

# I.D.E.A. Coalition Progress Report

---

Committed to Pursuing Inclusion, Diversity,  
Equity, and Accessibility in Chautauqua County

OCTOBER 2023



“Is this time going to be a catalyst to change in our area? We’ll see. People are saying that they are going to put in the work this time. Time will tell. We’ll see if people really want to do the work and be in this for the long haul.”

---

*Presented by*

I.D.E.A. Steering Committee and Implementation Team

*Written by*

Georgia Whitney, Long Story Short

*Design by*

Lindsey Goold, United Way of Southern Chautauqua County



Chautauqua County, the westernmost county in New York state, has more farms and produces more grapes than any other in the state. Manufacturing, centered primarily in and around the county's cities of Dunkirk and Jamestown, provides the base for its economy, although farming and food processing contribute to it as well. According to the 2020 census, the Chautauqua County is 86% white, 3% Black/African American, and 9% Latino/Hispanic. [1]

Many people in the county have thriving lives. However, according to the information gathered during IDEA Coalition town hall meetings, there is also a deep, painful, multi-generational history of social injustice and racism perpetrated against people of color and other marginalized communities. These injustices come not so much from individual acts as outcomes of structural racism—from some of the practices embedded in the county's businesses and institutions.

As the county becomes more diverse, the ability to work towards equity and inclusion is critically important, ensuring that everyone has the respect and economic opportunity that they need and deserve to succeed, and for the county to thrive. This not only strengthens our society, it is also critical to business success. From attracting top talent to fostering a more collaborative and creative community, the benefits of equity and inclusion can lead to increased innovation and productivity in the workforce. They will help companies to better understand and serve diverse customer bases, and improve overall business performance.

*The IDEA Coalition is determined to make this happen.*

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, several county businesses and agencies began to respond to the call to proactively address social injustices that are part of the area's history. The result was an organization committed to pursuing Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility strategies in Chautauqua County--the IDEA Coalition. Its mission is to make our county a place where everyone belongs and has opportunities to thrive. The coalition's goals are to engage historically marginalized communities to identify key barriers, prioritize issues that emerge from conversation with those directly impacted communities, and to create space for collaboration and collective work across organizations to address those barriers.

Since June 2022, the coalition has formalized its structure, leadership, and approach. The coalition then facilitated a series of townhall meetings and listening sessions with Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities in both Dunkirk and Jamestown. Other individuals within these communities completed a survey designed to get their feedback on challenges they are currently facing. This process ultimately identified three top priorities: education, business/employment, and community/social activities.

---

[1] The population for 2022 was estimated to be just over 126,000, down about 10,000 from ten years ago. The remaining population breaks down as follows: American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.8%; Asian alone, 0.7%; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 0.1%; Two or More Races, 2.5%.

After establishing priorities, coalition members began brainstorming ways their organizations could play a role in identifying solutions. Next steps include finalizing summaries of the identified priorities, as well as some of the solution themes, and identifying solution teams from coalition members, community members, and other key stakeholders.

The work is daunting, and similar past initiatives have met with limited success. Reactions to the coalition’s goals are mixed. While some people are enthusiastic about implementing solutions to correct the county’s social injustices, others feel less excited, saying the work is long overdue. Still others believe the work is unnecessary, irrelevant, or even unfair, viewing it as a form of reverse discrimination. However, the IDEA Coalition believes that this work must be done to ensure the success of the county’s future—and the time to do the work is now.

Are we ready to do the work? As one member of the county’s marginalized community said, “Is this time going to be a catalyst to change in our area? We’ll see. People are saying that they are going to put in the work this time. Time will tell. We’ll see if people really want to do the work and be in this for the long haul.”

We urge you to read this report, then think about how you can join our efforts to make Chautauqua County a place where everyone belongs and has opportunities to thrive, especially those who have been historically marginalized. Remember, too, that solutions are ongoing. There are no finish lines or checklists that, when completed, proclaim a Chautauqua County organization to be “equitable.” Learning and growing are constants.

Together, we have the power to determine exactly what time will tell.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Rohler, Executive Director  
United Way of Southern Chautauqua County

Bishop Leecroft Clarke  
I.D.E.A. Coalition Project Director



\*Photos and quotes used throughout this report come directly from I.D.E.A. Coalition Meetings, town hall meetings, and community events. Thank you to the following organizations for their support in these events; Love School, Dunkirk High School, Chautauqua Institution, Winifred Crawford Dibert Boys and Girls Club, United Way of Northern Chautauqua County and United Way of Southern Chautauqua County.

