

# 2022 Pillar Award Application Form

**Application Deadline: January 28, 2022**

Company Name:	Kent County	Website:	<a href="https://www.accesskent.com/">https://www.accesskent.com/</a>
Contact Name:	Teresa Branson	Title:	Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer
Address:	300 Monroe Ave NW	Phone:	616-632-7586
	Grand Rapids, MI	Email:	<a href="mailto:teresa.branson@kentcountymi.gov">teresa.branson@kentcountymi.gov</a>

### **Section 1: Employer/Award Applicant Profile**

Total number of employees in organization:	1,735
Total number of employees in West Michigan:	1,735
Total number of female employees in West Michigan:	904

### **Section 2: Application platform/award category**

*Please check all categories your application addresses:*

- Progressive Practices-Benefits (work/life, flexible schedules, living wages, etc.)
- Career Advancement (mentoring, networking, professional development, etc.)
- Nontraditional Careers for Women (intentional recruitment/retention efforts to increase the number of women in an occupation not traditionally held by women)
- Inclusion & Diversity practices (hiring/retention/inclusion networks, etc.)
- Fair and equitable wage system
- Supportive workplace culture
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_(please list)

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**\* This cover page must be included with the Pillar Application Narrative.**

**Note:** The following sections address application requirements for the Award Application **Section 3-**

- 3.1 outlines narratives and award justification under the 3 checked categories above, 3.2 includes employee testimonials, and 3.3 includes additional supporting documents.

# CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Kent County is dedicated to providing all employees with education, skill improvement, and personal growth opportunities. As a result, Kent County created a Learning and Development function to offer opportunities to acquire, share and apply knowledge, skills, and values that help individuals, teams, departments, and the whole organization improve performance that consistently aligns and supports the mission of Kent County. From humble beginnings in 1996, the County's in-house learning programs have evolved and been considerably enhanced to offer outstanding and comprehensive learning opportunities to help employees grow personally and professionally.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

### Learning Ensures Achievement Program (LEAP)

This training is available for all employees looking to grow professionally and personally. LEAP consists of a curriculum designed to enhance interpersonal skills, produce a better understanding of our diverse community, and better understand and live our Core Values. Courses include Business Writing 101, Business Etiquette and Customer Service, and Building Belonging With Words.

### Emerging Leaders Program

This program is a professional development series designed for individuals contemplating a role in leadership. Emerging Leaders consists of different leadership sessions carefully chosen to offer a variety of leadership development opportunities. Course topics include conflict management, emotional intelligence, employee engagement, and more.

### The Front Line

The Front Line is monthly skill development and policy fundamentals for those who supervise staff. All new supervisors are enrolled in The Front Line immediately upon hire or promotion and prior to enrolling in the LEAD program.

### Leadership Enrichment & Development Program (LEAD)

LEAD is a leadership program designed to increase effectiveness leading both people and operations. LEAD focuses on developing key leadership competencies that address the unique challenges of leading within the context of Kent County.

## ALIGNMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Kent County invests in its people. The County believes the key to being a successful organization depends mainly on its employees. The County is committed to fostering a culture of growth by providing professional development programs, so everyone has the opportunity to advance and contribute their talents. The value of this investment is a well-informed and skilled workforce and improvements to the County's goal of providing excellent internal and external service delivery; the result is a more effective and efficient organization that is prepared to address the needs of all residents.

