



SOUTH ORANGE | MAPLEWOOD
COMMUNITY
COALITION
ON RACE

2023

Annual Report

Growing Our Commitment to
Racial Equity & Inclusion



LEADERSHIP MESSAGE Advancing Racial Equity Together

Throughout 2023, the Community Coalition on Race challenged itself, the town governments, the schools, civic organizations, and residents to embrace unique, intentional efforts to build an inclusive community. Across the nation this year we witnessed growing censorship in classrooms, book bans, the persistence of school and residential segregation, the rise of white supremacy and racial hate crimes, and the dismantling of affirmative action.

As long as deeply rooted systemic racism, overt racism, and unconscious bias exist, we cannot for one moment take our eyes off the Coalition's mission. We know what happens to communities that gain diversity without doing the work of intentional integration. At best, people of different races tend to live, go to school, and socialize in isolation from one another. At worst, the community loses its diversity altogether.

This year the Coalition convened hundreds of people to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to share the light of peace with the Luminary Project, and to learn about the racial wealth gap at Conversations on Race. During Black History Month, we collaborated on African American Genealogy Workshops. With our support, Durand-Hedden House & Garden sponsored "Juneteenth: A Celebration of Freedom," an educational event that attracts hundreds of people each year. Plus, we launched monthly Integrated Art Circles that support cross-race relationship building; debuted a Deconstructing Racism Series, which brought people together to learn and grow in their anti-racism journeys; and gave parents and teachers strategies at a Talking to Children about Race workshop.

We continue to monitor and advocate for residential and school integration. To address community concerns about housing, we held a Town Hall on Housing, Development, and Impacts in SOMA. We are especially excited to have made five Wealth Gap Equalizer Loans, a critical effort to address home ownership disparities locally and promote integrated neighborhoods.

Your participation and support in our shared pursuit of integration and inclusion work makes change possible!

With gratitude,

Nancy Gagnier, Executive Director

Kelly Quirk, Chair of the Board of Trustees, 2023

Trustees share why they do the work...

"As a parent of three black children, I was aware of the inequities found in the schools. I continue to work with the Schools Committee because, while there has been significant progress, the minority achievement gap still persists. The community focus of the organization resonates with me."

"1) Service: I want to help create a better world. I remain engaged because we are at such a critical juncture. 2) Racial justice improves the lives of people and creates momentum to create change. 3) The Coalition is unique in this community because it can be a thought leader as well as a means for action."



"We need a united and aggressive effort to ensure equity and inclusion for all in our community as well as the need to vigorously confront the harms caused by the spread of white nationalism that has been embraced by many."

"I believe I have been called in this life to support community building and ensure everyone is seen, heard, respected, and has a sense of belonging."

"I think the Coalition has survived 25+ years by being strategic and always thinking of how we can address race and integration in very concrete ways: through relationships, data, advocacy and education."

"As a white person in this community, it is easy to live happily under the banner of a so-called diverse community, while acting in self-interested ways that undermine the opportunity for progress or the sustainability of what we have. This hypocrisy motivates me to show up."

BUILDING COMMUNITY

The 22nd Annual MLK Observance & Luminary Project: Creating Community in the Face of Discord

Hundreds of people gathered to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The speakers delivered stirring calls to activism to make progress on the mission of racial integration, equity, and inclusion. Keynote speaker Robt Martin Seda-Schreiber, chief activist at the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice, spoke about Rustin's contribution to Dr. King's work: "He planned the march, brought nonviolence to the movement, inspired the Freedom Riders, and spoke truth to power. He was lost to history, edited out of the books, and excised from the stories told because of who he loved and who he was: a queer black man embracing his identity and all his beautiful intersectionality."

Integration Through the Arts: Integrated Art Circles

Integrated Art Circles combines art education, individual creative expression, interracial interaction, and community engagement using small group workshops, public exhibits, performances, and community discussion. A racially diverse group of Essex County artists taught eight art forms throughout the year. The sessions included social interaction activities to foster cross-race relationship building.

Black History Month—African American Genealogy

Along with Durand-Hedden house, we sponsored two presentations: "African American Genealogy: The Joy of Discovery with Barbara Velazquez," and "In Search of Our Ancestors: How to Conduct Effective African American Genealogical Research with Genealogist Janice Gilyard." Attendees learned that while African American genealogy research is challenging, it is possible to locate ancestors in historical records, and they gained some of the skills necessary to research, document, share, and preserve family history.

