

Elevator Pitch (250)

Grand Rapids is one of the fastest-growing U.S. cities with economic opportunities for businesses. We jumped to the top of polls for the best cities to start a business in 2015 and have maintained top 5 rankings ever since.

This does not tell the whole story. We top national lists for best places to call home and raise a family while communities of color struggle to thrive here. We rank among the worst large U.S. cities for African-Americans economically. More than 40 percent of African-Americans in our city live in poverty. They are three times as likely to be unemployed as whites. An estimated 35 percent of Hispanics and Latinos live in poverty, and they are twice as likely to be unemployed.

This disconnect points to structural racism, perpetuated by City policies and practices. Due in part to our rapid growth, we do not know the public we serve. We do not keep up with the flux because the available data – 2010 census and the most recent sample census data – are obsolete.

We will develop a grassroots-led census initiative to collect vetted, close to real-time data at the household and business level. Using grassroots organizing, we will partner with community organizations and citizen advocates to collect data. We will also use our annual business registration renewal process to collect employee demographic data. Innovating current business practices with community organizing will bring value to correlated data for equity. We will use the data to become a racially equitable city.

People Affected (100)

This process will impact the entire Grand Rapids community. Real-data throughout the city will allow for more valuable and real time data-driven decisions. The Grand Rapids population as of 2015 data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) is estimated to be 192,416. The entirety of this population will benefit from this data collection stream. Since our goal is to mitigate and minimize policy practices that cause persistent racial economic exclusion, all Grand Rapidsians throughout our 32 neighborhoods will be positively impacted.

People Helped (100)

Our idea will help all 192,416 Grand Rapids residents. Real-data allows valuable data-driven decisions focused on equitable policy practices. As we implement solutions and make changes, we need real-time, reliable data to determine impact, assess progress, and pivot more quickly. This idea will also provide businesses with tools needed to bolster equitable practices. When granular data is unavailable, we have seen continued gaps in equitable access to and attainment of sufficient healthcare, wealth, housing, employment, education, infrastructure and civic participation. Inequitable policy implementation affects marginalized populations most, but also negatively impacts our 192,416 residents in 32 neighborhoods and 10,623 businesses.



Categorize your solution

Our solution is primarily improving the way government works.

Issue-specific

Other: Racial Inequality Disparities – Policy Decisions

Investigative methods

Innovation methods – journey mapping with City staff, neighborhoods and business partners to hone in on the issue of racial inequity

Qualitative data analysis

Define the problem (25)

Grand Rapids lacks current granular demographic data. This contributes to continued racial exclusion in policy decisions associated with economic development, affordable housing and employment opportunities.

Impact on Citizens (300)

Grand Rapids is a tale of two cities. We have concentrated poverty in neighborhoods that are more racially and ethnically diverse than the city as a whole. One-third of our residents live in these neighborhoods, but we often top national lists such as “Best Places to Raise a Family” and “Best Places to Live.” Racial disparities in our city are systemic and they have grown to an unacceptable proportion. These disparities have led to inequitable access to employment, housing, education, transportation and health.

We are grappling with an affordable housing crisis. With rising rents and housing costs amid unprecedented economic development, individuals and families are being priced out of their homes. Our residents are moving to neighboring cities for affordable housing. This uprooting has created a burden of distance from employment, education and transportation for many.

As we continue to top national lists for economic opportunities, we rank at the near bottom among large U.S. cities where African-Americans are doing the best economically. African-American entrepreneurs want to leave Grand Rapids, and it is clear that equitable economic development is a major issue in our city.

We have statistics from recent studies conducted by partner nonprofit agencies that show the impact of these disparities. Most recently, the City hosted multiple listening sessions that yielded similar results. During these gatherings, community members shared their concerns about many of the same issues that rose to the top of the studies.

As a community, we must address racial disparities. If we do not, this divide will widen and eventually fracture and break. The prosperity our city has built over the past few decades will be lost and the disparities around wealth equality, education opportunities, affordable housing and employment will grow.

Accolades mean nothing if the city continues on the path of racial disparities.

