, information on graduation parade and acknowledging firefighters, to name few.
- People have shared positive emotions and experiences with the police department. They have expressed a sense of pride and gratefulness which can be seen in the comments.



© Ashland Police Department, Facebook, 2021

*“We are so lucky to have such extraordinary emergency personnel as these in our community”*

*“Thank you to all involved today you make us proud. Great work!! Once again you remind us what a great town we live in.”*

### Observation:

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Not a lot of comments seen on most of the pictures. Also, not many comments from people of color. There are no posts (recent posts) on diversity, inclusion, discrimination, or equality. It is more of an educational / informative page and lacks substantial insights on aforementioned subjects.

**Recommendation:**

Take a look at the facebook page for the Revere, Massachusetts Police Department:

<https://business.facebook.com/ReverePoliceDept/>

In a post from June 7, 2021, RPD writes:

*“Revere Police Department Doubles Down on Citywide Community Engagement Effort: Chief Callahan Focuses on Programs to Connect with Residents, Build trust, Promote Diversity and Inclusion.”*

Posting any literature, photos, or upcoming events regarding diversity and inclusion can promote feelings of belonging and inclusivity to your online community. It is important for your residents to feel a sense of belonging not only in face-to-face situations, but online as well. We are in the era of social media and technology advancements; it is important to foster a positive and active social media presence.

**2. *You are from Ashland, MA if...* (Facebook Group):**

- The page has 2.3K members and mentions posts about Ashland’s history and encourages people to share their experiences of living in the town.
- While many people in the town are looking for growth and development, there are also others who are reminiscing the earlier days when they first moved to the town and it was calm and less commercial. The insights are from comments from a post in the group titled “Construction starts tomorrow...”



The comments on this Ashland town group page express dissatisfaction with growing traffic problems.

*“Its sad in many ways how this town has changed in my 60 years living here. and I understand that change and growth will happen. I miss my quiet town.”*

*“Oh no. More traffic. Ashland just isn’t Ashland anymore.”*

### Observations:

- Many people have shared where they used to live and shared their experience.
- Again, there is no real conversation of race, diversity, inclusion, or any other topic. However, they did share their disappointment on the changing development and infrastructure which was also noticed as a theme in the focus group interview.

### 3. Town of Ashland Ma (Instagram):

@TownofAshlandMa

- The page has 998 followers and is very active with 1 to 2 post per day on an average.
- They have posted about the focus group sessions three times till now.
- Page is very active with users and mentions various topics such as Health Alerts (Mosquito Project) Office Annual Town Election Results, Construction, and positive affirmations for example Pride, Nurse Week, Superhero Day.
- Promotes shopping local in Ashland with a positive comment. Mentions job opportunities and also posts regarding the city’s diversity including trivia!

- Finally, they also had a lot of likes for the page and had positive comments.



*“This is so cool!!!!”*

*“Big shoutout to all our teachers and staff at Ashland Early Education! They kept everyone safe and happy since we opened last August.”*

*@Murphy Eats & Treats “They are the Best”*

*@Cornerspot Ashland “Looking forward to the event tonight”*

*“Hooray that was amazing fun”*

### Observations:

- The Posts do not get many likes from a diverse audience
- The Posts do not get many comments from a diverse audience. A lot of the post are informational based.

### Recommendation:

- Having pictures that show a diversity people at the events. For example, at the Corner spot or at the library or town hall.
- Posting more trivia or engaging questionnaires that get people to think and send it to each other.
- Posting live streams of events, town meetings, book talks, games, etc.

#### 4. The Corner Stop (Instagram)

@TheCornerStopAshland

- This page has 930 Followers and is very active with at least one to two posts daily.
- Posts similarly to town of Ashland Instagram and promotes diverse events ex: best spot in town event celebrates cultures that make up the community, Outdoor Gala, and Culture fest Promotes shopping local.



