



# Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

Case Study | June 2022



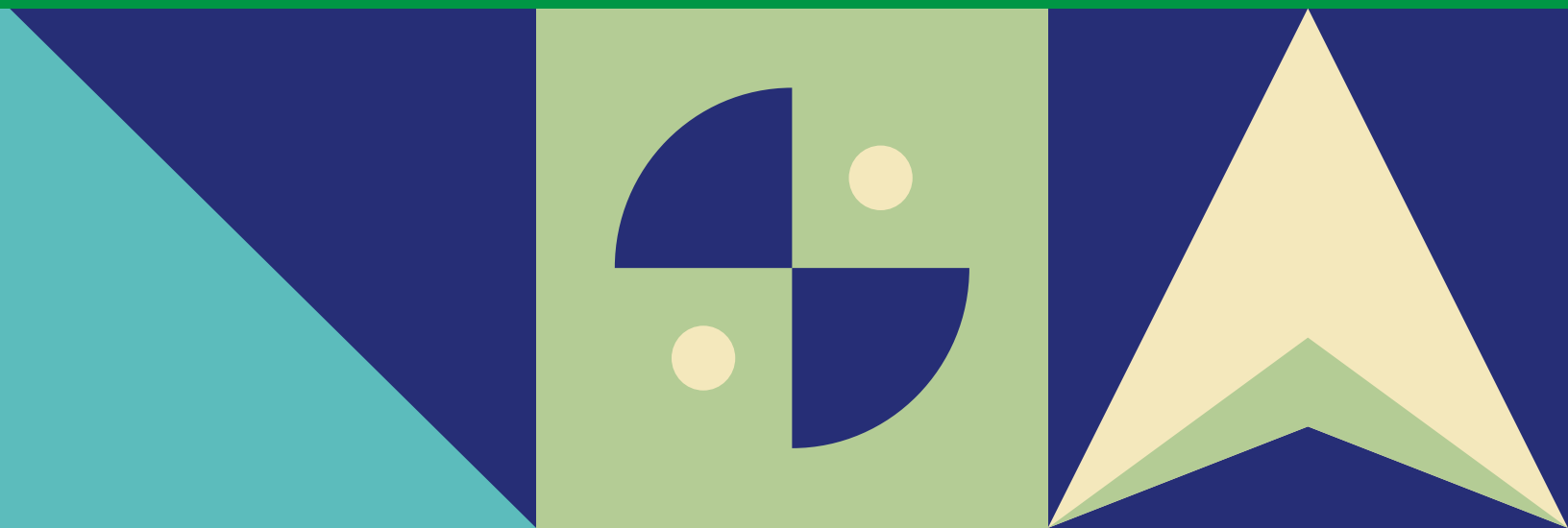
**CFLeads** | Community Foundations  
Leading Change



Since 2007, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo has been increasing its focus on racial equity, both externally and internally. In partnership with local organizations across various sectors, CFGB recognizes the economic benefits of achieving racial equity and frames it as an economic issue in addition to a moral imperative. The Community Foundation co-founded the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable in 2015, which takes a collaborative approach to advancing racial equity in the region. The Foundation has also launched programs like the Racial Equity Impact Analysis training, contributed to improving access to education through the Say Yes Buffalo initiative, and implemented policies to advance equity in procurement. The Foundation's board has played a crucial role in leading the equity journey, committing to ongoing learning and cultural competency.

# Table of Contents

Background .....	2
<b>COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER BUFFALO:</b>	
The Equity Journey .....	4
Mission and Vision.....	5
<u>Programs and Activities .....</u>	<u>6</u>
Learning and Evaluation.....	8
Operations.....	8
<u>Governance.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Endnotes.....</u>	<u>9</u>

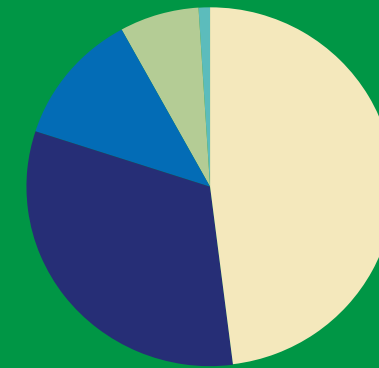




The Buffalo-Niagara Falls Metropolitan Area, also referred to as the Greater Buffalo region, is situated in the western part of New York State. The Greater Buffalo region comprises eight counties: Erie, Niagara, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Allegany, Orleans, Wyoming, and Genesee.<sup>1</sup>



