



Taking Diversity and Inclusion to the Next Level

# Town of Andover

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## Assessment Report Presentation to Select Board

April 27, 2021

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## Demographics

			Town Population
• Race/Ethnicity	#	%	%
• Black/African Descent	46	3.31	2.93
• Indigenous/Native American	7	0.49	0.05
• Hispanic or Latino	58	4.09	8.02
• Asian/Pacific Islander	129	9.59	9.89
• White/European Descent	977	70.94	77.34
• Biracial/Multiracial	49	3.88	1.74
• People who identified as 'Other'	104	7.69	not provided
• Gender			
• Male	448	31.68	48.41
• Female	938	66.34	51.59
• Transgender, Gender Queer,	28	1.98	not provided
• Gender non binary			
• Community Role*			
• Live in Andover	939	65.16	-----
• Work in Andover	218	15.13	-----
• Both	284	19.71	-----
• *Data in Merrimack Valley Planning Commission's report not provided in this way			
• Age**			
• under 20	46	3.21	-----
• 21 – 30	74	5.16	-----
• 31 – 45	367	25.59	-----
• 46 – 60	557	38.84	-----
• 61 – 75	302	21.06	-----
• 75 +	88	6.14	-----

\*\*comparison not possible with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission's data as the ages scales used were different (i.e., ages 10 - 19, 20 - 29, etc.)

## Focus groups process

VISIONS also facilitated focus group discussions with participants representing various constituency groups in the community. Such constituency groups included groupings by race/ethnicity, gender, age, role in the community (i.e., employees of various town departments, schools).

The consultants designed a system of inquiry that, along with participants meeting in their constituency groups, was designed to promote participants' ability to speak freely about the successes and challenges that exist in the Town of Andover in general, and those successes and challenges that exist in the town with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion. To achieve this, the focus groups were conducted over several weeks, held virtually via a zoom platform.

Twenty-three 50 minute focus group interviews were held January 16 – February 22, with a variety of constituencies of community members and town employees, intended to gather cross sectional qualitative information on experiences and perceptions of the racial climate in Andover.

For the focus groups consultants focused on the participants' open, discussion based responses to the following questions:

- 1) What are the Town of Andover's strengths/what is working well in general?
- 2) What are strengths with respect to diversity, inclusion and equity?
- 3) What are some challenges, areas that need improving?
- 4) What is the impact of the racial climate on the participants?
  - a) In what ways do you feel valued and included as a member of your group?
  - b) In what ways do you feel devalued and excluded as a member of your group?
- 5) What are some changes or next steps that participants would recommend the town take on, moving forward?

## Focus groups process

### Challenges to the Focus groups process

A challenge to the focus group aspect of the assessment came up when the consultants were not able to meet in the focus groups with as large a random sample of community members as planned. This was due to the following complication: there had been 8 – 10 slots allotted for participants in each focus group; there was initial interest and registration for a full complement of focus group participants; yet when it came time for several of the groups to take place, fewer participants (than had signed up) actually appeared for the groups, despite several communications via email with confirmation of registration and links to the respective group sessions.

### Summary of Key Andover Strengths

Most of the survey responses and focus group participants consistently identified certain Andover strengths, including:

- Andover is welcoming, the town is organized
- Overall, the schools are seen as effective with school clubs, and improving in their attempts to sponsor inclusive events, and enhancing faculty and staff learning regarding DEI
- The town community services and groups are seen as strong, particularly the library and its programs, elder and youth services, Merrimack Valley Black and Brown Voices
- Andover's slowly growing diversity along with many well-intentioned community members
- The town's support for small business
- A supportive faith community
- Town leadership is seen as being committed to examining and addressing DEI concerns and issues, has stated an openness to change, has made efforts to increase affordable housing in the community, and has improved with regard to gender diversity

## Summary of Key Andover Challenges

Challenges include:

- Lack of diversity in many places: school staff/faculty and leadership, town employees and leadership, boards, elected officials
- Town, school employees and community members having varying degrees of ability (and needing to learn) to engage in or facilitate conversations regarding racial, ethnic, cultural and other differences, issues and challenges
- Overall need for more community-wide, cultural events, ongoing education and training on these issues
- Frequent incidence of demeaning comments, and use of stereotypes based on race, ethnicity and other identities (gender, class, etc.);
- Macro- and micro-aggressions by police, fire department employees and by students at school – one example, many reported via survey and focus group discussion that people of color have been consistently stopped without cause at a much higher rate than white community members;
- Low level of trust regarding the town's anticipated responses to challenges; belief by many community members, across racial lines, that the town does not effectively intervene when observing or made aware of incidents of concern; this is aligned with...
- The perception of significant communication-related challenges, including, sharing information with the community, and a reported low level of transparency about the pace and process for responding to concerns and incidents
- School curriculum viewed as not culturally responsive and relevant to a slowly growing diverse student population
- Some community members resistant to or hesitant about supporting efforts related to diversity equity and inclusion as noted by many comments in response to questions 14 and 16 of the survey
- The low level of racial diversity as compared to (and insular from) adjacent communities; the need for more affordable housing.

