

# Illinois Racial Equity and Justice Landscape Study

## Executive Summary



Prepared for Grand Victoria Foundation, Spring 2023

**GRAND VICTORIA FOUNDATION**



**Great Cities Institute**

# GREAT CITIES

## Illinois Racial Equity and Racial Justice Landscape Study

**Spring 2023**

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### **Acknowledgments**

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# Contents

<b>From Grand Victoria Foundation</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Project Overview</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Conducting the Landscape Study</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Developing a Perspective on the Landscape</b>	<b>12</b>

# From Grand Victoria Foundation

Intentionally addressing the disparities and directing resources towards those who face the greatest challenges creates a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone can thrive. The Illinois Racial Equity & Racial Justice Landscape Study, commissioned by Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF) and executed by UIC's Great Cities Institute (GCI), embodies GVF's resolute mission to deeply understand and advance racial equity and racial justice in Illinois. Through meticulous research, the project identifies communities with 30% or more Black population and locates over 1,500 organizations within these communities. It seeks to understand their challenges and uncover opportunities to amplify the efforts of community-led organizations to achieve their desired equity and justice outcomes. The study goes beyond surface-level analysis to comprehend the complex systems and processes that perpetuate racism in its various forms, from individual to structural, and their profound impacts on Illinois' Black residents.

Rooted in the belief of "Black Abundance," the report also passionately acknowledges the richness of existing, Black-led efforts and strives to translate abstract concepts into tangible practices that drive meaningful change. The study presents strategic recommendations across multiple categories, such as bolster racial equity and racial justice work, redefine public sector involvement, and encourage collaboration and resource allocation beyond Chicagoland. This report, and other strategic deliverables like in-depth profiles of communities like East St. Louis and Pembroke Township, and a community network map lays the strategic groundwork for Grand Victoria Foundation's new approach to racial equity and racial justice - which goes live Fall 2023. We also hope it will serve as a beacon of inspiration for philanthropy, the public sector, and organizations engaged in racial justice work.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all the research participants who generously shared their insights, perspectives, and experiences throughout the Illinois Racial Equity & Racial Justice Landscape Study. Your invaluable contributions have enriched our understanding of the racial equity and racial justice landscape in Illinois and have helped shape the recommendations and findings presented in this report. Your commitment to advancing racial equity and racial justice in your communities is truly inspiring, and we are honored to have had the opportunity to learn from your wisdom and expertise.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to this critical work.

Sharon Bush

President  
Grand Victoria Foundation

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose

In June 2022, Grand Victoria Foundation commissioned the Great Cities Institute (GCI) to conduct a landscape study to deepen understanding in the philanthropic and public sectors about:

- The location and the social, economic, and political context and conditions of Black population centers in Illinois
- Existing racial equity and racial justice efforts across the state including the organizations and leaders working on racial equity and racial justice and the relationships between and among them
- Specific recommendations about how to advance racial equity and racial justice statewide and support Black-led and Black-centered work

## Research Design

GCI carried out an 8-step mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data about Black population centers in Illinois and the state's racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations. As shown in the project roadmap on page 9, GCI designed all aspects of this research to be adaptive, meaning each step would inform, influence, and enhance all other aspects of the project and permit researchers to groundtruth findings in advance of developing final recommendations. The results include information from 81 "Black population centers" – places in Illinois with a Black population greater than 30% – and 1,572 organizations of various sizes that are part of the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work in Illinois, including 570 that are Black-led, Black-centered, or Black-serving, 143 that build community power directly through organizing and 165 that work at the grassroots level. Appendix A presents the research methodology in full.

## Perspective and Analysis

To understand racial equity and racial justice in Illinois, it is essential to approach any analysis intentionally and with appreciation for the work already being done. Racial equity and racial justice work looks different across Illinois. Local history, economic conditions, leadership, and governance all play a role in determining community needs and individuals' and organizations' work to achieve racial equity and racial justice.