# BACKGROUND

---

In May 2020, the tragic death of George Floyd served as a stark reminder of the deep systemic realities of social injustice and racism that underlie life in America for people of color. While this was certainly not “new news” to people of color, Floyd’s death brought about a renewed call to proactively address racism in the United States.

In Chautauqua County, citizens also began to respond to the call. Over the next several months, the seeds of the coalition were planted in informal conversations that took place among people from education, law enforcement, local business, government, and nonprofit agencies. These individuals, who were primarily white, saw the need to address racism proactively, and all asked the same question: what can our organizations do to address equity and inclusion internally and externally in practical and systemic ways? The answer, they decided, began with working collaboratively and strategically with one other.

## Chautauqua County IDEA Working Group Organizational Racial Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Developed early in their informal meetings of December 2021, the IDEA Coalition’s steering committee created a self-assessment survey to assist our member organizations in two ways. It allows members to better understand their current IDEA efforts, with a specific focus on racial equity, and serves as an internal assessment tool to promote dialogue and action planning within the organization.

[Access it here](#)



United Way of Southern Chautauqua County, serving as the group’s backbone agency, provided administrative and leadership support. The agency began by engaging Battle and Banner (B&B), a consulting firm with expertise in community initiatives and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies. In April 2021, B&B and a group of 18 organizations, which included representatives from both north and south county sectors, began meeting monthly to develop the coalition's framework. Over the next 14 months, this group identified primary goals and outcomes. At every meeting, new participants joined. (See framework below).

<b>Chautauqua County Strategic I.D.E.A. Framework for Racial and Social Justice</b>			
A county-wide coalition to promote racial and social justice through Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I.D.E.A)			
	<b>OUTPUTS</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>GOAL</b>
	<b>This Framework reads RIGHT to LEFT and is implemented LEFT TO RIGHT</b>		
<b>Activities – what we do to achieve outputs</b>	1.1 Intercultural competency assessed and developed.	1.Community organizations and agencies equipped to better serve all residents.	<b>To strategically and collaboratively foster racial equity, promote equality, inclusion, and diversity, and fully include the participation of all households in key sectors, institutions throughout the county.</b>
	1.2 Boards developed and diversified.		
	1.3 Programs and services reviewed and redesigned.		
	1.4 Organizational policies and procedures reformed.		
	2.1 Equity/human rights council(s) established	2.Community members engaged to ensure accountability.	
	2.2 Community/Grassroots Conversation framework built.		
	2.3 Faith-based Initiative established.		
	2.4 Data Dashboard Created		
	3.1 Board Member Incubator established	3.Community-based initiatives designed and implemented to sustain desired outcomes.	
	3.2 Minority/Women Small Business Incubator strengthened		
	3.3 Workforce Development Programs aligned and strengthened		
	3.4 Cultural/Multicultural Events planned and held.		
	3.5 Leadership Development Program established		
4.1 Mission-aligned, programmatic partners identified.	4. Businesses and Corporations engaged to contribute to positive social impact.		
4.2 Volunteerism/community engagement strategy developed and implemented.			
4.3 Internal intercultural competency assessment and education conducted.			
<b>INPUTS</b>			
Government Non Profit Orgs Faith Communities Grassroots orgs Local Businesses Corporations Community Institutions Community Members Organized Labor			



“[It is difficult] dealing with implicit and explicit bias from teachers and leaders in the school.”

# AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

---

The Chautauqua County IDEA Coalition is based on concepts that are designed to give it a strong chance for success. It confronts the concerns of those who have been historically marginalized in our community in new ways, addressing aspects of antiracism work that some similar past initiatives have not spoken to.

## *Do Nothing for Us Without Us*

The coalition's premiere value is prioritizing and centering the voices of marginalized communities to identify the challenges of racism and social injustice and implementing solutions that effectively meet these challenges. This will be done by working with community engagement liaisons who represent the people directly impacted and the coalition members on the implementation team. Community engagement liaisons, who are paid stipends for their work, are integral to the coalition's implementation and solution teams and are empowered to devise solutions.

## *A Bone-deep Commitment to Accountability, Transparency, and Vulnerability*

This commitment helps foster an environment of trust and safety, where people feel comfortable being themselves. It also supports authentic, open, and honest communication, with a focus on working towards common goals, and following through with commitments. The work, and this commitment, can be daunting at times; however, coalition members are determined to meet the work head-on.