## EXAMPLES OF WOMEN CAREER ADVANCEMENTS



**Teresa Branson**  
Chief Inclusion Officer  
Began at Kent County in 1997



**Laura Clifton**  
Juvenile Division Senior Attorney  
Began at Kent County in 2003



**Sangeeta Ghosh**  
Assistant Corporate Counsel II  
Began at Kent County in 2007



**Linda Howell**  
Corporate Counsel  
Began at Kent County in 2006



**Michelle Lajoie-Young**  
Kent County Sheriff  
Began at Kent County in 1989



**Donna Moore-Brown**  
Kent County Police Lieutenant  
Began at Kent County in 1998



**Amy Rollston**  
Human Resources Director  
Began at Kent County in 2013



**Michelle Smith-Lowe**  
Senior Prosecuting Attorney  
Began at Kent County in 2002



**Sara Smolenski**  
63rd District Court Chief Judge  
Began at Kent County in 1991



**Kim Williams**  
DPW Finance Division Director  
Began at Kent County in 2010

## KEY STATISTICS



50% of new hires are women



60% of promotions are women employees

# NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS FOR WOMEN

According to the Michigan Municipal League (MML), women make up over 50% of the state's general population, but a mere 16% of Michigan administrative officers are women. Although women continue to be underrepresented in higher-level roles in the government sector, this is **not** the same story at Kent County. We are proud that out of our 25 departments, offices, and agencies, women represent 44% of top leadership positions. Within government, there are many more examples of women in nontraditional roles:

## EXAMPLES OF NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS FOR WOMEN AT KENT COUNTY

### (a) Sheriff and Law Enforcement-

"As Sheriff in Kent County, I am the only serving female Sheriff in the state and a part of only 1.5 % nationally. However, as a representative of Kent County, I have felt supported, mentored, fostered, and prepared to lead in this community every day."  
 ~ Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young

In addition, the Sheriff proactively works to recruit more women in law enforcement. Today, the Sheriff's Office has more women in positions (such as deputies, road patrol, lieutenants, correctional officers, and captains) than ever before in the organization's history.

### (b) Elected Officials-

42% of the Kent County Board of Commissioners are women. Comparatively, only 35.7% of local elected offices in Michigan are held by women.

### (c) Attorneys-

Almost half of all attorneys at Kent County are women. Nationally, only 37% of attorneys are women.

### (d) Department of Public Works (DPW)-

Public Works is historically a male-dominated field. At Kent County, we have multiple women working at the DPW in roles such as transfer station operator, geologist, and finance director.

### (e) Environmental Health-

"As the Environmental Health Director for the Kent County Health Department, I hold the unique honor of being the first woman to hold this position. I am one of 7 women in the state of Michigan that hold this position and part of the 2% of women in public health that hold a leadership position."  
 ~ Sara Simmonds

**44%**  
*of leadership roles at Kent County are women*

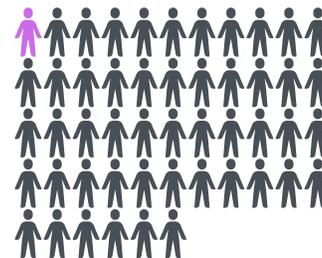
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**47%**  
*of Kent County attorneys are women*

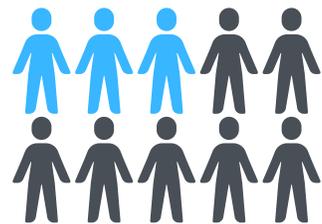
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**52%**  
*of Kent County employees are women*

## KEY NATIONAL STATISTICS



Less than 1/50 women in the U.S. are Sheriffs  
 (WGVU Public Media)



About 3/10 local elected officials are women  
 (Center for American Women & Politics)



Only 1/5 women work in geosciences  
 (Zippia Career Research Report)

## ALIGNMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

At Kent County, we actively encourage employees through our Core Values to leverage their unique strengths and perspectives and embrace the things that make them different. Having women in nontraditional careers at Kent County is not only something we take pride in, but it also sparks new ideas, innovation, and improves our processes and procedures having these perspectives in our workforce. We are continually improving our efforts in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, but also intentionally take time to celebrate the strides we have made in providing women with opportunities to serve in nontraditional roles.

# INCLUSION & DIVERSITY PRACTICES

Serving **every** person in the County is at the core of our organization's purpose. Kent County is home to over 650,000 people varying in ethnic, cultural, religious, political, educational, and economic backgrounds and identities. As our community rapidly grows and diversifies in these areas, local governments are called upon to provide equitable public services and consider issues of equity and inclusion that go beyond a wide array of human differences. We see diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work as not only an important facet of how to best serve our residents but also a critical piece in how we run our organization and build our internal culture. Kent County embraces a shared responsibility across our 25 departments to achieve our 5 DEI priorities. We are committed to working internally and externally to help identify new and innovative strategies. With thoughtful intention, we will continue to review our progress including work to enhance our performance metrics and integrate DEI in programs, practices, and policies.