Idea (300)

Our idea is to collect household and business level demographic data to inform policy and business practices in Grand Rapids. To create this community census, we will involve residents, citizen advocates, community leaders and business owners. We will organize a grassroots level campaign to knock on doors, spread the survey through printed materials and online content as well as hosting meet-ups. Combined, these methods will collect the data we need while building stakeholder ownership over the process. Is knocking on doors the only way we can think of capturing this information or can we think of crowdsourcing or some other form or technology or innovation to capture real time data?? What about the idea of linking multiple data sources (school, labor statistics, DHHS, etc.)?

To collect business data - including employee demographics and zip code data - we will use the City's current business licensing and annual business registration processes. This data will provide us insights into the current state of employment in Grand Rapids businesses as well as business ownership demographics.

Once the collection phase is complete, we will create a GRCityCen dashboard. We'll house this on the City's website and organize data by zip code and by neighborhood associations. The opportunities to apply this data to City and community practice are innumerable. City staff will use the data to inform their budgets and involve representative testing methods for service design, iteration and delivery. This will ensure the City is not disparately impacting low income neighborhoods.

Our Civic User team will use data to meet customers we believe are most affected by specific City services and assist with developing outreach material and correlating data with 311 service data.

We will use the data at the policy level to assess current policies for racial inequity and realign City practices as needed. This will apply to contract management for big developments. We have an existing agreement that contractors include a set number of low income housing units in their development. We will use GRCityCen to ensure contractors have complied and delivered on this agreement.

In the community, neighborhood associations and organizations will have the most accurate demographic data for their neighborhood to bolster grant applications and improve outreach. They will be able to use the data to assess gaps in representation on their boards and better understand the populations they serve.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs will be able to use the data to scope out business locations and focus on specific business opportunities. Businesses can use the data to improve equitable workforce recruitment and selection methods. We envision this data as a transformative tool we will eventually use to incite a Grand Rapids grown talent attraction and retention model for all sectors.

Previous Efforts (100)

Our idea is informed by initiatives we have observed in the community. The VoiceKent survey (previously VoiceGR) surveys a sample of residents to collect their opinions, attitudes and perceptions on various topics. This survey collects optional demographic information. We want to take their distribution and collection methods to the next level by collecting all household and business demographics.

We are aware that collecting data is only the beginning. Analyzing and producing data for public consumption is the next step. We know from organizations such as our Code for America Friendly Code Brigade how to best communicate about data with residents.

Outside Contributions (150)

We are grateful for the problem framing we received from community stakeholders and leaders. We held two ideation sessions at a business startup incubator space, Start Garden, and at City Hall. We started with the first session to hear all stakeholders' ideas about problems facing marginalized populations in Grand Rapids. We funneled these down to a handful of the most prominent issues. At the second ideation session we focused on one issue, inequitable economic development. The issue was broad and we are thankful for the direction of the Mayor's Challenge team with the local insights of residents, business owners, startup collaborators, community organization leaders and City staff to narrow the issue down to the heart of the issue – data. We determined that the GRCityCen idea, acknowledging the work that needs to be done in other realms of racial equity in the city, is the best starting point for our community.

Innovative Idea (200)

An annual City census is a novel idea. We are the first city to venture a citywide census with the primary intention to use the data for racial equitability. The GRCityCen dashboard will revolutionize the way City operations will budget for, plan and iterate on service delivery for the community. For the first time, we will be able to accurately reflect what the Grand Rapids population actually is and avoid exclusive assumptions. GRCityCen will fill a community need – health organizations, schools and other community partners have been asking for this real-time, accurate, local data.

We will use GRCityCen to assess City service outreach and testing for design and iteration. We developed a City funded Civic User Testing (CUT) Group - the first of its kind in the U.S. – for our current website redesign process. Linking this group of resident testers and the redesign process with GRCityCen not only improves current and new services, but it elevates the potential for coalition building with community partners to use data to address user needs in other realms we have not yet explored or tapped into.

Immediate Outputs (200)

This idea will have wide-ranging effects on our city. If implemented correctly, we will have the tools to make sure that all residents prosper. By January 2019 we will develop a GRCityCen online dashboard available to the public. Any entity will be able to export the data, aggregated by zip code or neighborhood, for use in their own analysis. Making this tool available not only to City leaders but also to residents, businesses, nonprofits, new business entrepreneurs will multiply the positive impact of our idea.