## *Strength and Unity in Numbers*

The IDEA Coalition is just that - a true community coalition, comprised of a wide variety of businesses and organizations, all of whom are working towards the same goals. While the local county government has been a part of the process, it is not an essential driver of the coalition's work. United Way of Southern Chautauqua County, which works to mobilize the community to help every person and family to improve their lives, is the coalition's backbone agency.

## What is a historically marginalized or disadvantaged community?

This term refers to a community that has historically suffered from discrimination and has not had equal access to public or private economic benefits due to the race, ethnicity, gender or gender identity, geography, language preference, immigrant or citizen status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability status.

Marginalization occurs when a person or group is less able to access basic services and opportunities and, as a result, experiences adverse life conditions and outcomes. Note: in this report, "directly impacted community" is a term sometimes used interchangeably with "historically marginalized community."

to access this report contact [idea-director@uwayscc.org](mailto:idea-director@uwayscc.org).

# YEAR ONE:

## What We Have Learned, Where We Are Going

---

The information gathered by the IDEA Coalition indicates that there is a deep, painful, multi-generational history of social injustice and racism perpetrated against people of color and other marginalized communities in Chautauqua County. These injustices come not so much from individual acts of as from outcomes of structural racism—from the practices embedded in the county's businesses and institutions. These practices and policies have not been created by the individuals who enforce them. They are imbedded in an organization's history and systems. Sadly, enforcing discriminatory policies causes individuals to discriminate against people from marginalized communities without knowing it. Even among the county's leaders, there seems to be limited understanding of the pervasiveness of structural/systemic racism, which makes changes to policy and process much harder to implement. This lack of understanding, which began generations ago, perpetuates racism and discriminatory practices into the all segments of population. This, too, can serve as an attribution of some of the opinions shared in the report.

### *Community Differences*

Chautauqua County's marginalized communities are not a monolith. There are cultural, generational, geographic, socioeconomic, and experiential differences among Black/African Americans and Latinos/Hispanics.

The communities experience social injustice and racism differently. While most Black/African American citizens say they feel the sting of racism acutely, many Latinos say the effects of racism in their lives are not all-pervasive.

There's enormous diversity among each of the affected populations as well. Unlike people from Central and South America, Puerto Ricans are not immigrants. Cultural differences abound in both Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities, too. The customs and tastes of Latinos/Hispanics can be vastly different depending on their country of origin, and this may show up as contrasts in both language and communication style. Similarly, the Black population in Chautauqua County is comprised of African Americans, African-Caribbeans, and people from the Congo. In addition to cultural contrasts, people may have experienced the trauma of racism and discrimination in different ways.



There are differences between the northern and southern parts of Chautauqua County as well, starting with demographics. In Dunkirk, located in the north, 60% of the student population is Hispanic/Latino, and the Puerto Rican population is well established. Conversely, the southern county is more ethnically diverse, and its residents of color may be newer to the area. In addition, experiences of racism seem to differ significantly. Historically, southern Chautauqua County citizens report far more overt racist events. Citizens from the northern part of the county say they have encountered more subtle forms of racism.

These differences may have implications for the solutions that will be proposed by the IDEA Coalition. While discriminatory systems and structures exist throughout the county, it's possible that a solution which works well in the north county may not be as effective in the south. Creating solutions may also involve educating county leaders about the nature of structural and systemic racism.

### *Hearing Voices, Rebuilding Trust*

The coalition then identified an overall goal for its work: to make Chautauqua County a place where everyone belongs and has opportunities to thrive, especially those who have been historically marginalized. A series of strategic outcomes then provided steppingstones to move the work of the coalition forward:

- Community organizations and agencies are equipped to better serve all residents.
- Community members are engaged to ensure accountability.
- Community-based initiatives are designed and implemented to sustain desired outcomes.
- Businesses and corporations are engaged to contribute to positive social impact.

Defining the goal and outcomes moved the coalition into a crossroads. Traditionally, policy makers and others in positions of power make decisions and plans about how to “serve” directly impacted people without asking them what they need and what they see as solutions. The coalition wanted to break from that tradition. The coalition realized that the best way to ensure that directly impacted people would be true partners in the work would be to gather input from the folks affected by social injustice.



“You are supposed to feel safe in school. You shouldn't be made fun of (in school) because of the race you are.”