## KENT COUNTY'S FIVE KEY DEI PRIORITIES:



## TIMELINE OF DEI AT KENT COUNTY

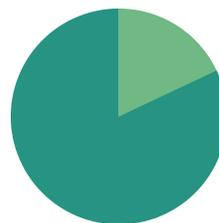
- 2000** County Administration directed a Staff Insight Subcommittee "to study and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners regarding the County's interaction/relationships with people of color in employment, purchasing, and otherwise."
- 2001** The Cultural Insight Council (CIC) was formed to provide direction on DEI and cultural change in the workplace, and increase communication with internal and external partners
- 2003** Conducted a Diversity Climate Study
- 2005** Conducted an Invisible Barriers Study
- 2006** Registered more women & minority suppliers (doubled its base from 2001-2005)
- 2015** Formalized diversity & inclusion efforts
- 2018** County Board of Commissioners establish Inclusive Participation as one of the County's strategic priorities
- 2020** Kent County Administration and Board of Commissioners issue a DEI Statement.
- 2021** Kent County create the DEI Office and hired Teresa Branson as the Office's first director.

## KEY POLICY & PRACTICE HIGHLIGHTS

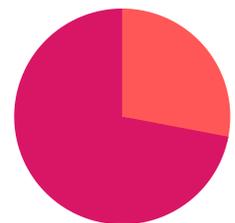
Kent County invests in organizational practices and policies to demonstrate our commitment to DEI and leadership accountability. Examples of policies and practice implementations include:

1. All County policies are reviewed to ensure alignment with DEI efforts with a specific focus on Human Resources Policies and Procedures.
2. Performance reviews include discussions on Cultural Intelligence (CQ) plans and improvement strategies.
3. County Departments identify relevant DEI performance measures and deliver progress reports to the Kent County Board of Commissioners annually.
4. Hired a full-time wellness coordinator position to offer a diverse range of wellness programs that encourage work/life balance and include gender-specific wellness offerings that will help women meet their additional well-being needs and create a supportive culture of well-being for everyone.

## KEY STATISTICS



18% of employees identify with an underrepresented race/ethnicity group



28% of promotions are given to employees from underrepresented race/ethnicity groups

## ALIGNMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Inclusion and diversity practices have been embedded into Kent County's organizational values and goals for many years. "Embrace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" is one of Kent County's Core Values. In addition, the County's strategic plan illustrates DEI in multiple goals, including recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce that reflects our continually changing community, providing residents with equitable access to government services, and intentionally incorporating DEI practices in our organization to provide culturally responsive services.

# EMPLOYEE TESTIMONIALS

Kent County is committed to career advancement through its professional development and diversity and inclusion practices. I began my career working for Kent County almost 25 years ago. The opportunities for personal/professional growth have far exceeded my hopes and expectations. I've been blessed with leaders who have invested their time in mentoring me and exposing me to leadership development initiatives. My career path in local county government has provided significant stepping stones that I have learned from and built upon to best serve our community and lead by example for other women, specifically African American women in the workplace. I began working in Kent County as a Public Health Educator, advanced to serve as the Coordinator for the Kent County Task Force on Health Care for People of Color, followed by three additional career promotions as a Public Health Program Supervisor, Deputy Administrative Health Officer and in 2021, becoming Kent County's first Chief Inclusion Officer. This is one of many illustrations of not only my hard work ethic but that I work for an organization that does in fact empower women in the workplace, invests in diverse hiring practices, and sees the talent among many emerging women leaders that come to work for Kent County. Kent County's tag line is..."Where Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Matter." It truly does matter!