**Communities encounter several forms of racism: individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural. Throughout this project, understanding and addressing the complex systems and processes that result from racism—and the reverberating effects those can have on their economy, mobility, careers, and more—has been only part of the story. Another part has been understanding and acknowledging the existing good work, assets and types of resources, organizing, milestones and successes, joys and concerns, and community-determined desires for a collective future. This acknowledgment of the richness of existing Black-led efforts and the opportunity to support those efforts in a way that leads to freedom and joy for all is what Grand Victoria Foundation defines as “Black Abundance.”**

With this understanding, GCI asked research participants to define or describe their racial equity and Black-centered work themselves rather than starting from a standard definition. We analyzed the definitions and descriptions provided by research participants for themes and identified systems change, community survival and support, workplace operations and culture, storytelling and truth telling, coalition building and activism, and civic engagement as the primary categories of racial equity work. We also asked survey respondents and interviewees to tell us how and why their work is Black-centered. Our analysis of the landscape provides detail on this input from individuals and organizations on pages 14-16 of this report and it was used to inform development of the findings and recommendations.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

Following our analysis of the racial equity and racial justice landscape, GCI concludes this report by offering findings and recommendations for understanding and supporting racial equity and justice work in Illinois. Recommendations fall into six categories. Detailed findings and recommendations can be found on pages 18-29. A select recommendation from each category is shared below.

### **Bolster Racial Equity and Racial Justice Work**

Allow racial equity and racial justice organizations space to reflect and learn from the work they do to refine their approaches internally as an organization and externally with their communities and with other racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations.

### **Redefine Public Sector Involvement**

Encourage government to engage with racial equity and racial justice community groups to provide clarity on which policy and budget decisions they can meaningfully participate in and to repair broken trust and build common understanding.

### **Encourage a Focus beyond Chicagoland**

Use and regularly update the data in this report to inform the public and community organizations about Black population centers outside of Chicago and across Illinois.

### **Acknowledge the Universal Lack of Resources and the Need for Collaboration**

Develop a larger “investing in a racial equity and racial justice ecosystem” strategy that seeks to connect racial equity and racial justice organizations seeking common outcomes to work together in new ways.

### **Shift Grantmaker Expectations to Support Racial Equity**

Encourage longer-term investments with more flexibility and adaptability to realities defined by racial equity and racial justice organizations.

### **Adapt to Community Need**

Adopt innovative shared decision-making and co-creation models with Black communities and other communities of color to transform not just grantmaking organizations and institutions but also Black communities and the nonprofit ecosystem broadly.

We are pleased to share this document, which reflects our understanding of the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work in Illinois. We hope it—along with participant quotes from the interviews and focus groups—can contribute to translating what can seem like abstract concepts into specific practices that drive racial equity and racial justice work.

# Project Overview

In June 2022, the Great Cities Institute was commissioned by Grand Victoria Foundation (GVF) to undertake a landscape study of racial equity and racial justice work across Illinois. Landscape studies are important tools for identifying current conditions and highlighting areas of opportunity. In this case, our research team heard directly from people involved in this work to ensure that this study accurately incorporates their voice and expertise.

The overarching goal of this project was to deepen understanding in the philanthropic and public sectors about the location of Black population centers, existing racial equity and racial justice efforts across the state, and to identify concrete recommendations about how to advance racial equity and racial justice statewide and support Black-led and Black-centered work. To achieve that, we researched the existing network of organizations and leaders working in racial equity and racial justice and the relationships among them. We also were interested in learning about places in Illinois where Black people live, work, and play and the organizations that are located in those places. To demonstrate how to understand Black communities more deeply, we developed comprehensive profiles on Pembroke Township and East St. Louis that include history and demographic information, as well as details about active community organizations and leadership. To create these profiles, we visited both locations and met with local leaders. We discussed their experiences, the challenges they face in their work, their hopes for their community, and ways they would like others to see and understand their community.

This report and the recommendations found here represent the culmination of this research. At multiple steps in this process, we groundtruthed our preliminary findings and the information we had gathered with participants. They provided additional insight that helped to shape the definition of a community as a Black population center; the definitions of racial equity work and what it means to be Black-centered; specific organizational relationships in communities and regions; and the types of demographic data collected on communities that appear in community profiles. The process and recommendations that follow incorporate research findings as well as community input from racial equity and racial justice leaders who contributed directly to our understanding for developing these recommendations.