“[We need] more publicity for existing resources.”

To gather this vital information, the coalition hired Justice Walk, a consulting firm rooted in equity, justice, and belonging. Over a two-month period, the firm interviewed a cross-section of people from the county's Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities in the cities of Dunkirk and Jamestown. These people shared their experiences, expertise, and recommendations about how to make the county more equitable, accessible, and inclusive, discussing recommendations and barriers to solutions. The outcomes of these interviews, published in a “Directly Impacted People Stepping Forward” report, helped the coalition reaffirm its original commitments, and included commitments to:

- Center and prioritize the voices and concerns of the county's historically marginalized communities.
- Re-build broken trust that these communities might have with organizations and our coalition.



## STORIES FROM DIRECTLY IMPACTED PEOPLE

Perhaps the best way to gain a clearer sense of the challenges of racism and other forms of inequities is to hear the stories of those directly impacted by it. To that end, from December 2021 until March 2022, the IDEA Coalition commissioned a consultant who spoke with several people willing to share their experiences and expertise about the impact of racism in their lives, and make recommendations about how to make the county more equitable, accessible, and inclusive. Those interviewed had an opportunity to review a draft of a report that summarized their conversations. This helped to ensure that these individuals' views were correctly presented, and quotes were accurate.

The people who were interviewed took a huge risk in sharing their experiences so deeply. Their participation was an act of trust, and the IDEA Coalition is deeply grateful for their contributions.

The report begins with recommendations specific to the IDEA Coalition, then examines how trust between those traditionally in power and those who are directly impacted by racism is broken, and how trust can be rebuilt. The report goes on to explain common physical and emotional/psychological barriers to directly impacted people's participation in efforts like the coalition, and recommends ways to overcome those barriers. There is discussion about the importance of taking measurable action steps guided by directly impacted people's priorities – “showing” rather than “telling” a commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility – and the benefits of intentional collaboration. The report ends with recommendations for addressing the specific concerns raised by those interviewed.

# THE I.D.E.A. COALITION LAUNCHES

At the county's 2022 Juneteenth celebrations, nearly 20 organizations and businesses announced the formation of the IDEA Coalition—an organization committed to pursuing **I**nclusion, **D**iversity, **E**quity and **A**ccessibility strategies in Chautauqua County. The coalition focused on having a positive impact on the economic and social needs of its historically marginalized communities.

## Mission

To make Chautauqua County a place where everyone belongs and has opportunities to thrive, especially those who have been historically marginalized.

## Coalition Description:

The CHQ County I.D.E.A. Coalition is designed to address, prioritize, and give voice to concerns of those individuals that have been historically marginalized and directly impacted by such thing as racism and social injustice in our community. It serves as a bridge between impacted populations and the various organizations that provide services within the communities of the county. It is also committed to both anti-racist and broad social justice work.

## Goals:

1. Engage historically marginalized populations and identify barriers and concerns related to belonging and thriving
2. Prioritize issues/themes that emerge from those direct conversations
3. Create space for collaboration and collective work across organizations and those directly impacted to help address identified barriers and concerns



# COALITION MEMBERSHIP AND EXPECTATIONS; EXPANDING CONNECTIONS

Membership was open to any organization interested in supporting the coalition's initiatives and willing to agree to the terms of membership.

As organizations joined the IDEA Coalition, they agreed to:

- Attend and participate regularly in coalition meetings.
- Address, prioritize, and give voice to the concerns of those communities who have been historically marginalized
- Develop and post an organizational public statement about their involvement in the IDEA Coalition which explains its purpose, vision, and goals, and why the work of the coalition is so critical to Chautauqua County's future.
- Champion engagement in antiracism activities within their organization, solidifying support from organizational leadership.
- Commit to developing both internal and external action plans on antiracism and social injustice.
- Align their work with that of the coalition's framework.
- Provide updates on initiatives and outcomes to key coalition stakeholders.
- Leverage its access to resources and assets to support implementation of the coalition's activities.
- Project collaboration with other key stakeholder organizations.

Because most of these organizations came from the southern part of Chautauqua County, the coalition held an organizational meeting in the north county. Hosted by United Way of Northern Chautauqua County, its participants worked to engage with and identify potential member organizations in that area. The September 2022 meeting was a huge success, generating productive conversations, ideas, and feedback. Encouraging, insightful thoughts showed a strong level of support for the coalition's work throughout Chautauqua County.