Our first data collection is the baseline we will use to measure the impact of our idea. By June 2019, City leaders will use the GRCityCen dashboard to inform their decision-making. By correlating data from other City sources with the data we collect for the GRCityCen dashboard, we will understand how decisions affect our community. Every fiscal year becomes an opportunity to test new hypotheses surrounding community displacement. By June 2020, we will have tested several hypotheses. If we see positive economic indicators in the absence of displacement in minority and low income areas, we affirm City leaders' decisions. If we find negative economic indicators or signs of displacement, we try something new.

Short-Term Outcomes (200)

City staff will use GRCityCen data to make decisions that avoid disparate impacts on low-income and minority communities. By June 2019, we expect this to be common practice. Similarly, the data we collect will inform contract management. When developers commit to practices meant to avoid negatively impacting neighborhoods, we will have the data to make sure they meet these commitments. Right now, there is no reliable way to measure displacement in minority and low income neighborhoods. As we update the dataset over time, we will be able to measure displacement. By June 2021, we will have the ability to measure actual displacement. If it exists, we can work to

remedy or prevent it. If it does not exist, we can confidently say that we have made progress toward our goal and strengthen the policies that have made that progress possible.

Long-Term Impact (200)

We will give our community the data it needs to solve complex problems. Making reliable, granular data describing our community available to the public will have wide-reaching effects on Grand Rapids public, private, and non-profit sectors. Advocacy organizations will have better data to reach populations that most need to be reached. Businesses will have data to help assess the risks of opening or expanding in the area. City government will have the data needed to study the effects of policy and make the changes needed to better our community.

The long-term impacts will be ongoing. It will take time for these impacts to gain momentum, but it will begin with the first release of the GRCityCen dashboard in January 2019. We believe that our idea will lead to measurable progress toward racial equity – an achievement that will have ripple effects throughout our community. Through more informed policy decisions that make Grand Rapids better, we will achieve income, housing value, and employment increases in the absence of displacement in our minority and low-income neighborhoods. [PENDING – EDITS NEEDED]

Impact on Residents (200)

We will interact with residents in several ways throughout the process of collecting data for our City census. Using several modes of interaction, we will work toward inclusivity of a diverse group in our community. While we will be unable to reach everyone, we will be vigilant in our pursuit of a sample that reflects our community's racial, ethnic, gender, and age makeup. We will engage residents digitally, through the City website and digital marketing. We will reach others through in person interactions as they seek City services at our storefront windows at City Hall. We will take survey responses over the phone when residents call to report issues in the City. Finally, we will make paper applications available both to print online and in heavily trafficked areas of the City.

Testing Your idea (200)

We assume this idea will help address data needs for community organizations, neighborhood associations and business owners. The only way to be sure that data collected reflects these needs is to prototype the data collection tools and test with a representative sample of these stakeholders. We will use our Civic User Test (CUT) Group to collect public feedback, both remotely and in person. Then we will invite a group of users from a sample of neighborhoods to a journey mapping session to understand how best to collect data in the community. We will focus on neighborhood specific personalities and available resources/tools. We have cultivated a relationship with the public through the CUT Group and we are confident that we will be able to collect honest, complete feedback from all geographic regions of the city.

We will incorporate CUT Group feedback into survey design. This will ensure we collect all demographic data deemed necessary by both the community and the City. We will follow up with neighborhoods on the journey mapping session by developing a joint outreach and communications plan for in person and online data collection. The plan will include guidance on how to interpret and present GRCityCen data.

Risk Factors (200)

The greatest risks to the success of our idea relate to the data collection process, community buy-in and City adoption. We are sure that our team of community stakeholders and the City business licensing and registration processes are capable of collecting complete data. One risk lies in the potential outreach gaps to collect data. We will mitigate this risk with 311 data and a collaborative strategic outreach/communication plan we will develop during the testing phase.

The second risk is community buy-in. Our intention is to become a racially equitable city – both in terms of City operations and community relations. We must design this process in a way that involves the community from the beginning so the public trusts GRCityCen and is motivated to use it for its intended purposes. We will mitigate this risk in the testing phase by understanding community needs per neighborhood and including stakeholders in the process along the way.