Juneteenth Celebration at Durand-Hedden House & Garden

This day-long event on the grounds of Durand-Hedden House included music, historical reenactments, and an informative exhibit on the history of slavery in New Jersey. With growing interest in Juneteenth since the signing of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act into law in 2021, this educational event is intended to enlighten people about its meaning. We are grateful for the work that everyone at Durand-Hedden House and Coalition on Race volunteers put in to make it possible.



ANTI-RACISM, ADVOCACY, RACIAL JUSTICE

Deconstructing Racism

The Anti-Racism Committee developed this community program to explore how our society is infused by racist conditions and systems that impact us all behaviorally and psychologically, as well as what we can do to disrupt it. The eight virtual sessions focused on issues like structural racism, unconscious bias, anti-racism, white privilege, and the challenging work it takes to address these issues in one's personal life and in the world of work, education, and politics. Each week attendees gathered to hear a well-researched presentation and to spend time with one another in breakout discussion sessions. They discussed their individual experiences of racism and shared ideas for disrupting racism.

The Wealth Gap Equalizer Loan: Increasing Racial Equity in Homeownership

The WGEL program is a special purpose loan intended to narrow the racial home ownership gap by providing supplemental funds to Black and non-White Hispanic households buying homes in South Orange and Maplewood. As of the end of 2023, the Coalition made five loans and collaborated with multiple realtor groups and lenders to promote the program, as well as to partner on other financing options.

Talking to Children About Race

These workshops help adults gain an understanding of the stages of racial knowledge and how to talk with children about race. Dr. Diane Hughes, professor of applied psychology at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Development, and Education, along with Ph.D. candidate Blair Cox, led caregivers in learning how to raise race-conscious children. Participants practiced age-appropriate responses to the difficult questions raised by children about racial identity. The Schools Committee shared an updated "Strategies for Talking to Children about Race" to all participants.

School Integration and Inclusion Advocacy Efforts

The Schools Committee voiced its support of integrated schools in response to community concerns about bussing and elementary school assignments, continued its support of the Intentional Integration plan, and hosted a presentation on the district's preschool program.

Freedom to Learn Day of Action

We joined SOMA Action, SOMA Justice, South Orange Public Library, Erasing Essex's Borders, and Maplewood Library on this National Day of Action to protect the truth and the freedom to learn. The events included banned book readings at both town libraries, a teach-in at CHS, and a rally at Spiotta Park at which Executive Director Nancy Gagnier spoke.



Strategies for Talking to Children About Race

Compiled by the Schools Committee



DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING

Conversations on Race: Rethinking the Racial Wealth Gap

The panelists focused on the racial wealth gap with expert information. Attendees heard about the stark disparities in home ownership, income levels, wealth assets, and more from panelists Laura Sullivan, NJ Institute for Social Justice; Catherine Connelly, United Way NJ; and Darrell W. Gunter, adjunct professor Seton Hall University. Moderator Rhea Mokund-Beck, Director of People & Culture, ACLU New Jersey, challenged the panel and the audience with questions about the systems that perpetuate the wealth gap, the ongoing barriers to solutions, and how to bring about change.

Town Hall on Housing, Development, & Impacts in SOMA

The Residential Committee hosted this informative session featuring South Orange Village President Sheena Collum and Maplewood Mayor Dean Dafis and moderated by Luis Estrella. Attendees learned about affordable housing and development, and the pathways as well as impediments to socioeconomic and racial diversity in SOMA.

Promoting Integration at the Local Level

Executive Director Nancy Gagnier moderated this panel at the 2023 New Jersey Planning and Redevelopment Conference hosted by New Jersey Future and APA New Jersey. Community leaders, planners, and researchers presented the case for local and state-wide plans that support racial equity and integration in areas of community life, such as transportation, housing, access to community opportunities, shared leadership, and more.

Demographics Research

The MERT (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Testing) team continued its demographic data gathering to assess the integration levels of government departments and committees, conducted research on housing values and new tax assessments in SOMA over time with comparisons to other towns, and started work on a survey for SOMA businesses.

Targeted & Affirmative Marketing

To engage more SOMA residents in our mission, we developed an awareness campaign, getting the word out about our mission and the importance of integration. The ChooseSOMA.com targeted marketing site continued to draw potential in-movers to learn about the benefits of living in SOMA.



"These towns exemplify the essence of what it means to build a thriving, inclusive, and harmonious neighborhood... They are places where the conversations around race, class, and culture are not only welcomed but celebrated. It is this commitment to open dialogue that fosters understanding, breaks down barriers, and paves the way for genuine connections."