## IDEA Coalition Members:

- Audubon Community Nature Center
- Chautauqua Adult Day Services
- Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce
- Chautauqua County Department of Planning & Development
- Chautauqua County Office for the Aging
- Chautauqua Institution
- Chautauqua Opportunities Inc.
- Chautauqua Region Community Foundation
- Chautauqua Region Economic Development Corporation
- Child Advocacy Program of Chautauqua County
- Church Apostolic House of Prayer
- City of Dunkirk
- City of Jamestown
- CREATE Project
- Davey Resource Group
- Dream it Do it of Western New York
- Dunkirk City Schools
- E2CCB
- Goodwill of WNY
- #IntegrityFirst, Inc. Jamestown Jackals
- Jamestown Community College
- Jamestown Community Learning Council
- Jamestown Police Department
- Jamestown Public Schools
- Junior Achievement of WNY
- Kids at Promise
- M&T Bank
- Manufactures Association of the Southern Tier
- Northern Chautauqua Community Foundation
- Northwest Arena
- Prevention Works, Inc.
- Ralph C. Sheldon Foundation, Inc.
- Robert H. Jackson Center
- Rotary Club of Jamestown, NY
- Roger Tory Peterson Institute
- Southern Chautauqua Federal Credit Union
- Suicide Prevention Alliance of Chautauqua County
- St. Luke's Episcopal Church
- SUNY Fredonia
- The Chautauqua Center
- The Resource Center
- United Way of Northern Chautauqua County
- United Way of Southern Chautauqua County
- UPMC Chautauqua
- YWCA Jamestown

# FOCUS ISSUES AND COMMUNITIES FOR COALITION STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

From the outset, the IDEA Coalition committed to both antiracist and broad social justice work. Initially, its members determined to focus its efforts on Chautauqua County’s Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities. Once the coalition has made significant contributions to these communities, it will consider expanding its efforts to other historically marginalized populations.

## CREATION OF STEERING COMMITTEE AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

In fall 2022, the IDEA Coalition formed a steering committee comprised of members who have the interest and capacity to commit to a leadership role in designing, administering, governing, and implementing the coalition’s goals. Meeting once a month, this committee began working with the implementation team to review, approve, and guide the work of the overall coalition.

The implementation team is comprised of four community engagement liaisons and coalition members. Community engagement liaisons—Black/African Americans and Latino/Hispanics representing the north and south county—are stipended positions and are designed to develop relationships with the directly impacted populations, providing ongoing feedback to and from historically marginalized communities. Community engagement liaisons meet with the coalition’s project director bi-weekly to achieve the coalition’s mission and strategic outcomes, and report their findings to the coalition’s steering committee. They provide the coalition with a thorough understanding of the barriers and concerns of historically marginalized individuals and populations.

### “The Business Case”

In addition to the moral and ethical reasons for making a community more welcoming and inclusive, a more diverse community strengthens business, and the local economy by:

- Expanding the workforce pool in the county.
- Creating conditions for new businesses and industries.
- Increasing property values and home ownership equity.
- Helping businesses expand their existing customer base by serving an increasingly diverse population.
- Reversing the steady population decline in the county by making it more attractive for a diverse population to work and live here.
- Attracting young people who grew up here to return to Chautauqua County, building our economy and community.
- Expanding the middle class.
- Enhancing the customer experience for everyone.
- Improving communication within the workforce by increasing the number of bilingual or multilingual workers and building cultural sensitivity.
- Growing the tax base.

[Access it here](#)



Leecroft Clarke  
IDEA Project Director



Patricia Graves  
South County



Vidalys Holmes  
South County



Sandra Lewis  
North County



Shiloh Rivera Martinez  
North County

# CREATION OF STEERING COMMITTEE AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

The coalition adopted a 12-month approach to the community's concerns and barriers. The approach is broken down into five phases: listening sessions, problem prioritization and clarification, identifying solutions, implementation, and lessons learned.

## I.D.E.A. Coalition 12 - Month Approach



# TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND SURVEYS

The coalition began to attack its goals by devising a system for giving the county's Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino citizens an opportunity to express their concerns and discuss the barriers they encountered to services.