**Teresa Branson**  
Chief Inclusion Officer



I have been an employee with Kent County for over 23 years. I have worked my way from a Detention Youth Specialist to Juvenile Probation Officer and now I am a Juvenile Probation Supervisor. I am appreciative of Kent County for giving me opportunities to expand my education and providing me with a multitude of learning opportunities. Kent County provides education assistance and internal learning opportunities to encourage staff to commit to higher learning. I have been able to complete my Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration. Utilizing these opportunities has given me the insight to develop my own management skills and be creative with implementing new opportunities that could benefit my department and community. With the knowledge and experience I have received while working at Kent County, I have helped to implement a new and innovative Specialty Court called Girls Court. Girls Court has been awarded the Excellence in Action Award for Innovation and has positively impacted girls who have experienced trauma and abuse. I have also received the honor of being appointed by Governor Whitmer to participate on the Michigan Committee for Juvenile Justice representing law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies.

Being a member of Kent County's Cultural Insight Committee has also helped me gain professional relationships which enhance my ability to collaborate with other departments like the Sheriff and Health departments to bring influential voices to community issues. I have also become a trained facilitator for Unconscious Bias and Cultural Intelligence. The ability to facilitate these training has helped me to recognize and address important issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of my life and career. I look forward to continuing my professional growth with Kent County.

**Marcela Moralez-Morris**  
Juvenile Probation Officer Supervisor



In particular, I feel that Kent County has been very supportive in the Inclusion and Diversity practices. I am starting my 32nd year with Kent County, and Kent County is one of the fastest-growing Counties in all of Michigan. The Kent County Administration focuses on equality, inclusion, and diversity.

**Sara J. Smolenski**  
63rd District Court Judge



I'd like to take a few moments to talk about being on the Kent County team. I joined the Kent County team in 1989 as a Corrections Deputy in the jail. The work was difficult but rewarding. I always found it comforting to know that everyone on my team was there to help me to succeed. I found the unity of purpose and spirit of service to be the prevailing connection that brought the whole team together. As you can probably imagine, there were very few young women who worked as part of the Corrections team at that time. That made it imperative that others helped me understand that even though we came from different places, looked different, and had different career expectations; they were there to help me succeed.

As I continued my career at Kent County, I had many opportunities to stretch and grow. I was always able to be myself and fulfill my aspirations within the roles I served; specifically, male-dominated roles. Within those roles, I was never expected to act like the men acted, or to do the work in a way that wasn't consistent with my values. This was empowering. I was valued for what I could bring to the table based on who I was. As it became time in my career to take on leadership roles within the department, again I was faced with a lack of female role models within the industry and agency. Many of my male counterparts were happy to step in and guide my growth. The variety of people that served this purpose for me was so immense and diverse that it helped my development. I believe has been a major factor in growing to the role of Sheriff. I could not have asked for a better environment and hope this team is recognized for the very important work we are doing.

**Michelle LaJoye-Young**  
Kent County Sheriff



My name is Donna Moore-Brown and I am a Lieutenant with the Kent County Sheriff Department, Corrections Division. I am going into my 24th year with the department. I have seen much growth and change within the department since my career.

I work in a male-dominated field. I knew I would see and impact change because my hiring class in 1998 had 6 females and 1 male. It was the largest group of females they have ever hired in one group. As I rose through the ranks from deputy to classification officer, I noticed that females in the sergeant and administrative roles were only in the single digits, compared to males. I also looked at our female offenders and programming and saw the limited resources compared to the males.

I have been a longtime advocate for females and those with mental health challenges; this has helped Kent County Corrections bring more mental health services to the female population. As our female population continues to grow in the County, so is our resources and programming. It has been a great encouragement to see women in the Kent County Sheriff Department chain of command roles from cadets to deputies, sergeants to lieutenants, a captain, and the sheriff. We have already made history and we will continue to do so.

**Donna Moore-Brown**  
Lieutenant, Corrections Division



It's been an honor to serve as the Medical Director of the Kent County Health Department for the past three years. It has been both inspiring and sustaining to work with colleagues who are passionate about improving the lives of others, especially as we work together to navigate a pandemic. Through policies that support staff's wellbeing such as providing options for people to work from home when possible, I was better able to balance my life as a working mother during the pandemic when school interruptions made life unpredictable. As the first woman in this role in Kent County, I feel privileged to have the support and mentorship of colleagues in both the health department and other County departments as I grow in this position.