*“Excited to be at the corner spot again this year!!”*

*“Can hardly wait”*

*“Looking forward to it!” “*

*We will be there!”*

#### **Observation:**

- Has more engagement than the town of Ashland page the posts have more likes in general and more comments per post.
- Not many people of diversity commenting.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Posting more people doing said activities, boomerangs, videos etc. Post more on Instagram stories or live stream events.
- Post more about diversity and inclusion.

## 5. Town of Ashland, MA (Twitter)

@ashlandmass

- The Official Twitter account for the Town of Ashland Massachusetts 96 followers.
- Inconsistent posts with 1 post every two days on an average. Informative posts about the town's events.
- Posts on pride month, St Patrick's day, easter, women's day, Hanukkah, Diwali and Chinese New Year etc.
- No comments or tweets from the followers on posts. Very limited activity is seen, almost equal to no activity.
- Interesting "Snowman Challenge" initiative to engage people and promote activity, however, we could not find any response or comments from the followers



### Observations:

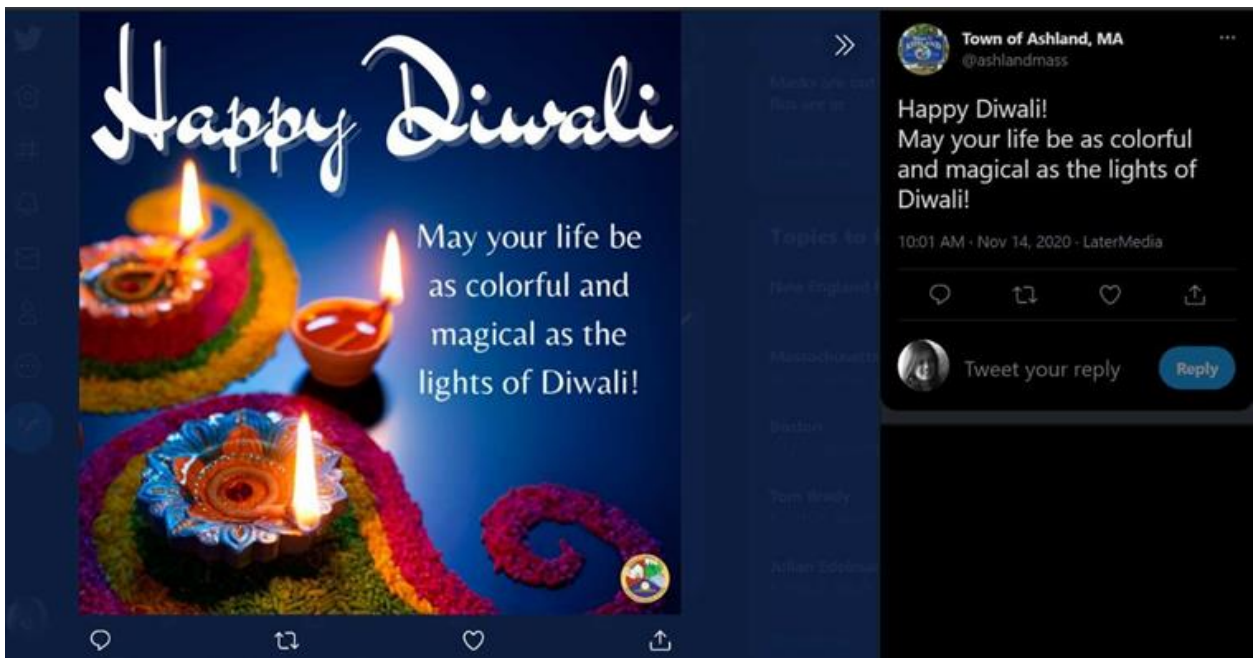
- The twitter account is taking measures to post more diverse and inclusive content and also tries to come up with challenges to generate user activity.

- However, posts are less frequent, and the page has very less followers.

Many informative and political posts are observed with hyperlinks leading to the official websites and community groups.