We are pleased to share this document, which reflects our understanding of Black communities and the landscape of racial equity and racial justice work in Illinois. We hope that it can contribute to translating what can seem like abstract concepts into specific practices that further drive racial equity and racial justice work.

## Limitations

The sections that follow present our research analysis, findings, and recommendations. It is important to recognize the various limitations of these findings, including time constraints and a larger share of responses from the Chicago area (especially to the survey) than from other parts of the state. In addition, for several reasons, it was not possible to meet with all organizations and individuals working in this field. Moreover, aspects of this research that could have greatly benefited from analysis of public data on voting and civic engagement were hampered by the lack of reliable data about these topics. Limitations of private data in these same areas include that it can be cost prohibitive, incomplete, and the depth of information is determined on the basis of who collects and allows access to it.

Given these limitations, the findings are not exhaustive. Even so, because of the depth of research and information, the wide geography and experiences we were able to reach and learn from, and our commitment to directly reflecting input from the people who contributed to this research, our findings and recommendations can help inform and support decision-making around advancing and accomplishing racial equity and racial justice within and across Illinois.



## Project Roadmap

The eight steps of the landscape study, from start to finish. Steps in which we groundtruthed our findings to date with participants are marked by an asterisk.



# Conducting the Landscape Study

The landscape study had three primary goals:

- To identify the location and the social, economic, and political context and conditions of Black population centers in Illinois.
- To better understand the existing network of organizations and leaders working on racial equity and racial justice and the relationships between and among them.
- To create analysis and recommendations about how to advance racial equity and racial justice statewide and support Black-led and Black-centered work.

GCI designed a landscape study methodology centered on a mixed-methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative data and information. To achieve the first goal, GCI worked to determine “Black population centers.” We used Census data to determine 81 places in Illinois—municipalities in whole or part and unincorporated areas—that have a Black population greater than 30%. Knowing where these places are, and the organizations doing work there, can provide much-needed information about not just the community but what people there are thinking about, worried about, working and hoping for, and dreaming about.

To achieve the second goal, quantitative data on organizations was collected from GuideStar, a survey distributed to known stakeholders, and internet research into stakeholders in the racial equity and racial justice landscape. Qualitative data and information included survey questions, interviews, and focus group conversations.

To align with the third goal, we designed all aspects of this research to be adaptive, meaning each step would inform, influence, and enhance all other aspects of the project to build and shape a broader and ultimately better understanding of both (a) Black population centers across Illinois and (b) racial equity and racial justice leaders and organizations. For detailed information about our methodology, see Appendix A.

## Black Population Centers in Illinois

<b>Northeastern</b>	Glenwood	<b>Other Counties</b>	<b>Central</b>	Royal Lakes
<b>Cook County</b>	Harvey	Crete	Champaign*	Sauget*
Bellwood	Hazel Crest	Fairmont	Danville*	Shiloh*
Berkeley	Hillside	Hopkins Park <sup>§§</sup>	Decatur*	Washington Park
Blue Island	Homewood	Joliet*	DeKalb*	Venice
Broadview	Justice*	Kankakee*	Normal*	<b>Southern</b>
Burnham	Lansing	North Chicago*	Peoria*	Cairo
Calumet City	Lynwood	Pembroke Township <sup>§§</sup>	Rantoul*	Carbondale*
Calumet Park	Markham	Plum Valley	Springfield*	Mound City
Chicago Heights	Matteson	Preston Heights	Urbana*	Mounds
Chicago, North Side	Maywood	Sun River Terrace	<b>East St. Louis Area</b>	Mt. Vernon*
Chicago, South Side	Olympia Fields	Waukegan*	Alton*	Pulaski
Chicago, West Side	Park Forest	Willow Brook <sup>§</sup>	Belleville	Unity
Country Club Hills	Phoenix	Zion	Brooklyn	
Dixmoor	Richton Park	<b>Northern</b>	Cahokia Heights	
Dolton	Riverdale	Freeport*	East St. Louis	
East Hazel Crest	Robbins	Rock Island*	Fairview Heights	
Flossmoor	Sauk Village	Rockford*	Madison	
Ford Heights	South Holland			
Forest Park	University Park			

\*At least one Census tract in this place has greater than 30% Black/African American population. <sup>§</sup>Refers to Willow Brook Estates a Census-designated place in Will County on the Indiana border. <sup>§§</sup>Pembroke Township contains Hopkins Park.