**Dr. Nirali Bora**  
Kent County Medical Director



Throughout my professional journey starting out as a sanitarian until the present, Kent County has opened doors or encouraged me to grow as a leader, mentor, and professional. This support has helped me grow exponentially. Nearly 20 years ago, I was hired by the Kent County Health Department as a sanitarian in the well and septic program in the Environmental Health Division. I was one of two women on the ten-person team. I learned and grew in a time when there weren't many women working in the well and septic program in the state. It was a male-dominated field profession that worked with well drillers, builders, and excavators. The work was hard in the beginning. I forged relationships of mutual respect with the men in the field and in the office while still working within my integrity and values without compromise. The internal team including management mentored and supported me to achieve my professional goals.

Over the years, Kent County supported the completion of my master's degree in Public Administration and provided leadership training. I completed the internal LEAD programs offered too. Education, professional experience, and mentorship from the men and later women in my profession helped prepare me for where I am today. Since those early days, a lot has happened in the years between. I helped the community members navigate vapor intrusion in their homes, a large-scale water contamination crisis, and was promoted twice. I now serve our community as the Environmental Health Director. I have served as President of the Michigan Environmental Health Association and am the current President of the Michigan Association of Local Environmental Health Administrators. However, I am most proud of having the ability to use my role to mentor, hire, and promote other women in the Environmental Health profession. It is a way to pay it forward because there isn't a day that goes by that I don't feel a deep sense of gratitude to those that helped prepare me for the opportunities that Kent County has afforded me.

**Sara Simmonds**

Environmental Health Division Director



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I've been with Kent County for 15 years this past October after coming from the corporate side working at General Motors and Steelcase, and then locally at Barnes Management as a Construction Project Manager. Kent County has helped me become successful in a typically male-occupied position by allowing me to serve as an Owner's Rep./Facilities Project Manager. In my role, I manage various building projects and responsibility to oversee the A/E firm and Construction Manager in the design process and construction.

I've been blessed with being part of a strong team in Kent County's Facilities Management who support me in all aspects of my job and what might be needed. In addition, other supporting departments such as Purchasing, IT, and those involved in building projects have provided many relationships to collaborate, obtain expertise, and rely on throughout the County. Working together as a team, respecting others, giving value to how they feel and what they have to say, and humbling myself when working in a heavily male-dominated workforce has gone a long way in building those relationships and developing a long career in the construction industry. I've been told by some contractors on previous projects that "she's firm, but she's fair and good to work with," and at the end of the day, that means a lot to me in that I've done my job and treated others with respect.

**Linda Rensland**

Facilities Project Manager



# SUPPORTING MATERIAL

## 1. KENT COUNTY STATEMENTS ON DIVERSITY

### (a) Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Office Mission & Vision Statements

Our mission is to advance a culture that demonstrates diversity, equity and inclusion.

At Kent County, we work to provide a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and belonging environment for County employees and residents. We are committed to:

- Providing our residents with equitable access to efficient, effective, and culturally responsive services
- Intentionally incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in our service delivery
- Recruiting and retaining a qualified, diverse workforce that reflects our continually changing community

### (b) Kent County Strategic Plan 2019- Statement on Inclusive Participation as a County Priority

Over the last decade, Kent County's population has grown at a record-breaking pace. The County has not just grown in number, but it has also become more diverse. Nearly 26 percent of residents identify as racially or ethnically diverse, and this number is likely to increase in the years ahead. As a result, Kent County is committed to undertaking efforts and strategies to address the needs of its evolving population so that all its departments, offices, and agencies provide culturally competent customer service to all residents. Additionally, we will continue to recruit and retain a workforce that reflects our diverse community.

### (c) County Administrator's State of the County Address (2019)

"[Government] is a highly diverse and multifaceted business, and we get the job done with a diverse and multi-talented staff."

"[The Public Health Department] provided nearly 60,000 WIC appointments for 15,000 women, infants and children, and more than 6,000 home nursing visits to support pregnant women and new moms."