## Recommendations

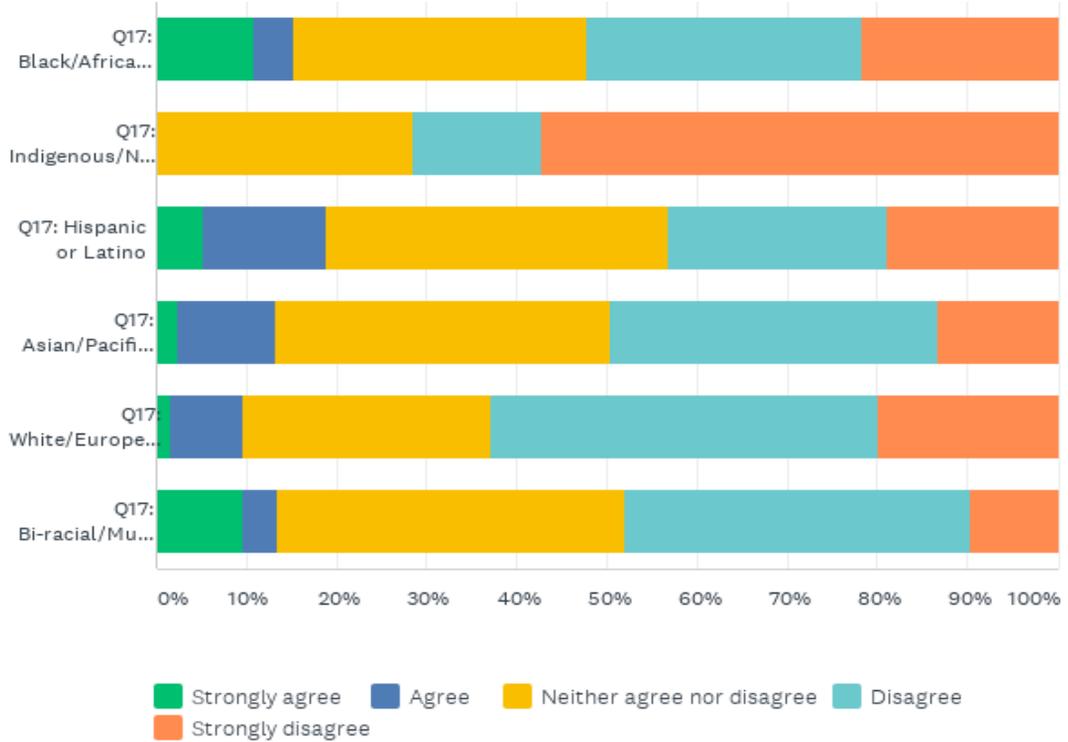
Based on the data collected via both processes, the following recommendations are suggested:

1) Hiring a more diverse workforce is seen as one of the most needed and recommended action steps by the community. This includes hiring for greater diversity in the schools, in all town departments, particularly Fire and Police, and in leadership roles in many of the departments. This usually requires a thorough examination of existing practices, with an expanded lens to include job description write up and languaging, outreach and community engagement (where and how), hiring committee membership (diverse), skills and process, examination of resumes and qualifications, interview process (for example, can hire with DEI skills and experience with discussing as challenging oppression as part of the skill set needed), examine and enhance cultural responsiveness of the department in which the new employee is to be hired, sustainability of employee (set up for success);

2) Multiple DEI trainings of town employees, leadership, school staff/faculty, boards, elected officials, and interested community and faculty to build the skills to effectively participate in and implement a long-term initiative to improve the racial climate and culture in the community. *Such a process would address responses to **Question 4** on the survey, providing the kind of practice that leads to greater comfort and skill in having/supporting these conversations and addressing the issues and challenges.* Such training would include opportunities for following facilitated elements;

- a. Learning/practicing multicultural tools, skills and processes to allow for cross cultural/cross level communication within meetings as well as informally
- b. Options to explore value of/institute caucus or affinity group work (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)