In its metropolitan area, Buffalo is home to more than one million people, making it the second-largest city in New York State; in 2022 the City of Buffalo had 267,486 residents.<sup>2</sup>



48% White  
33% Black  
12% Hispanic or Latino  
7% Asian  
< 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native

# Introduction

Founded in 1919, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo is a leading civic organization in the Buffalo region with a mission of connecting people, ideas, and resources to improve lives in Western New York. In total, the Community Foundation manages \$650 million in charitable assets.



14%

of residents of Greater Buffalo live below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup>

3X

Black residents have a premature mortality rate three times higher than that of White residents in the Buffalo Metropolitan area.

57th

In 2020, Erie County's health outcomes were ranked 57th out of 62 counties in New York based on the length and quality of life.<sup>4</sup>



The City of Buffalo is also considered one of the most segregated cities in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Black residents have advocated against the elevated grocery store prices discovered in comparison to affluent, predominantly White areas. Residents have also raised transportation concerns due to reductions in bus routes.<sup>6</sup>

# The Equity Journey

Since 2007, the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo has increased its focus on racial equity, both in terms of its externally-facing work and its internal operations. In partnership with local organizations spanning business, nonprofits, government, and philanthropy, the Community Foundation co-founded the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable in 2015. The Roundtable takes a collaborative, multi-sector approach to advancing racial equity in the region. The Foundation has also sought to live out principles of equity in its governance and internal operations.

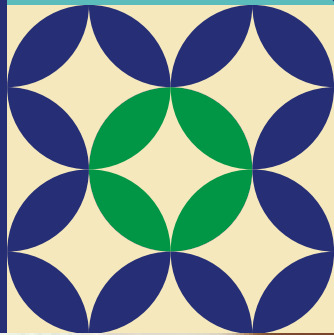
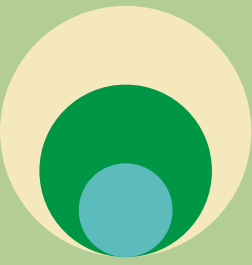
“When we close racial gaps in workforce participation we will see a broader tax base, more income for families and households — making the region an estimated \$12 billion wealthier and more competitive for investment and development.”

**Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker**

*Former CEO, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo*

## Mission and Vision

The Community Foundation has made achieving racial equity one of its four primary community goals (alongside education/workforce readiness, environment, and arts and culture). In addition to the moral imperative of achieving racial equity in the region, the Foundation also frames it as an economic issue in its report, *The Racial Equity Dividend: Buffalo's Great Opportunity*: “When we close racial gaps in workforce participation we will see a broader tax base, more income for families and households — making the region an estimated \$12 billion wealthier and more competitive for investment and development.” Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, describes the Foundation's approach as pragmatic: “Yes, [focusing on equity] is the right thing to do, but also what we need to do given the demographics of our community.”



**\$70M** The Community Foundation helped raise over \$70 million from the private sector to support scholarships and educational programs.

**\$15M** Over the past eight years, Say Yes Buffalo has distributed over \$15 million in college scholarships.

**76%** The high school graduation rate in Buffalo has increased from 49 percent to 76 percent (the highest rate in decades).



## Programs and Activities

In 2015, the Community Foundation co-founded the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, which brings together business, government, and non-profit organizations to advance racial equity in the region. The Roundtable approach is rooted in data and focused on systems change, while creating the conditions for change through capacity building for organizations and their leaders. The work is about closing equity gaps in systems such as education and job readiness, criminal justice and safety, and income and wealth. For example, the Roundtable supports the Juvenile Justice Coalition, which works to reduce contact with juvenile justice systems, and improve outcomes when youth are in contact. As of 2020, the Roundtable consisted of 35 members and 350 partners.