### **Recommendations:**

- Increase the activity of followers by introducing more challenges and posting questions in tweets.
- For example- ending the tweet with questions like “What are your thoughts on this?” or “Let us know your opinion in the comments section” or “What would you like to see during this event?”. This could motivate people to share their thoughts.
- Post more frequently and increase the number of posts pertaining to equity and diversity. Include diverse topics which are not just specific to good wishes during festivals or celebrations but are also highlighting the key issues around these areas such as relevant news and other topics within the county.



## 6. Town of Ashland Website

[www.ashlandmass.com](http://www.ashlandmass.com)

- Includes information of all the businesses within the town.
- Interesting section on community events shown on a monthly calendar. Provides information of date, time, venue, and contact details of the organizer along with registration links.
- Section named “Doing Business” which includes information and resources for already established businesses as well as new business ventures.
- Includes a 12 Step Guide to Starting a Business.
- Includes information on business incentive programs and grant opportunities for new ventures and startups.

**A LOOK INTO ASHLAND**  
COMMUNITY. BUSINESS. ACCESSIBLE

**COMMUNITY**  
STRONG, DIVERSE, SUPPORTIVE

**FACTS:**  
TOWN POPULATION: 17,573  
BUSINESSES: 150  
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$102,811  
COMMUNITY COMMITTEES: 26+

**FEATURES:**  
OPEN SPACE & RECREATION  
HIGHLY RATED SCHOOLS  
50+ LOCAL COLLEGES  
12 LANGUAGES SPOKEN

**BUSINESS**  
APPROACHABLE, AFFORDABLE, ATTRACTIVE

**BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS:**  
SMALL TAX RATE (9.7%)  
WORKING LEARNING  
KNOWLEDGE FOR WORK & REGIONAL BUSINESS

**EASE OF DOING BUSINESS:**  
ONE POINT OF CONTACT  
SUPPORT OF REGIONAL SPONSORS  
ASHLAND BUSINESS ASSOCIATION  
SCORE - Free Business Counseling

**ACCESSIBLE**  
LOCATION, TRANSPORTATION, CONVENIENCE

**ACCESSIBILITY:**  
METRA COMMUTER RAIL LINE TO WORCESTER AND BOSTON  
SHORT DISTANCE FROM ROUTE 9, 1495 AND MA 190  
MARTA - STOPS THROUGHOUT TOWN  
10 WAYS TO BOSTON

**CONTACT:**  
Beth Reynolds  
Economic Development Director  
Town of Ashland

101 Main Street, Ashland MA  
breynolds@ashlandmass.com  
508-532-7905

## 7. Ashland Youtube Page

- 2019 Town of Ashland Residential Video

(copyright 2019), Apr 11, 2019 1,481 views

and 1 comment.

- Only one interviewee was a person of color and that too after half of the video is over and that person to be seen only for 20 seconds. Rest everyone seems to belong to the white community.
- Other scenes in the background shows majority of white community except for 1 or two rare moments where a person of color was seen.
- People speak a lot about diversity, town being warm and welcoming, many activities and events along with committees in place for the residents.
- This link is posted on the official town website under “Why Ashland”

- 2019 Town of Ashland Business Promo  
(copyright 2019), Apr 11, 2019 595 views

- 2 people of color out of 10 interviewees.
- No information about the aids/ grants/ support system or organizational benefits given to businesses of other cultures or diverse groups.
- This link is posted on the official town website under “Why Ashland”

16 Curious Things About Ashland, Massachusetts , Apr 11, 2019 794 views

- Includes wide range of information right from beaches to businesses to community events like music festivals and farmers market.
- Limited information on cultural diversity or history of Ashland referring to racial equity and inclusion.

- 
- Sri Laxmi Temple was shown which could be a motivator for the Indian Community members to reside in the town.
  - This link is posted on the official town website under “Why Ashland”

## **6. Special Thanks**

**We’d like to extend a special thank you to:**

**Residents of Ashland, Massachusetts**

**Participants of this study**

**Ashland Steering committee members**

**Professor Marc Holzer, PhD**


**Professor Aimee Williamson, PhD**

**Suffolk University Staff**

**Suffolk University Graduate Research Fellows**

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