**Q4: I frequently ask a person from a different group (race/ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) about how my behavior has impacted them.**



	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Q17: Black/African Descent (A)	10.87% 5 DE	4.35% 2	32.61% 15	30.43% 14	21.74% 10	3.62% 46
Q17: Indigenous/Native American (B)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	14.29% 1	57.14% 4	0.55% 7
Q17: Hispanic or Latino (C)	5.17% 3 E	13.79% 8	37.93% 22	24.14% 14 E	18.97% 11	4.56% 58
Q17: Asian/Pacific Islander (D)	2.33% 3 AF	10.85% 14	37.21% 48 E	36.43% 47	13.18% 17	10.14% 129
Q17: White/European Descent (E)	1.53% 15 ACF	8.16% 80	27.55% 270 D	42.86% 420 C	19.90% 195	77.04% 980
Q17: Bi-racial/Multi-racial (F)	9.62% 5 DE	3.85% 2	38.46% 20	38.46% 20	9.62% 5	4.09% 52
Total Respondents	31	106	377	516	242	1,272

This question was designed to examine whether respondents saw themselves as skilled in being able to listen to feedback, ask for it, notice the ways that they can interact with others that may have challenging results, particularly across cultural and other differences. The fact that between 82 and 98% of the respondents did not see themselves in this way may mean that there is little confidence (or sense of competence) in being able to be in these kinds of conversations.

## Recommendations

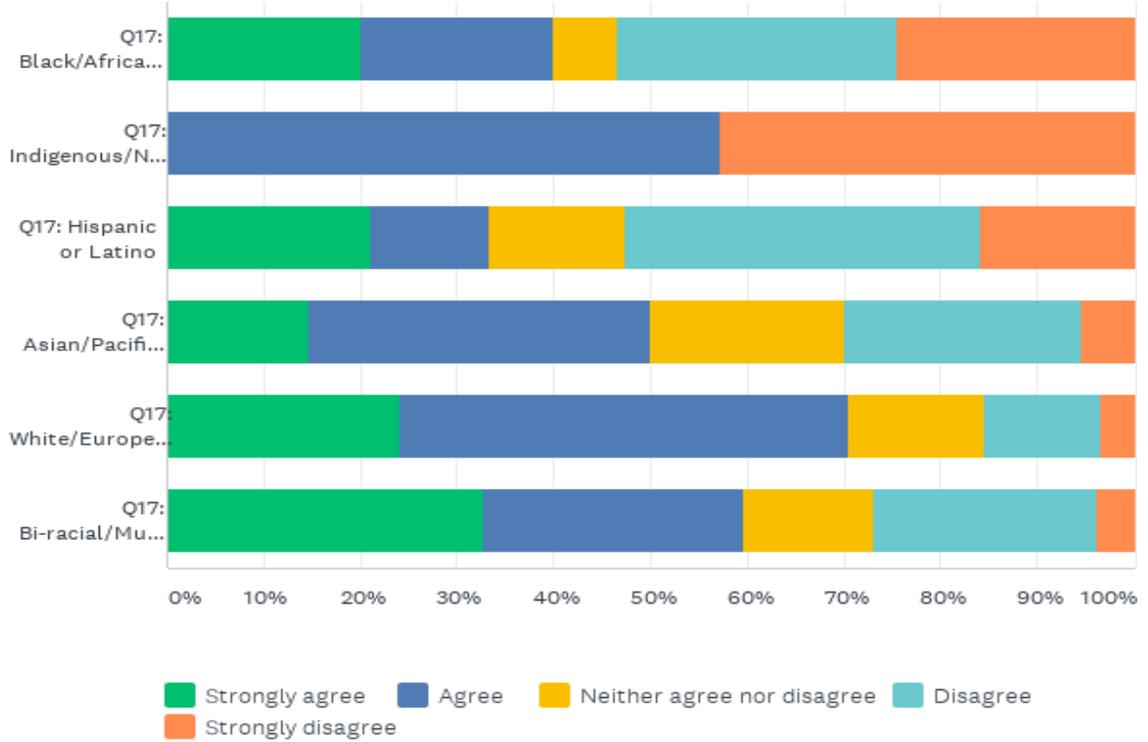
### Training recommendations (continued)

c. Opportunity for all employees and leadership to improve skills for having cross cultural, challenging conversations; enhance problem solving using a multicultural lens; this, in turn, will support:

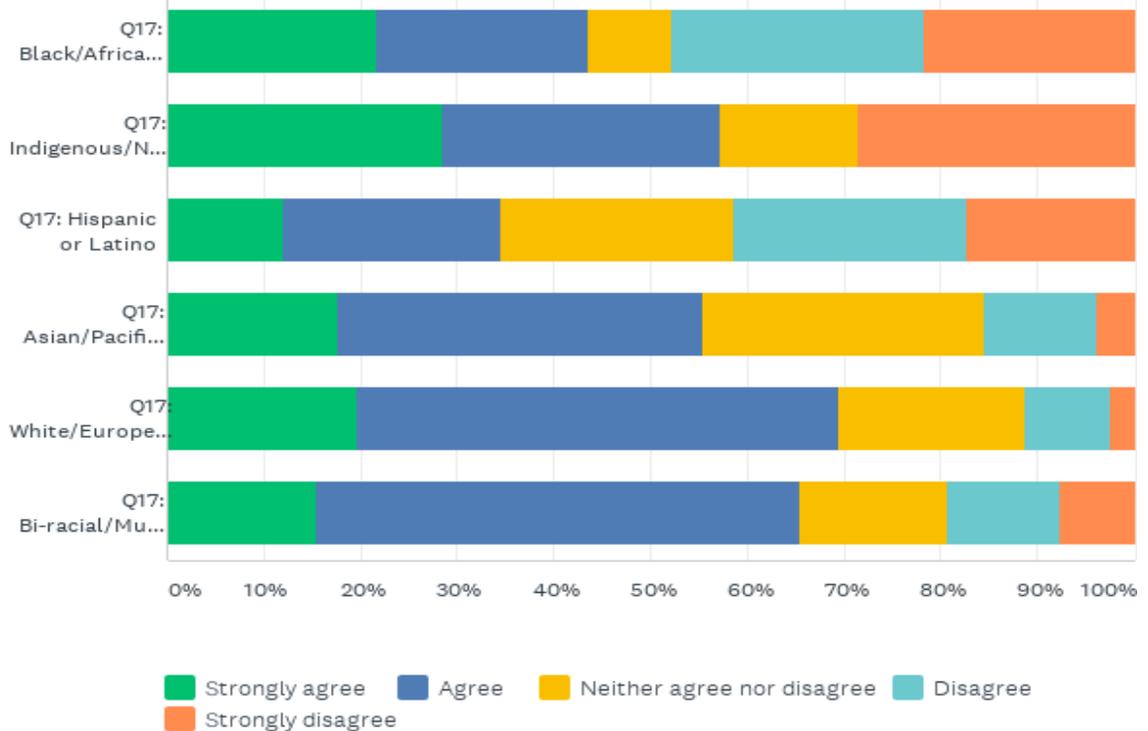
- i. Development of shared language
- ii. Greater awareness of intent and impact
- iii. Embracing the differences that exist among all
- iv. Holding selves and each other accountable
- v. Skills to interrupt micro-aggressions and more effectively manage implicit/unconscious bias
- vi. Practice and follow through in behavioral change
- vii. Improvement of quality of relationships across all levels
- viii. Leadership in its efforts to maintain a DEI lens as the town works towards its vision of enhanced inclusion and equity;

- 3) Institutional support for Commission on DEI to support its sustainability;
- 4) Examination and changing, where relevant, curriculum to include time and content related to these issues, including a mandatory social justice course for all students;
- 5) Encouraging an increase in classroom discussions regarding these issues, particularly when it overlaps with content; also in-time discussions when these issues are highlighted in the larger community (city, state, country, etc.);
- 6) Continue to enhance the process for engaging and developing strength of youth; leveraging youth voices/perspectives/impact (**survey questions 9 and 13 related to belonging**);
- 7) Increase practice of engaging community cultural events to facilitate additional cross-cultural engagement and learning (also survey questions 9 and 13 related to belonging);