## *The Process*

The approach was two pronged. First, the coalition facilitated a series of four townhall meetings and listening sessions with Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities. People met in Dunkirk, in the northern part of the county, and in Jamestown, which is further south. Facilitators first shared the IDEA Coalition's mission, purpose, goals, and objectives, then listened carefully to attendees' concerns, discussing barriers regarding a variety of issues, from health care to after-school programs for youth. While the first four meetings were specifically for Black/African American or Latino/Hispanic citizens, the last two were for both communities. In the latter meetings, the two groups combined to review and give feedback on thirteen categories of concerns expressed at the four earlier meetings. This helped to ensure that the coalition clearly understood the communities' concerns, and that the communities had ample opportunity to ask questions, share their experiences, and suggest solutions.



United Way of Northern Chautauqua County provided the space for key stakeholders in the North County to meet and discuss the I.D.E.A. Coalition.

## DEI Training

In addition to the listening and prioritization process, the IDEA Coalition offered diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training opportunities to businesses, individuals, and nonprofits across the county. These included cohorts of DEI trainings for nonprofits, in both the north and south county, as well as a county-wide opportunity, "Lenses of Humanity," presented by Dr. Kyle Reyes. Overall, more than 200 people participated in these workshops, representing more than 70 unique businesses and agencies.



“There are a lot of Hispanic people here that want to start their own businesses, but they can't because they don't know where to get the information.”

Second, people who chose not to attend the town hall meetings could respond to a survey. The results of the data collected from 300 completed surveys, combined with the feedback and comments from townhall meetings, identified and defined thirteen concerns and barriers, which outlined the challenges.

Racism/Discrimination: An unequal distribution of power and differential treatment based on race or ethnicity. Feeling excluded.

Language Barriers: Creating a significant impairment to clear communication.

Lack of Representation: No proportional representation in spaces where decisions are made or services are provided, such as education, financial institutions, politics, and healthcare.

Poverty/Financial Hardship: Not enough money to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

Business: No centralized base for resources, no access to cultural businesses and products/services, and no representation in business ownership.

Employment: Lack of appropriate professional employment and opportunities for advancement.

Housing: Limited adequate housing combined with lack of access to information on home buying and improvement; limited financial support.

Education: At all levels, limited understanding of cultural diversity, over-disciplining, disparity in graduation rates.

Public Safety: Increased crime and limited response from law enforcement.

Community/Social Activities: Limited opportunities and gathering spaces.

Services/Resources: Availability of resources not clearly communicated. Limited support and resources for cultural events/celebrations.

Health Care: Limited or no access to services for citizens experiencing mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Transportation: Limited public transportation and inadequate school bussing options.

As these meetings occurred, both Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic people seemed to become more mobilized to act, promoting changes within their respective communities. In reviewing the source of the concerns, Black/African American citizens appear to see their challenges based on racism while Latino/Hispanic individuals believe language barriers lie at the root of their issues.



“Cultural representation is lacking in public spaces”

# TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND SURVEYS

## *Prioritizing the Concerns*

The coalition's next step were two additional town hall meetings that combined Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic community members. The meetings included a "data walk," where community members reviewed the data and feedback. Participants added new questions, shared firsthand experiences, and began to suggest solutions. This process was key in prioritizing which concerns/barriers the coalition would tackle first. In their May 2023 meeting, coalition members carefully reviewed and finalized the top three priorities.



Education

Business &  
Employment



Community/Social  
Activities

## EDUCATION

Educational concerns were raised in both public schools and higher education:

- Students, parents, guardians, and members of the community see an overarching need for more people of color to be employed in local public schools.
- Members of historically marginalized populations are not proportionally represented in the school board, administration, faculty, and staff.
- Students from marginalized populations are treated unequally in comparison to their white counterparts, and are discriminated against. This discrimination shows up in over-disciplining of students of color, and bias and favoritism shown to white students.
- Students of color say they lack access to advancement opportunities such as special appointments and recognition, and they feel their emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing is at risk.
- There is little acknowledgment or celebration of students' cultural diversity in either social or academic curriculum.

As a result, students of color are adversely impacted in a variety of ways: reduced academic gains, higher dropout rates, and lower graduation rates. All these outcomes have negative consequences for these students' subsequent employment opportunities.

Access the full Education narrative [here](#)

“The demographics of our teachers do not reflect the students they are serving.”



# BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT

---

Both African American/Black and Latino/Hispanic workers say they face outright discrimination and have fewer job opportunities, sometimes resulting from occupational segregation. When workers are hired, their wages are frequently lower, benefits are fewer, and their jobs are less stable when compared to white employees. People of color also face barriers around job requirements and certifications as well as training and promotion opportunities. While Black/African Americans and Latino/Hispanics are interested in entrepreneurial ventures, systemic racism, a persistent lack of adequate support and funding, disadvantaged family backgrounds, and less education have made it harder for their ventures to thrive.

