

# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

At Code for America

Annual Report 2020  
July 2021

**CODE** *for*  
**AMERICA**

## Message from our CEO

In the last year, our collective humanity has been challenged in immeasurable ways.

The COVID-19 virus triggered the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Millions of people have claimed unemployment benefits, with one in eight Americans experiencing food insecurity. Millions have also been facing life sentences to poverty because of damaging criminal records after decades of mass incarceration and over-policing. And we have experienced excruciating grief, anger, and sorrow after the horrifying police brutality we witnessed—following centuries-long violence against Black communities in America—when we lost George Floyd, Daunte Wright, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others whose stories have not been nationally visible. We're also heartbroken and outraged by the violence against Asian-American communities that has plagued this country. These crises deeply affected all of us, and yet again, the most marginalized among us have been hit the hardest. The reach of racism and inequities in America's systems is expansive.

At Code for America, we work hard each day to create lasting change and build equitable, people-centered government systems that work well for everyone. Equity is not just a core value, but also at the center of our work. We don't just talk about the promise of an America built on equity, respect, dignity, and freedom—we create and measure it.

To that end, in addition to our work changing government systems, we have also prioritized an overall vision for what it means to be a truly equitable, diverse, and inclusive organization—where everyone can bring their whole selves to work and feel a sense of shared belonging. Transformative change requires a comprehensive and sustained commitment in all aspects of the organization—from [people power](#), to operations, to leadership, to messaging, to shaping the future.

I'm proud to lead an organization that shows such remarkable courage, resilience, and ambition for change. I invite you to learn more about Code for America's journey toward shaping a world that's more equitable now and for future generations.

Sincerely,  
Amanda Renteria,  
Chief Executive Officer

## A Team as Diverse as the Country We Serve

Building a diverse workforce, ensuring equitable practices, and enabling an inclusive culture has no end point; it is the constant work of running an organization that strives to reach its full potential. And as you'll read below, we continue to make progress for representation. That said, we're extremely proud of the work we are doing and the progress we are making:

- Over 50% of our team identifies as people of color, up from 40% two years ago.
- At the end of 2020, 68% of Directors and above identified as people of color, up from 16.6% in 2018. This includes 80% of our executive (C-Level) leadership.
- Code for America continues to be a women-led organization, and women are a majority at all levels of the organization and on the board.
- While women and people of color are often alarmingly underrepresented in technical organizations, 48% of our Engineering and Data Science team members identify as as women or non-binary, and 40% as people of color.



## Investments over the past few years

Over the past few years, we have made significant progress in 1) creating structures that allow us to take on diversity and inclusion work systematically, 2) tracking metrics that hold us accountable to progress, and 3) implementing some critical activities that move the needle on our goals in both of these areas.

## Structure

We've structured our approach to diversity and inclusion work to enable internal engagement and outside support. We believe that the work of diversity and inclusion can't be owned only by some, so it's important that all staff know how and where they can plug in through these structures and how the pieces fit together.

- Our **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee** consists of employees who are interested in advancing diversity and inclusion at Code for America. Members rotate periodically and include a C-level sponsor, a chairperson, up to 14 additional committee members (which we expanded given the size of the organization and the interest of team members to serve on the committee), and our CEO Amanda Renteria. We also developed subcommittees that can rotate quarterly to make progress on key initiatives such as recruiting, onboarding, and people operations philosophies like compensation. The Committee Charter is: *The Diversity and Inclusion Committee is a node in the Code for America network that advocates for equitable and inclusive practices. We are Code for America employees who model behavior, process actionable feedback from others, recommend courses of action, take action ourselves, and hold the organization accountable.*
- **Earthtones** is our people of color affinity group. The group identifies areas of concern and opportunities for improvements and brings these to any member of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee. We also have other Slack channels for those that identify with a specific race or ethnicity, as well as other community-specific Slack spaces.
- **People managers** have regular meetings that make it easier to problem solve with peers, create a shared culture, and build our people management practice so that Code for America is a great place to work for everyone. We believe that strong people managers will help us be more successful in promoting talent, retaining talent, and supporting our employees. We provided various tools to people managers last year including inclusive manager trainings to new managers and custom support tools that all managers could share with staff as people navigated the various transitions and challenges of 2020.
- Our **Culture Committee** plans social activities and enables inclusive community-building at Code for America, which is critical as our staff has grown and been fully remote for the majority of 2020 and the first half of 2021.
- Finally, we have an **ombudsperson for DEI matters** and a whistleblower hotline to create an avenue through which people could raise concerns confidentially.