## The Statewide Landscape

Blue dots indicate racial equity and racial justice organizations across Illinois. Numbers in larger population centers indicate clusters of organizations.

# 1,572

Organizations  
and groups in the  
landscape

# 570

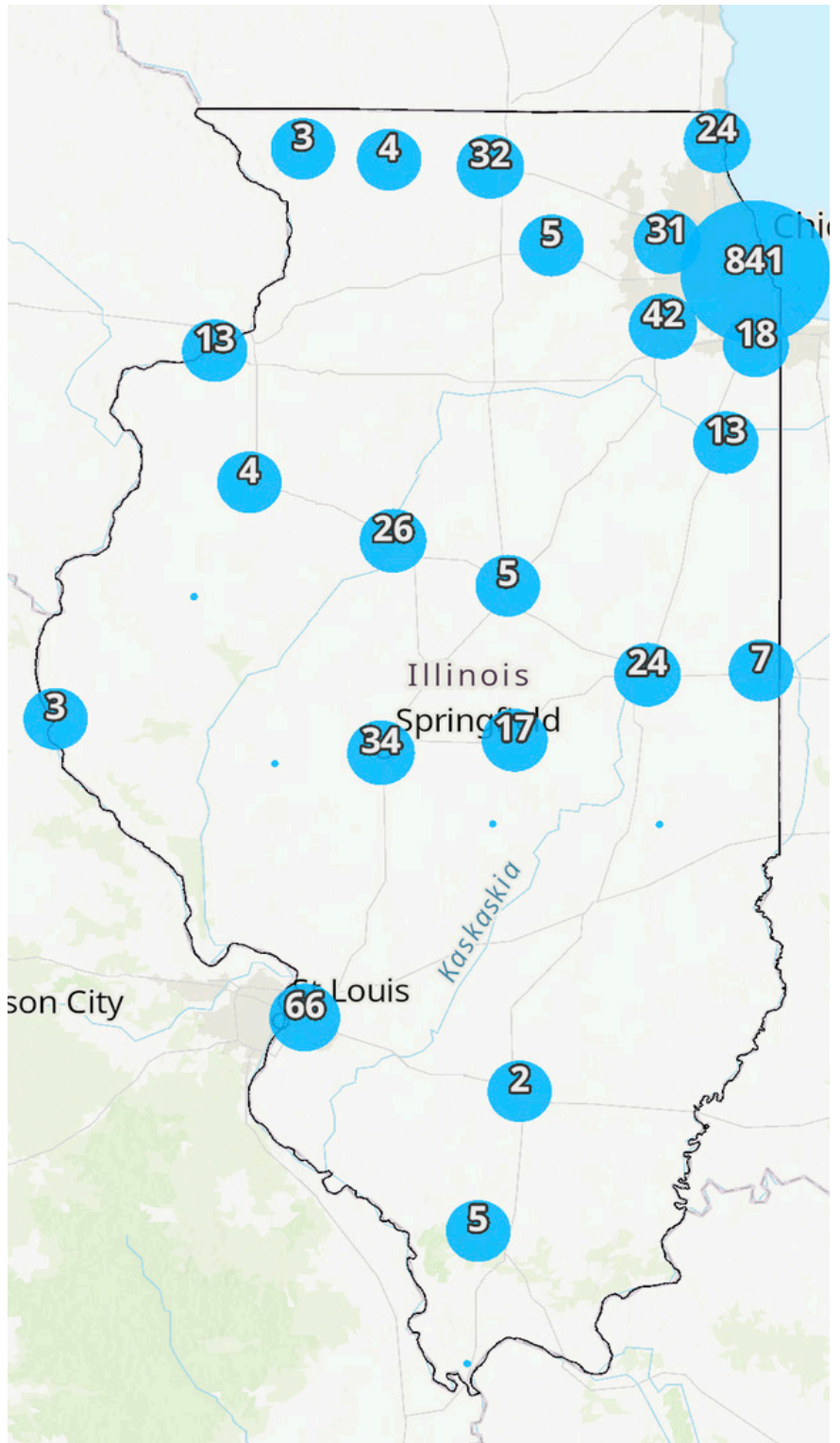
Identified  
as Black-led, Black-  
centered, or Black-  
serving