**Question 9 and Question 13 will be examined together:  
Q 9: I can be my full, authentic self in Andover.**



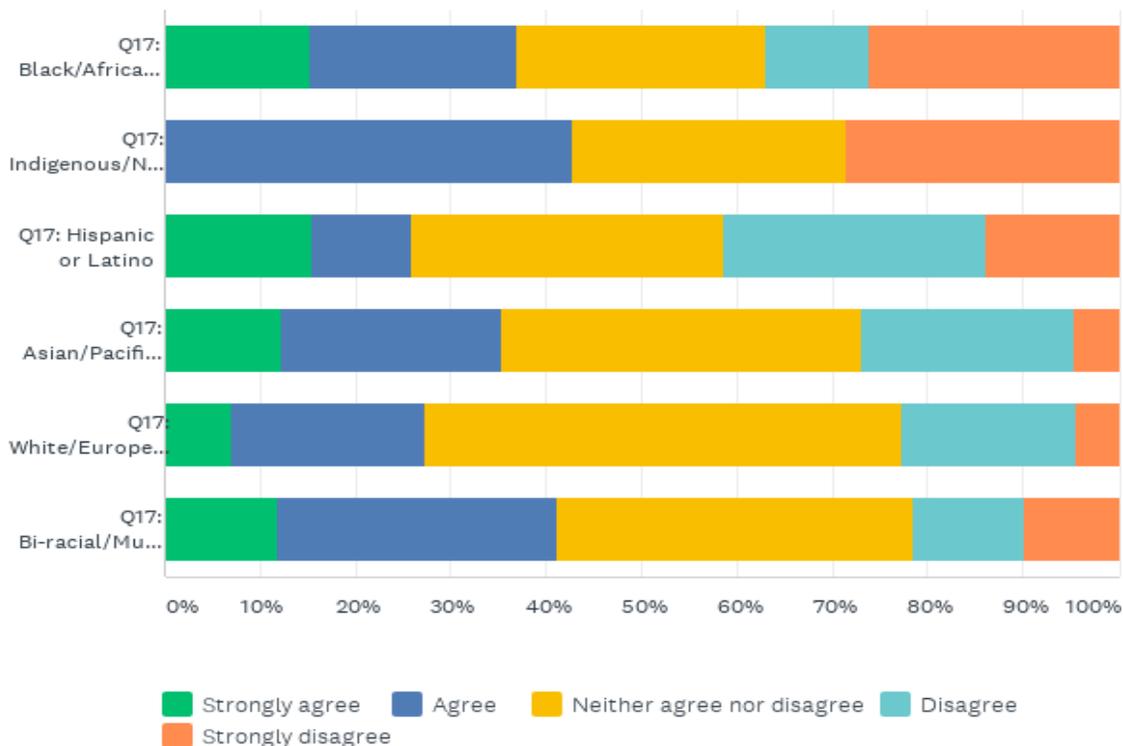
**Question 13: I feel a sense of belonging in Andover.**



## Recommendations

- 8) Increase transparency and effectiveness in communication – around responsiveness to incidents, policy changes, community projects, etc.
- 9) Support for leadership (and others as needed) in the form of coaching. This can be conducted through individual sessions with leadership or with a leadership team, to support engaging a multicultural lens in leadership's work
- 10) In addition to examining hiring policy and practice, re-examine other policies/practices, with a multicultural lens, to look for changes that would reflect needed enhancements regarding inclusiveness;
- 11) Promote reporting, including by providing greater clarity to community members on the process and importance of reporting incidents of discrimination, including harassment or retaliation (in addition to embracing training and cultural learning events, this willingness to hear more will continue to demonstrate leadership's commitment – **Survey question 5**);
- 12) Communicate regularly and effectively to the community on the progress and plans regarding Andover's ongoing efforts related to the issues raised by the community;
- 13) In appropriate time intervals and/or as needed, perform follow-up racial climate audits, to assess progress in addressing the core issues addressed by this assessment.

## Q5: Town leadership’s management decisions reflect a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in/for the community.



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Q17: Black/African Descent (A)	15.22% 7 E	21.74% 10 E	26.09% 12 E	10.87% 5 C	26.09% 12 DEF	3.62% 46
Q17: Indigenous/Native American (B)	0.00% 0	42.86% 3	28.57% 2	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	0.55% 7
Q17: Hispanic or Latino (C)	15.52% 9 E	10.34% 6 DF	32.76% 19 E	27.59% 16 AF	13.79% 8 DE	4.56% 58
Q17: Asian/Pacific Islander (D)	12.31% 16 E	23.08% 30 C	37.69% 49 E	22.31% 29	4.62% 6 AC	10.22% 130
Q17: White/European Descent (E)	7.04% 69 ACD	20.31% 199	49.90% 489 ACD	18.27% 179	4.49% 44 AC	77.04% 980
Q17: Bi-racial/Multi-racial (F)	11.76% 6	29.41% 15 C	37.25% 19	11.76% 6 C	9.80% 5 A	4.01% 51
Total Respondents	107	263	590	235	77	1,272

For this question, between 55 and 75% of respondents either did not agree with or were not aware of town management’s decisions reflecting a commitment to DEI for the community. The large number of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed, we think, speaks to a lack of information that participants, and thus the community, have about how leadership responds. Thus, the data suggests the need for town management to be more transparent and intentionally communicative related to DEI responsiveness.