## Activities

In addition to enabling the structure to support our current diversity and inclusion efforts, we've undertaken a number of activities over the past few years that will allow us to continue building a more diverse and inclusive environment in the future.

- We've **refined the Community Fellowship program**. In 2019, we brought on two Community Fellowship teams, where the Fellows had authentic project-related lived experience. As a result, these teams were more successful across a variety of factors, including community engagement and user research. In iterating for 2021, we pondered the following questions: How might we intentionally center the people closest to the problems that the government is trying to solve? What if in 2020, every Fellow had project-related lived experience with the problem that they were trying to solve? We decided that the Community Fellowship must continue to push the limits of what's possible and in early 2020, we arrived at a new mission statement:

*The primary purpose of the Community Fellowship Program in 2021 is to resource and train community members with project-related lived experience and partner them with their local government to more effectively address inequities in service delivery.*

Our 2020-2021 cohort of Fellows represents the first time in our organization's history that all of the Code for America Community Fellows have direct project-related lived experience. We have also added a formal mentoring component with more than 32 Mentors who work with Fellows individually and in groups weekly. By hiring Fellows with lived experience, we're showing what's possible when you equip people from the community with the tools and resources to make an impact. Our innovative approach toward improving government effectiveness is validating that lived experience improves outcomes.

- We continue to **enhance our recruiting practices**—we have hired recruiters that focus on equitable hiring by creating consistent processes and coaching for hiring managers. We look at job boards where we post as well as the language we use in our job descriptions. Additionally, to promote and ensure pay equity, we include salary bands on job postings.
- We also continue to follow and refine the **Rooney Rule** that we put in place a couple of years ago where hiring managers must interview at least one candidate at the onsite stage who would move them closer to one of the demographic areas in which they are currently underrepresented.
- We **maintain and are expanding our career ladders by discipline with internally transparent salary ranges**, which is generally recognized as a cornerstone for organizations striving to ensure racial and gender equity in hiring, pay, and promotions.

- We **continued and expanded our apprenticeship program**, with a focus on underrepresented demographics and people who are trying to gain entry to the civic tech space, either as a first job or a career change. We have hosted eight apprentices since the start of the program in 2018, have expanded the disciplines to include qualitative research, engineering, and data science, and are proud to say all eight apprentices were hired as full time staff at the conclusion of the program. We are continuing the program in 2021.
- We have **normalized various inclusive cultural practices** such as introducing ourselves with our pronouns and having them in our signatures, starting meetings with an icebreaker, and rotating note-takers in various meetings. We continue to introduce and experiment with micro-changes that can signal and create spaces of inclusion and belonging. In addition, we **updated our communications style guide** with people-first language to give staff clear guidance on inclusive language we can use when talking about the people we work with and serve, the systems we are working to change, and our programs.
- We continue to provide opportunities for **DEI-related training and development**. For example, our DEI committee has hosted staff-wide readings of books such as “So You Want to Talk About Race” by Ijeoma Oluo and “The 1619 Project” by Nikole Hannah-Jones of *The New York Times*. We have incorporated a **DEI overview as part of our onboarding** to make explicit to new staff what our intentions and expectations are as well as provide support tools and culture norms. In addition, we piloted some **racial privilege accountability cohorts** across our staff and Brigade members for those that identify as white or racially privileged; together, they worked in small groups to explore their individual perspectives and commit to authentic allyship actions.
- Finally, we **continue to strive to measure how we are doing across diversity, inclusion, and equity of our practices**. For example, we internally review our staff diversity with the board on a quarterly basis, and externally strive to publish this report. In addition, we are working on compiling internal metrics so each team can assess how their team’s makeup compares to our overall diversity goals. Additionally, we measure our internal practices for unintentional biases or exclusions by methods such as tracking the makeup of those who speak up or get acknowledged at our weekly staff meetings so we can appropriately support or revise our forums as needed. Finally, we conduct an **Engagement Survey** twice a year with our staff—and did quarterly pulse checks with team members in 2020. As part of the Engagement Survey, we include questions around inclusion such as “I feel comfortable being myself at work,” “I am respected and taken seriously at Code for America by all staff,” “All staff at Code for America demonstrate a commitment to creating an inclusive environment,” and “Code for America is a more inclusive environment compared to my previous employers.” We are proud that as of our last survey, our collective inclusion score was over 90% and we continue to pay attention to creating an inclusive community as it is active and intentional work.



