

Raising Voices of Color

**Engagement of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
(BIPOC) community in local government**





Raising Voices of Color

Purpose

The purpose of the YWCA's Raising Voices of Color project is to assure that diverse voices are represented in our local Great Falls government. Specifically, during the years of 2020-2021, the YWCA Board members will work with community members to increase the diversity of racial voices on the 20 city advisory boards.

Why is engagement in Great Falls local government important for all citizens?

According to the City of Great Falls website, “Serving on boards and commissions is an opportunity for citizens to become involved in the decision-making process on the various issues that the City deals with. The City of Great Falls has over twenty boards and commissions, so there is ample opportunity to get involved. Whether your passion is planning, recreation, health, or the arts, there is sure to be a topic of interest”.

Why is Racial Diversity Important in Local Government?

“For years the voices of people of color have been silenced, while at the same time the assumption of the Government system has shed such a negative light on these same groups of people. In order to truly understand a particular culture, that culture must first be allowed to speak. What this process does is it allows our various cultures to be exposed to the ideas of people of color, and how their ideas can truly impact neighborhoods, schools, businesses and life as a whole.

This process brings out the creativity of all cultures, which in terms places a level of respect on the thoughts, ideas, and concepts of all people. This is what must happen as we seek to challenge the past. We must embrace the truth that all cultures in one form or another are Intelligent, articulate, educated, professional, and creative. It is time for this to be acknowledged in our society as a whole.”

-Antoinette Collins, Business Owner, Social Activist, Religious Leader, January 2021

“Local government should reflect the population it serves. Addressing barriers to this reflection is not only about equity. Diverse perspectives create more opportunities for creativity and compassion. These qualities in governance will make local policies more effective for all members of our community.”

-Kimberly McKeehan, Little Shell, Chippewa Tribal Councilman, February 2021

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Why is Racial Diversity Important in Local Government? Continued...

“Active participation in local government is the most effective way for a citizen to have influence on the policies, ordinances, resolutions and recommendations that affect community life. Representation by all demographics is important, but especially critical for traditionally under-represented groups. We welcome different perspectives and the opportunity to amplify the voices of those who may believe their access to government has too often been hindered by social, cultural, or racial differences”.

-Bob Kelly, Great Falls Mayor, January 2021

“As home to the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and with new homeowners choosing to relocate to Big Sky Country or past and current military members in our communities, Cascade County’s citizens are a blend of many cultural backgrounds and colors. Local government policies shape our community. I encourage everyone to consider volunteering on one of the thirteen public boards to help frame county policy conversations and future policy decisions.”

-Jane Weber, Cascade County Commissioner, January 2021

"When we talk about diversity in the categories of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, political perspective, and especially race; I feel we are asking about who a person is. My dream is to live in a community where all options for each category are not only represented, but valued and treated with dignity."

-Sandi Filipowicz, Director of YWCA, January 2021

Frequently Asked Questions About the Advisory Boards

- What are the positions of the 20 local advisory boards?
- When and where are board openings listed?
- Where are the applications located?
- What is the application process?
- How to prepare for the application process?
- Is being on an advisory board fun?
- Sources of Support?

What are the positions of the 20 local advisory boards?

Name of Advisory Board	Link to More Information
Board of Adjustment and Appeals	Board of Adjustment and Appeals
Business Improvement District	Business Improvement District
City-County Health Board	City-County Health Board
Ethics Committee	Ethics Committee
Conservation District Board of Supervisors	Conservation District Board of Supervisors
Golf Advisory Board	Golf Advisory Board
Housing Authority Board	Housing Authority Board
Historic Preservation Advisory Commission	Historic Preservation Advisory Commission
Advisory Commission on International Relationships	Advisory Commission on International Relationships
Library Board of Trustees	Library Board of Trustees
Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts Advisory Board	Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts Advisory Board

What are the positions of the 20 local advisory boards? continued...

Name of Advisory Board	Link to More Information
Parking Advisory Commission	Parking Advisory Commission
Park and Recreation Advisory Board	Park and Recreation Advisory Board
Planning Advisory Board/Zoning Commission	Planning Advisory Board/Zoning Commission
Police Commission	Police Commission
Airport Authority	Airport Authority
Tourism Business Improvement District Board	Tourism Business Improvement District Board
Transit District Board	Transit District Board
EMS Advisory Board	EMS Advisory Board
Great Falls Police Department Advisory Board	Great Falls Police Department Advisory Board

When and where are board openings listed?

- The **most current source** of advisory openings is located at [Advisory Board Openings](#)
- Openings are posted for about three weeks. If no applications are received or if current applicants do not hold the needed skills, the application period may be extended.
- Advisory openings are posted throughout the year.

Where are the applications located?

Applications for citizens for the positions on the city's advisory boards are located at:

[Citizen's Interest Form](#)

These advisory board positions are volunteer positions.

What is the application process?

- The advisory board's city liaison and the current board members review the applications. They seek applicants with relevant experiences for the board but also for applicants whose expertise compliments the skills of the current board members.
- Advisory Board and the Board's city liaison generally make applicant recommendations to the City Commissioners.
- The City Commissioners vote and appoint new Advisory Board members. *They reserve the right to interview in special circumstances.*

How to prepare for the application process?

- Attend the meetings of the board of interest to familiarize yourself with the issues and the way meetings are run. The upcoming meetings and their agendas are listed at [City Meetings](#)
- Access the meeting minutes at [City Meetings](#), so that you have a history of the issues that come before the committee.
- Meet with the city liaison and learn more about the challenges and expectations of the job. The city liaison for each advisory board should be listed on the advisory board website. See slide 6 and 7.

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How to prepare for the application process? continued...

- Attend the Citizens 101 Academy, held annually by the City's Deputy Manager, to provide citizens with an overview of city government. As of January 13, 2021 due to Covid 19, the next class date has not been set. For more information on the Academy schedule, contact **Lanni Klasner** at **(406) 455-8496**.
- More information on the academy is located at: [Citizen's Academy 101](#)
- For further information about any current openings and/or the application process, please contact **Krista Artis** in the City Manager's Office at **455-8450**.

Is being on an advisory board fun?

Absolutely!

The variety of boards is immense: Golf, Housing, History, Library, Park and Recreation, Tourism, etc...

As you consider applying for an city advisory board, select a board that addresses topics that resonates with your passions.

Creating a Supportive Environment for Voices of Diversity

Leaders of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community and Great Falls city officials are seeking to improve diversity strategies when it comes to attracting, retaining, and engaging advisory board members. The road to inclusivity and diversity will undoubtedly be bumpy.

- Join our community's journey.
- Help build a better community.



Apply to volunteer to become a member of one of the 20 city's advisory boards

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

— James Baldwin

For more information on the Raising Voices of Color Project click [here](#).

If you have questions, contact [the YWCA's Racial Equity Committee](#) .

Thank You to the Following Contributors for their Assistance with the Raising Voices of Color Project

Krista Artis

Bill Bronson

Antoinette Collins

Leigh Cooper

Meshayla Cox

Sandi Filipowicz

Jennifer Fritz

Bob Kelly

Ivan MacDonald

Kimberly McKeegan

Hannah Pate

Mary Sheehy-Moe

Jane Weber

Jennifer Fritz