—Luis Estrella, moderator of the Town Hall and member of the Residential Committee



#ChooseSOMA
The Communities of
South Orange and Maplewood

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

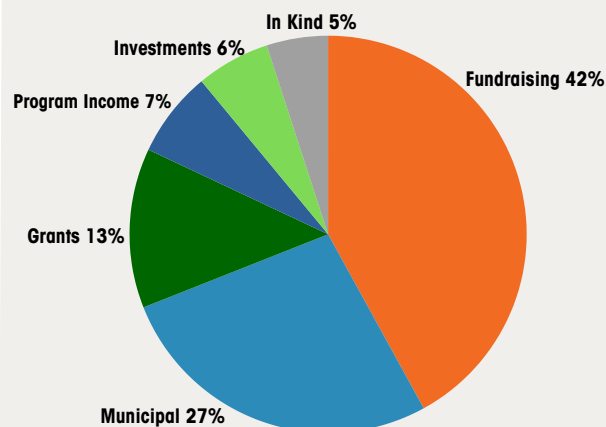
In 2023, we:

- Hosted 30 public events and workshops, and launched three new projects
- Provided race-related education and conversation events for 1,528 community members
- Engaged 597 volunteers, including 55 committee members
- Collaborated with 16 local and regional organizations
- Completed two new Wealth Gap Equalizer Loans
- Raised funds from over 400 donors
- Distributed 1,400 Luminary kits to shine on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

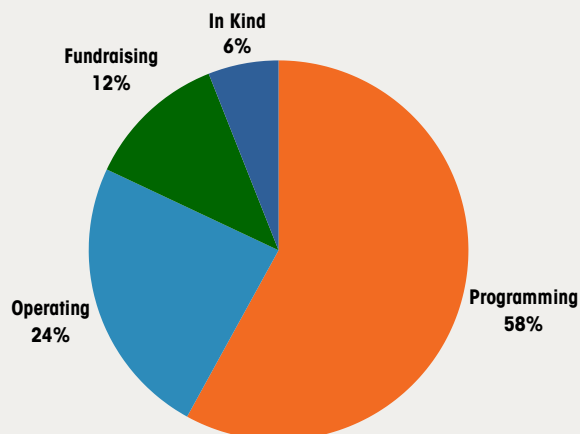
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| • D&I Fitness | • SOMA Action |
| • Durand-Hedden House & Garden | • SOPAC |
| • Elitist Coffee | • South Orange Civic Association |
| • Essex County Local Arts Grant Program | • Sparkhouse Toys |
| • The FB Heron Foundation | • TechSoup |
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| • First Baptist Church of South Orange | • United Way NJ |
| • Ford Foundation | • Village Babies Development Center |
| • General Store Cooperative | • The Vincent A. Huggins Foundation |
| • Give Lively Foundation, Inc. | • Words Bookstore |
| • Google | |

2023 Projected Income: 218,839



2023 Projected Expense: 172,132



IN THE NEWS...

"In this community, buying a home is no longer a pipe dream," Opinion Mosaic News

The Community Coalition on Race's Residential Committee introduced WGEL—the Wealth Gap Equalizer Loan—as a financial incentive to support pro-integrative moves into the towns by Black and Brown homebuyers. This article highlights the experience and perspective of one of the loan recipients.

The Maplewood Foundation

We were honored to be among the inaugural grant recipients from this newly established foundation that provides financial support to local organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life of all residents. The grant will be used in 2024 and 2025 to support our Anti-Bias/Anti-Racism trainings.

Maplewood Ideas Festival Honored Coalition Staff

Program Director Audrey Rowe and Executive Director Nancy Gagnier were honored at the Ideas Festival with the Carol Buchanan Award for Outstanding Contribution to Civic and Intellectual Life! Carol Buchanan was a beloved Maplewoodian who was president of the Hilton Neighborhood Association, and a volunteer on the Maplewood Library Board of Trustees and the Community Coalition on Race.

Local Media Coverage

Thanks to SOMA Living, The Village Green, Matters Magazine, Essex Daily News, Tap, Patch, the South Orange Gaslight, and the Mapleleaf for highlighting our community work!

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

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**Celebrating
Integration:
Growing Our
Commitment to
Equity & Inclusion**

We honored two outstanding SOMA community members, Gail Safian and Dr. Ahadi Bugg-Levine, at this year's fundraiser and gala. Both women have contributed to racial equity and inclusion in a variety of ways over many years in our towns. We are so grateful for their community spirit, their challenge to not take progress and integration for granted, and their calls for continued action on the Coalition's mission.



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