## Employee Representation

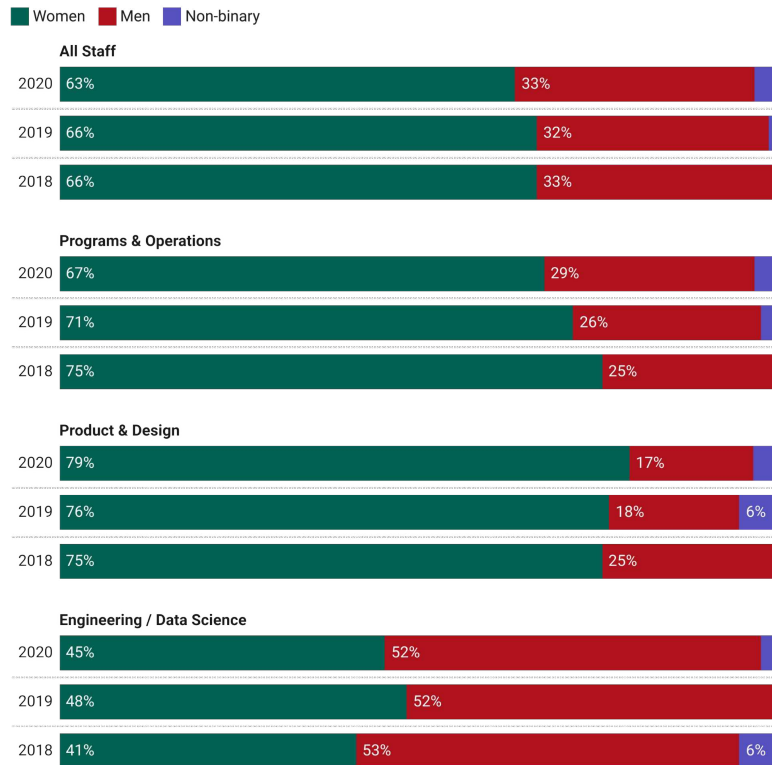
In creating a more diverse team at Code for America, our primary focus has been on activities that increase the number of candidates hired and retained at Code for America who are people of color, women, and non-binary. We are focused on these groups because they are underrepresented in tech and marginalized in many professional jobs. Without a strong focus on diversity in hiring, we run the risk of perpetuating this underrepresentation and marginalization at Code for America.



## Gender

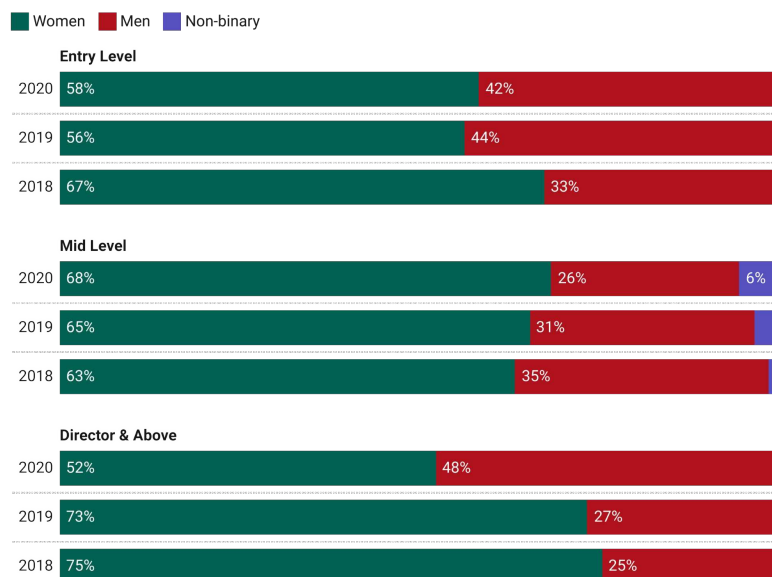
Code for America is a majority-women organization. At Code for America, we are organized into three departments: Programs, Operations, and Product & Technology. We have elected to break out our numbers somewhat differently, however, to highlight engineering and data science specifically as an area where people of color, women, and non-binary people are typically quite underrepresented. We are proud to report that 48% of our engineering and data science team identify as women or non binary, even during a time of growth.