## 2. LIST OF PARTNERS & INITIATIVES

Our work empowering women and residents/employees of all backgrounds would not be possible without the involvement and strong relationships we have with organizations in the Kent County community and beyond. Below is a **non-exhaustive** list of organizations we work with to help us expand our perspective and strive to continually improve:

### (a) Welcoming America and New American Economy



Local communities across the country have long seen the positive effects of a growing immigrant population. An influx in newcomers has driven population growth, revitalized neighborhoods, spurred innovation, and enriched communities with cultural diversity. Kent County worked with Welcoming America, New American economy, and several community partners to create a countywide Welcome Plan. The Plan helps us strategize and illustrate how to create an environment that sends a message of inclusion and social cohesion, maximizes the contributions of all residents, and gives community members the tools they need to thrive together.



### (b) Michigan Municipal League and the Women's Municipal Leadership Program



The Kent County Administrator is a presenter/trainer for the Michigan Municipal League (MML), educating local government leaders about diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Administrator also assists with and presents at the MML's Women's Municipal Leadership Program (WMLP). This program brings together lectures, panels, and interactive experiences and offers a comprehensive curriculum that prepares women to make bold moves forward in their careers. Participants explore topics including municipal budgeting & finance, economic development, interviewing and negotiating, and leadership development.



**(c) Government Alliance on Race and Equity**

Kent County is a member of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). GARE is a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. Though it is currently in its beginning phases, the County is planning to unveil a plan to bring together the local municipalities in Kent County to operationalize racial equity measures and develop a shared commitment to this work.



**(d) Talent2025**

Talent 2025 assisted Kent County in developing a D&I Benchmark Survey. This tool was used to measure the impact of the County's efforts, offering comparisons by industry and organization size. The data collected helped provide insight into West Michigan's growing populations in the workforce, while preserving confidential organizational details and scores.



**(e) Cultural Intelligence Center**

Kent County's Cultural Insight Council partnered with the Cultural Intelligence Center to implement a Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Model in the organization. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a globally recognized way of assessing and improving effectiveness in culturally diverse situations. All employees have participated in a CQ workshop that includes reviewing a personal assessment of the four CQ capabilities. The workshop also includes developing a personalized action plan to build on the individual's commitment and accountability. Another line of accountability is weaved into the leadership and management employee performance plans with yearly reviews of ways they are advancing their CQ. This partnership also resulted in the County creating an "Excellence in DEI" employee recognition award and developing stronger DEI communications.



**(f) HireReach**

The County worked with HireReach to develop an evidence-based hiring process. By partnering with HireReach, Kent County has been able to remove systemic barriers and take a more holistic view of each job candidate. In doing so, we have removed bias from decision-making in hiring practices, seen a more diverse talent pool, reduced turnover, increased employee diversity, and improved retention.



**3. PUBLISHED ORGANIZATION DOCUMENTS/MATERIAL**

**(a) Kent County Human Resources and Cultural Insight Council YouTube- "[We Are Kent County](#)"**

- A look at the work the employees of Kent County do to serve the public. The video highlights multiple women in County leadership.



We Are Kent County  
 YouTube · 1,000+ views · 11/10/2015  
 by Kent County, MI

**(b) Kent County [Values](#)**

- These Core Values illustrate the County's commitment to diversity and inclusion.



**(c) Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Report [Strategic Plan](#)**

- Originally drafted in 2016, this working document demonstrates the County's commitment to DEI and outlines areas such as strategies for intentional hiring practices, staff training and development, and accountability measures.