The final risk is City adoption and incorporation of GRCityCen in service delivery and iteration. Communicating project process and developing champions for GRCityCen internally will help to mitigate this risk. Starting with the testing phase, we will keep City department leadership and staff updated.

Resident Involvement (100)

Residents will be involved beginning during the testing phase. We will use our existing, representative Civic User Testing Group to test prototype collection tools/methods. Using journey mapping with community and business stakeholders, we will determine how to best collect data in each neighborhood. We will get a sense of best times to reach out, preferred modes of interaction and available tools and resources to collect data. We will then collaborate with stakeholders on an outreach/communications plan to align messaging for the data collection phase. We will ask how we should package tips on how to use GRCityCen when launched.

Resident Reflections* (50 each response)

Response 1

“This idea is about the diagnosis and assessment, not a cure or dose. We do need to start here though. Grand Rapids is like most places where the dominant culture is the default. There are hidden rules and cultural barriers you’ll have to find and address”.

Response 2

“Racial equity is huge. You have to reverse engineer how the City impacts marginalized populations and then hear stories from the people themselves. You have to find the root cause to get to the solution and data can definitely help tell that story”.

Response 3

“This seems like you’re on the right track. You have to start at the beginning with data to understand what you’re working with. I like that you’ve thought of how to share this with the community. You’re doing admirable work.”

Work Plan – to be entered in the worksheet in the application

Work plan – includes work stream, brief description, 5 milestones and target dates for completion

1. Design the City Sponsored GRCityCen Program Project Plan - Data Collection/Stakeholder Identification
 - a. Define, design and codify the data collection model to include the stakeholder assumptions to assist in data collection
 1. Complete the project charter to define the deliverables of the entire program – August 18
 2. Determine which GRCityCen data demographics to collect – household/business - August 18
 3. Vet the data points with stakeholders (users of the data) through the City’s Civic User Testing Feedback program to gather input to validate demographic alignment to households and businesses – December 18
 4. Finalize the charter and plan for deployment – January 19
 5. Launch the plan distribute and begin collecting data – February 19
2. Develop City Staff Engagement and Community Model for Data Collection Support Teams
 - a. Determine the various channels by which we will use City staff and community stakeholder strength to be the data gatherers; define roles and responsibilities
 1. Define and develop the initial staffing and stakeholder plan to collect the GRCityCen data – November 18
 2. Vet the plan by conducting strategy session with City staff and community stakeholders – February 19
 3. Finalize the support strategy for teams that will collect the data, roles and responsibilities – online in the neighborhoods, meetings, door-to-door, faith-based organizations, nonprofits- April 19
 4. Launch the channels to begin data collection – June 19
 5. Complete data collection December 19
3. Develop the Data Strategy – Gathering, Consumption, Assessment and Launch
 - a. Determine the best ways and channels that will be used to collect data – household and businesses
 1. Meet with the Chief, Data strategist at the City to confirm data points and clarity of data - May 18
 2. Develop the list of possible data collections tools into one GRCityCen toolkit – July 18
 3. Present the toolkit to City and community stakeholders to gather user feedback on the toolkit – ease of use, components, understanding – October 18
 4. Launch toolkit and data collection – households and businesses – May 19
 5. Complete 80% data collection – December 19
4. Define Technology Platforms, Datasets and Dashboards for Development
 - a. Review and define the technology hardware to collect data electronically, manually and develop platforms to display data for use
 1. Identify technology needed tough books, GIS, ESRI, Power BI - July 18
 2. Develop initial dataset model off current census data - November 18
 3. Conduct City Civic User Testing of the dataset built and feedback for dashboards - March 19
 4. Launch Data sets for use receive feedback and iterate datasets - January 20
 5. Conduct sessions with community, stakeholders and City staff how to use the data for affordable housing compliance, determining economic development compliance assessments, data-driven City budgets, etc.
5. Communication – Community, Stakeholders, City Staff

- a. Develop the communication strategies that will be used to engage and interface with the community households and businesses to ensure they know the plan why are we doing this and how the data will be used
 - 1. Develop the communication strategy – August 18
 - 2. Identify stakeholders that will assist in data gathering - October 18
 - 3. Citywide Communiques by stakeholder – multiple channels – December 18
 - 4. Citywide continuous update communications – 1/19 – 2/21