## GENDER BY DEPARTMENT



Code for America is also a women-led organization. Women make up 52% of the Director and above level, 66% of the executive team, and 66% of our board. Though still in the majority, we recognize that our representation of women at the Director and above level has declined as we have expanded over the past couple of years while becoming more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. We'll continue to monitor the overall composition of this group to ensure the overall trends are in the direction of increasing diversity.

## GENDER BY SENIORITY



Note: The entry-level percentages in the above chart represent relatively small numbers. In 2020, there were 8 entry-level employees.



## GENDER WITHIN THE COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP



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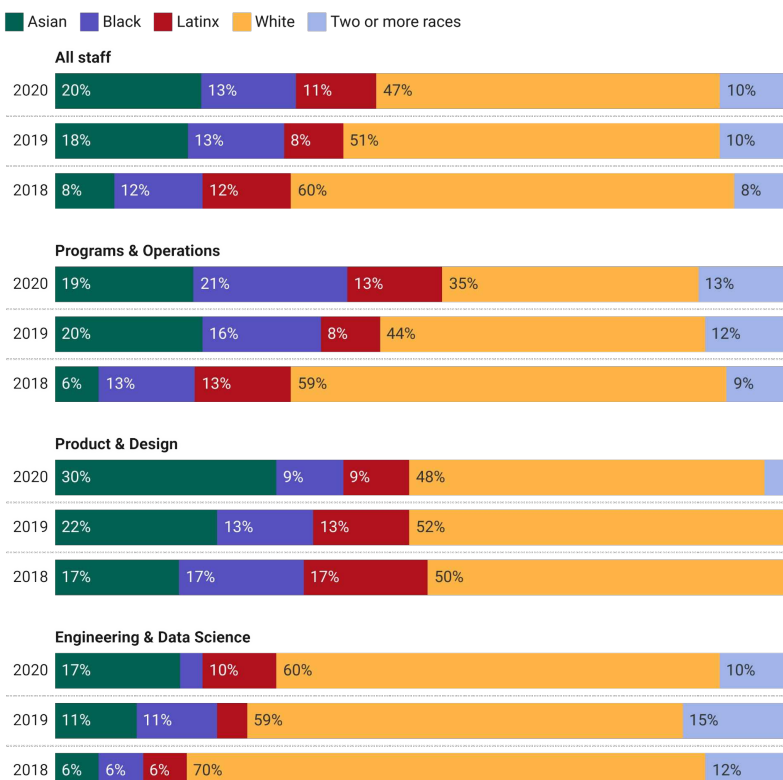
Note: The Community Fellowship cohorts, represented in the above chart, are relatively small groups. The 2020 cohort included 12 fellows, the 2019 cohort included 13, and the 2018 cohort included 8.

## Race & Ethnicity

Over 50% of our workforce identifies as people of color, compared to 40% in the national Census and 60% in the Bay Area. This ranges by department from 40% in Engineering and Data Science to 65% in Programs and Operations. We have also made strides in the makeup of our Directors and Executives, with over 65% identifying as people of color.