# 143

Identified  
direct community  
builders<sup>1</sup>

# 165

Identified  
grassroots groups<sup>2</sup>



1. Community Builders are organizations that have described or identified their organization's work as organizing, building power, or working on/for rights, equity or justice.
2. Grassroots groups are individuals, groups, coalitions, and/or organizations identified through social media and archival research that are unincorporated and engaged in racial equity and racial justice efforts. This is not the same as grassroots organizations who typically are established and may have 501 (c) 3 tax status or a fiscal sponsor for its work.

# Developing a Perspective on the Landscape

Racism is individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural, and it often manifests as a combination of these qualities. Individual racism informs an individual's perception of race as a social construct of worthiness and power. Internal feelings of racial superiority and racial inferiority are expressions of individual racism. Interpersonal racism occurs in social interactions, whether consciously or unconsciously. Institutional racism occurs in an organizational context, including unfair policies and procedures that result in inequitable outcomes for Blacks and other people of color. Structural racism is the summation of all operating forms of racial bias across institutions and society. Individual and institutional behavior often operate synchronously, such as the criminalization of young people in elementary and secondary schools, by which individual bias and institutional policies push Black people into the criminal justice system at a higher rate than White people for the same actions.

In the face of this, many communities have fought to expand their power and representation—and many have succeeded in doing so. For Black people especially, events of 2020—a global pandemic, police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and a presidential election that necessitated voter engagement—catalyzed a movement to work for and achieve racial equity and racial justice. It made that work urgent for a larger swath of Americans than before.

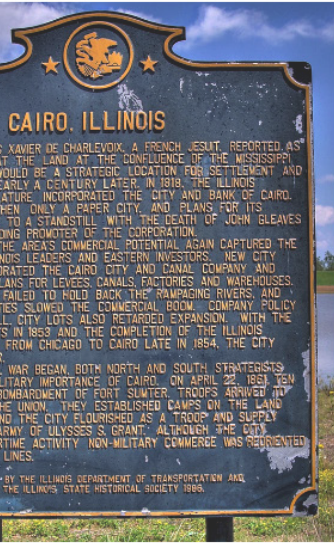
Many people remain stymied in their efforts and struggle to improve the state and circumstances of the places they live and the people they care about, and society at large. Organizations that provide a social safety net, organize neighbors, influence policy making for good, enhance education, support artistic expression, and any number of other missions also face challenges in supporting the communities they serve. The fact is, whether they live in rural areas or big cities, exurbs or former thriving city centers, whether they are young or old or anywhere in between, the reality is that many Black people face limited choices and engage in a daily struggle simply to survive.

Understanding and addressing the complex systems and processes that limit the choices of Blacks and other people of color—and the reverberating effects those can have on their economy, mobility, careers, and more—is only part of the story. Another part is understanding and acknowledging the existing good work, assets and types of resources, organizing, milestones and successes, joys and concerns, and community-determined desires for a collective future. People are already inspiring and creating change. This acknowledgment of the richness of existing Black-led efforts and the opportunity to support those efforts in a way that leads to freedom and joy for all is what Grand Victoria Foundation defines as “Black Abundance.”

It is essential to approach any analysis of racial equity and racial justice in Illinois intentionally and with appreciation for the work already being done.

Finally, racial equity and racial justice work looks different across Illinois. Local history, economic conditions, leadership, and governance all play a role in how communities work to achieve racial equity and racial justice. Local context always drives community needs and responses.

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