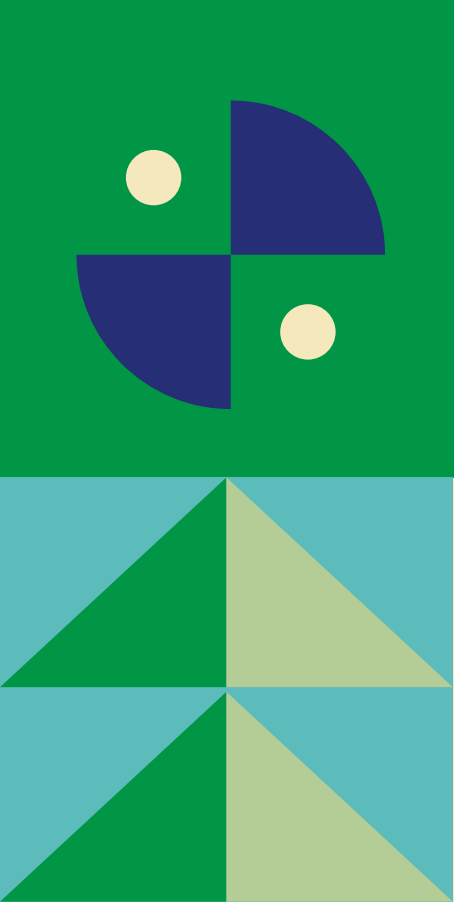
In 2016, the Community Foundation launched its Racial Equity Impact Analysis training, which teaches leaders how to insert a racial equity lens into their decision-making process. Since

its inception, 142 organizations (including major employers, government, law enforcement, media, and nonprofits) have sent 3,500 regional leaders to attend this racial equity training and continue to use this approach, with the support of coaches who receive ongoing training and support.

The Community Foundation has also contributed to improving access to education in the region. The Foundation led the [Say Yes Buffalo](#) initiative, designed to remove social, emotional, health, and financial barriers to academic achievement and offer a universal postsecondary tuition scholarship—setting the expectation of educational achievement for all. The Community Foundation helped raise over \$70 million from the private sector to support scholarships and educational programs. Over the past eight years, Say Yes Buffalo has distributed over \$15 million in college scholarships, and the high school graduation rate in Buffalo has increased from 49 percent to 76 percent (the highest rate in decades).

**“ Our board members tell us they’ve never served on a better board, because of the opportunity to both learn and contribute.”**

**Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker**  
*Former CEO, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo*



# Learning and Evaluation

Through its Racial Equity Dividend Report, the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable has documented the state of racial inequity in the region, including disparate rates of neighborhood segregation, poverty, educational attainment, and incarceration. This report is used to diagnose problems, inform programming decisions, and measure progress against goals. The indicators contained within the dividend report will help capture population-level impacts over the long-term, with the goal of eliminating racial equity gaps between people of color and the White population in the region.

## Operations

The Community Foundation has instituted new policies geared towards advancing a more equitable and inclusive local economy, including a procurement policy that monitors use of external vendors of color. Guided by this policy, the Foundation is working to increase the number of Black, Indigenous or People of Color vendors it uses. The Community Foundation has also expanded this practice to large corporations in the region through the “business leaders task force.” The task force, composed of the CEOs of 12 major corporations in the Buffalo region, came together to develop the Buffalo Purchasing Initiative, which sets annual goals for increased purchasing from local businesses owned by people of color.

## Governance

The Community Foundation’s board has been instrumental in leading its equity journey. The board named advancing race equity as a priority community goal, and understood that this meant committing to a journey. All Foundation board members undergo six months of onboarding; starting in 2016, this onboarding process included a Racial Equity Impact Analysis training, which teaches leaders how to insert a racial equity lens into their decision-making process. Every board member has also committed to using the Intercultural Development Inventory as a tool for planning their personal journeys towards deeper cultural competency. Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker credits the board for engaging deeply with the organization’s equity journey: “Our board members tell us they’ve never served on a better board, because of the opportunity to both learn and contribute.”

## Endnotes

- 1 Invest Buffalo Niagara, [“8 County Region”](#)
- 2 [United States Census Bureau](#)
- 3 Census Reporter, [“Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area”](#)
- 4 [University of Buffalo](#)
- 5 [NPR](#)
- 6 [WGRZ](#)

# CFLeads

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