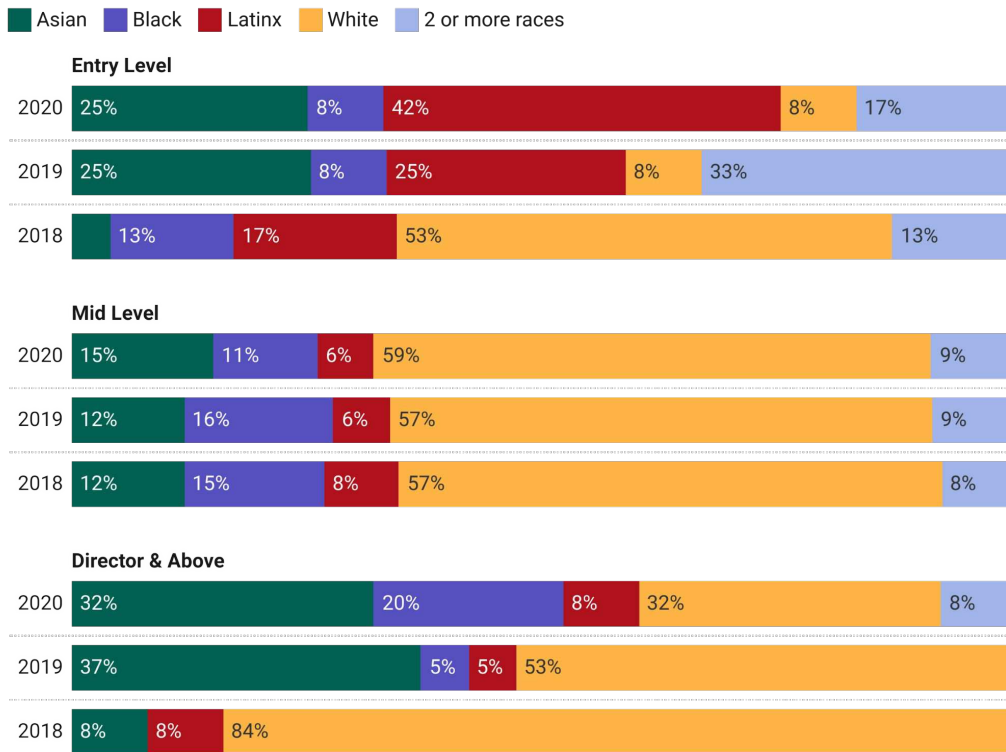
Our biggest gap as compared to U.S. Census benchmarks is in our Latinx representation, which is 11% among all staff, compared to 22% in the Bay Area or 18% nationally. Engineering and Data Science is the department with the most room for improvement, particularly in Black and Latinx representation.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY BY DEPARTMENT



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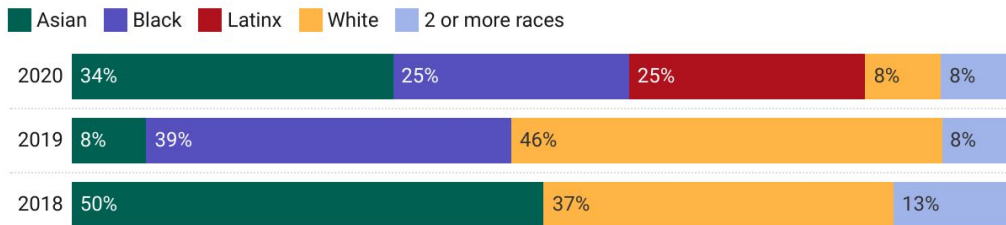
## RACE AND ETHNICITY BY SENIORITY



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## RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP



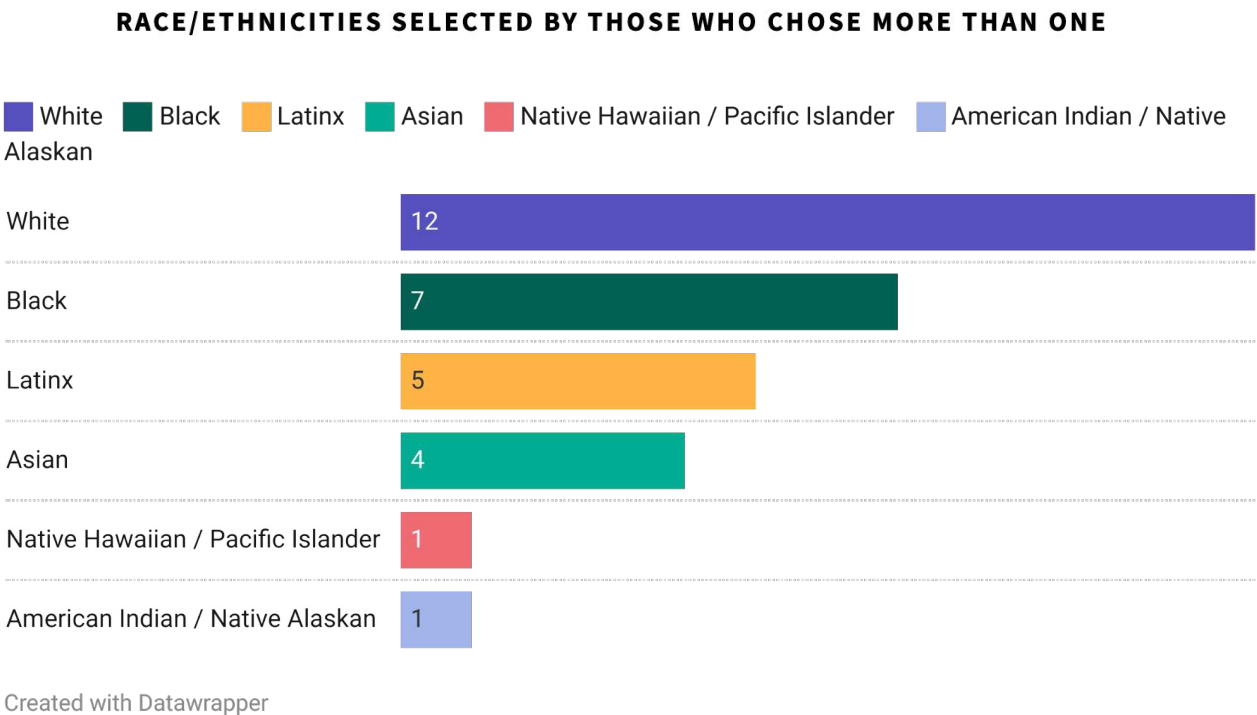
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# Self-Identification Data for Race, Sexual Orientation and Lived Experience

In the middle of 2020, Code for America team members were asked to self-identify demographic information (gender, ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and pronouns). The intention of collecting the information was to better reflect staff identities in a way that resonates for them—and allow us to better understand survey results and analysis needs by demographic/audience. Some takeaways include:

- A quarter of staff identify as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) community.
- Several staff members called out more specific racial or ethnic identities than are captured by the standard EEOC race and ethnicity reporting categories, such as “Middle Eastern or North African,” “South Asian,” or “White Guyanese.” These types of responses underscore the inadequacy of traditional reporting categories for representing the richness and complexity of racial and ethnic identity. Moving forward, we are considering options for capturing more nuanced race and ethnicity data as part of our standard processes.
- For the first time, we were able to see a more detailed view of race and ethnicity for staff who selected “two or more races.” This is a category where Code for America is over-represented relative to Census data, so we were interested in understanding more about those identities. Here is a breakdown of races/ethnicities selected by those who chose more than one:



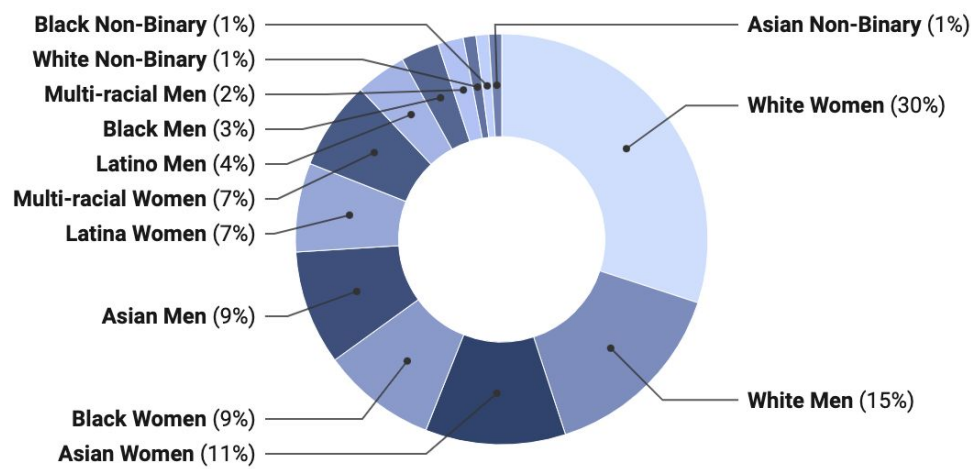
In addition, we gathered more data on “Mission-Related Experience.” We strongly believe that people who have experience with systems that reinforce poverty and incarceration must be involved in any attempt to address them. We wanted to learn more about our staff’s experience with Code for America’s program areas to help inform our systems change work—to help address systemic injustice against communities that have been marginalized. Our first step was to gather the data from our Engagement Surveys and get team members to voluntarily share their lived experience by responding to the question “have you or your family (as you define it) at any point in your life experienced...” We gathered this data in 2019 and 2020. In 2020, 29 staff members (58% of respondents to the question) noted they or their family members had been eligible for or received safety net services, 21 (42%) had been involved with the criminal legal system, 17 (34%) had worked in government, and 6 (12%) had lost out on opportunities because of a criminal record. Our work going forward is to think about how we can appropriately and thoughtfully include those with mission-relevant experience to inform our programs and products. In the year ahead, we will continue to learn more from this data and develop strategy for how Code for America can best support staff with lived experience.

### Intersectionality

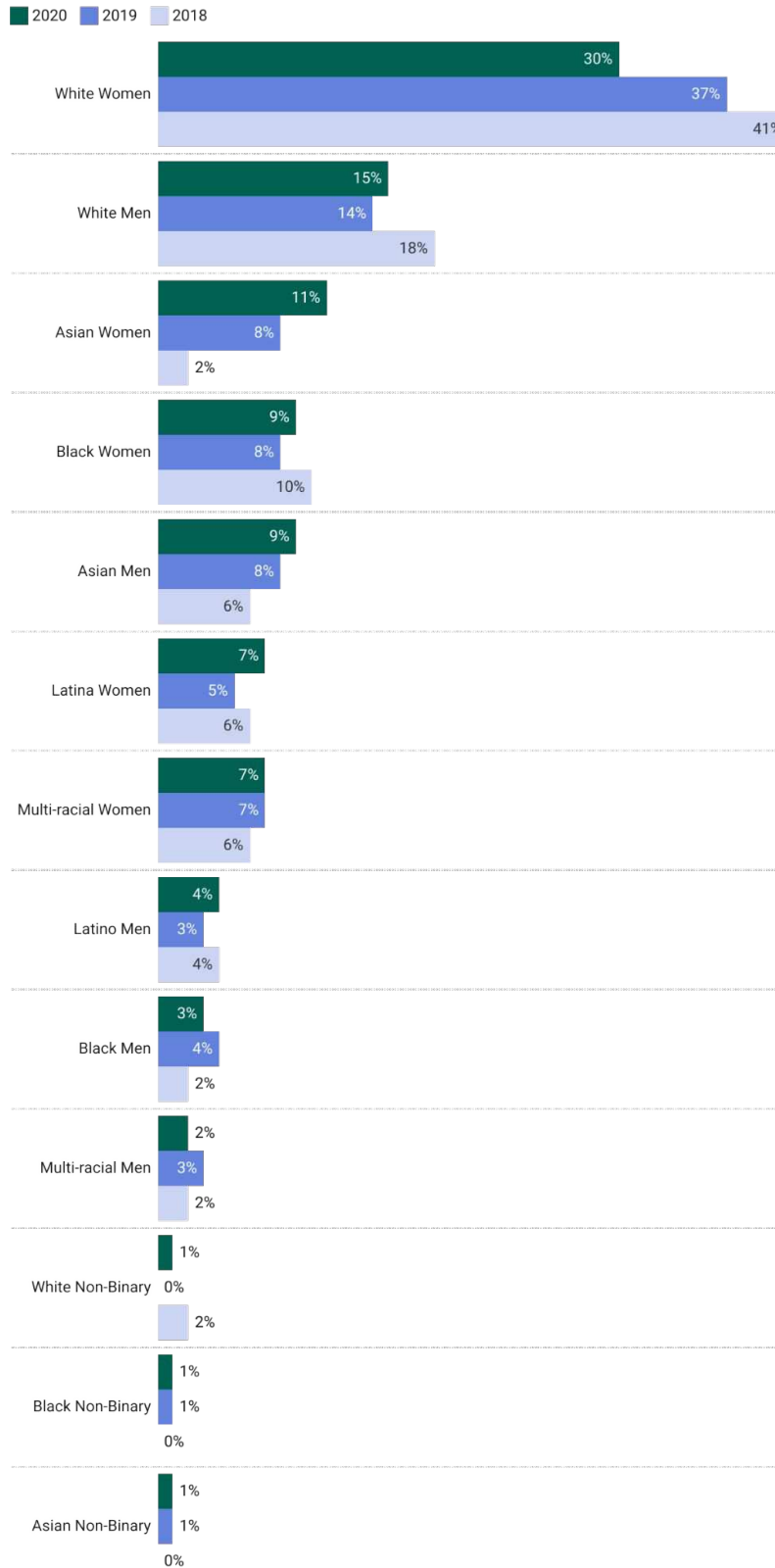
People experience bias and disadvantage in different ways based on the intersection of their various social identities. We strive to understand and provide transparency into the representation of these intersectional identities at Code for America. Because we are a majority-women organization, representation of those intersectional identities is more in-line with the national average than it is for men at Code for America. In mapping our staff demographics this way, we see opportunities to be more representative of both the Bay Area and the nation going forward.