“Do not reject anyone because they only speak a little English, they often have great skills and should be treated fairly, given equal opportunities (employment and advancement)”

These challenges seem to have evolved from a variety of circumstances:

- Local employers lack clear hiring, outreach, and recruitment policies for people of color.
- Employers have a poor understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles.
- Limited opportunities for workforce training/apprenticeships, networking, and mentoring.
- POC are poorly represented in businesses and other organizations.
- Need for inclusive, easily accessible grant/loan programs.
- Barriers to language, childcare and transportation.
- Evaluation of educational standards.
- Gap in services that are needed, such as assistance in obtaining certifications for Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises.

As a result, African Americans/Blacks and Latinos/Hispanic are poorly represented in executive and higher-paying positions, and there are very few minority-owned businesses in Chautauqua County.

Access the full Business & Employment narrative [here](#)



“I often have to jump through many hoops and overcome barriers in order to even begin to think about opening a business in order to be successful”

# COMMUNITY/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

---

Chautauqua County's Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities lack social opportunities and appropriate gathering spaces, particularly for young people, and a gap in understanding of the opportunities and resources currently available. Impacted communities say that many resources have been intentionally taken away despite their repeated efforts to create positive changes in their community. The county's people of color have come to distrust institutions and power structures and are frustrated by the lack of support for their cultural celebrations.

These problems seem to occur for a variety of reasons:

- Program funding lacks a plan for sustainability.
- Few physical spaces for social activities that are both physically and socially accessible.
- People making community decisions do not necessarily mirror the community demographics.
- Existing programs and resources do not meet community needs; the community is unaware of resources available to them.
- Limited options for childcare—the county is a “childcare desert.”
- Little affordable summertime care and activities for children.



As a result, historically marginalized communities in Chautauqua County feel even further removed from the larger community. These individuals are eager for change, but don't trust that “this time it will be different,” nor do they feel they'll be part of the process to make the needed changes.

Access the full Education narrative [here](#)



“We need more spaces for artistic expression and celebration of culture.”

# BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS

---

After identifying and prioritizing these concerns, coalition members began brainstorming a number of solutions to the challenges faced by Chautauqua County's Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic communities. The coalition explored themes and concerns more deeply, which has helped to make certain that the solutions are consistent with what the county's marginalized communities need and want. This "deeper dive" has also helped to ensure that anyone who wants to become involved in the strategy will find a role for themselves, bringing everyone's ideas to the table.

In the next few months, the priorities' summaries and solution themes will be refined and finalized. The coalition will identify three "solution teams" made up of its members, community members, and other key stakeholders.

## A Call to Engage, a Call to Action

The IDEA Coalition has accomplished a great deal in its first year. However, there's much, much more to do. This work is a continual process of listening to the community and looking at ways to be accountable for achieving the coalition's goals.

If you've read this report, chances are you're interested in furthering the coalition's mission and goals. Maybe you'll want to discuss what you've read with friends and neighbors. Have conversations about your own next steps. Work to foster open and honest dialogue to address any concerns or misunderstandings. If you're an employer, consider talking about it with your team and staff. Talk to your employees about the benefits of diversity and equity, and model inclusive behavior in your workplace.

Remember, too, that we need funders to sustain this work, both locally and regionally. Maybe you'll want to provide us with financial support. You'll help to build and strengthen the outlook for our community and ensure its future.

If you're interested in working on one of the coalition's three areas of focus, maybe you're ready to join us. Yes, the work is daunting, but the IDEA Coalition is determined to address the challenges head-on, and involve stakeholders from around the county. Together, we can create a diverse, equitable, inclusive community where everyone wants to stay, live, and grow.

### CONTACT

Bishop Leecroft Clarke  
IDEA Project Director  
[idea-director@uwayscc.org](mailto:idea-director@uwayscc.org)  
716-483-1561  
[www.uwayscc.org/ideacoalition](http://www.uwayscc.org/ideacoalition)



We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to make Chautauqua County a place where everyone belongs and has opportunities to thrive, especially those who have been historically marginalized.

---



[uwayscc.org/ideacoalition](http://uwayscc.org/ideacoalition)

## FUNDERS of the I.D.E.A. Coalition