**ALL STAFF BY RACE, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER**

### Intersectionality in 2020



## INTERSECTIONALITY BY YEAR



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## Brigades Representation

We conducted the Brigade Census for our volunteer network in 2019 to get a baseline of volunteer demographics as well as set goals around what we need to improve upon. Our 2020 review of Brigade Census data revealed that the number of BIPOC members in the Network increased from our baseline in 2019. Our female and non-binary representation, as well as our representation of people with lower incomes, also increased in 2020, while our age range skewed younger than in 2019. The results, including our baseline metrics, are noted on [our website](#) and we will continue to regularly conduct this census.

## What Else Will We Do Going Forward?

Code for America will build on the momentum of work in 2021 to advance equity and justice internally and throughout the civic tech ecosystem in the coming years.

This goal includes continuing to track and work toward effective representation and inclusion across our staff and our Network. We are also in the process of concluding an external audit of our people processes to review any unintended inequities and opportunities to foster more inclusion and belonging. Through that work, we will identify priority internal actions, including creating opportunities to invest in coaching and mentoring across all levels.

We also will expand our existing efforts to ensure that the impact of our work across all our programs advances racial and ethnic equity in outcomes. We want to analyze, understand, and measure inequities in our program areas. This effort will inform how we develop universal goals and targeted strategies to promote equitable and inclusive government service delivery through our work.

For example, the GetCalFresh team has been working to close the participation gap in SNAP in California and smooth out the friction in the enrollment process for the most people possible. In Q4 of 2020, the team learned that GetCalFresh's approach may be exacerbating inequalities and that we needed to course correct so as to not exclude communities that are most marginalized. Our service was disproportionately serving English speakers (93.5% of applicants), while the majority of people in the SNAP participation gap were speakers of other languages (more [here](#)).

In 2021, the GetCalFresh team has been learning from community-based organizations (CBOs) and advocacy organizations that serve the folks we have overlooked to improve our internal systems and close the participation gap. Internally, we are reallocating GetCalFresh's outreach budget to achieve equitable outreach outcomes, and we have worked with these same CBOs to improve digital outreach for non-English speakers. We are also exploring existing options and pathways for speakers of all threshold languages to find a way to successfully apply for CalFresh benefits, either through GCF or trusted partners.

Finally, we want to advance discussions externally through various channels of our work so we can collectively support, enable, and learn from other organizations in the civic technology space and beyond to create greater, lasting impact.