LEADERSHIP - The County will address enhancing its diversity, equity and inclusion efforts through leadership by top leadership modeling the way and demonstrating a greater commitment to DEI, engaging the BoC and improving hiring practices to ensure a more diverse pool of talent				
Improvements to Processes/Capabilities	Timeline	Metrics for Tracking Progress	CQC Recommendations/Leading Practices	Perspective(s) Impacted
<b>Leadership Training &amp; Development</b>				
1. CQ Training for Executive Leadership Team and Union Leadership (format of Manager's Speaker Series)	Y1 Fall of 2017	*Attendance/Participation 85% *CQ Assessment Scores/Results Y2 or Y3 *Development Plans Y2 for Leaders	*Leadership team develops CQ (models the way) *Must build in development opportunities and support systems *Allocation of adequate resources to efforts	*Leadership Commitment *Learning & Diversity
2. E-Learning Modules/Training for 26/7 environments	Y2 Discuss with Sandra, Michelle & Hue	*Training Program Developed		*Leadership Commitment *Learning & Diversity
3. Incorporate CQ training in LEAD programs	Y2 Discuss Module with Sandra	*Attendance/Participation *CQ Assessment Scores/Results *Development Plans		*Leadership Commitment *Learning & Diversity
4. Develop Post-Training Resources	Y1 Recommendations?	*Resources Developed and Available		*Leadership Commitment *Learning & Diversity
<b>BOC Engagement</b>				
5. BOC engagement through DEI Updates/Reports (data, CQC activity, Community)	Y1 Darius establish a committee to assist with report format	*BOC participation/involvement	*BOC CQ training	*Leadership Commitment

**(d) County Strategic Plan [Performance Dashboard](#)**

- This webpage provides a progress update toward achieving the priorities and goals of the County's Strategic Plan. The update for Inclusive Participation priority is outlined below.



**Inclusive Participation**

We will provide innovative and inclusive ways to engage residents and involve them in County government.



**(e) DEI Office- "[How Does DEI Help Our Community?](#)"**

**ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH**

Kent County Population Health Consortium: Addressing social determinants of mental health. **Diverting People of Color from:**

**Emergency Departments**

**Corrections**

**Psychiatric Hospitals**

**BETTER JUSTICE SYSTEMS**

Examining trends in the race and ethnicity of youth in County detention. *Why? To identify and eliminate practices that may lead to bias or injustice.*

**Sheriff's Office + Hispanic Center of Western Michigan:** Building understanding & bridges with the **Latino Citizen Police Academy**

**ALLOCATING FUNDS**

Kent County Board of Commissioners allocates **CARES Act** dollars to reduce the disparate economic effects of the pandemic on the community, especially on people of color.

**\$9.5 million**  
Nonprofit Organization  
COVID Grant Fund

Programs addressing family crisis, food insecurity, education, transportation and healthcare.

**\$34.2 million**  
Small Business  
Recovery Fund

Small businesses, including those from underserved communities + those that face language or other barriers.

**INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES**

**Training to manage biases** is offered to all employees

**Hiring protocols** proven to reduce the potential for unconscious bias in hiring

**Cultural intelligence assessment** and training for all new employees

**WELCOMING NEW AMERICANS**

Joined **Gateways for Growth** to develop the **Kent County Welcome Plan**, our roadmap to a more welcoming and inclusive environment for New Americans in Kent County.

**PANDEMIC SUPPORT**

**Kent County Health Department** partnering with diverse community groups to mitigate the disparate impact of the pandemic on People of Color in our community.

**COVID Infection Rates**

Community	Before Engagement	After Engagement
African Americans	2 x expected rate	1.3 x expected rate
Hispanic/Latinx	4 x expected rate	1.3 x expected rate
Asian	3 x expected rate	1 x expected rate

**OPEN DISCUSSION**

**"Unrest in America"** – Kent County all-staff town hall where County staff openly discussed with the County Administrator their sentiments, fears, struggles and questions related to the racial justice movement and relevant County policies and practices.

## 4. MEDIA ARTICLES

**(a) Women's LifeStyle- "[Women Who Serve Kent County](#)"**

- The article highlights women at Kent County who have made a tremendous impact and have helped to make the organization thrive and be successful.

### Women Who Serve Kent County

Feb 27, 2019 10:00AM • By WLMagazine



**(b) Envisio- "[Inspirational Women in Local Government](#)"**

- An interview celebrating the work of MaryBeth VanTill, now Senior Information Technology Business Analyst that has worked for the County seven years.



**(c) Women's LifeStyle- "[History on the Bench: Judge Christina Elmore](#)"**

- The article highlights Judge Elmore of the 17th Circuit Court in Kent County, the first black woman judge and the second black person ever to take the stand in the court's 180-year history.

### History on the Bench: Judge Christina Elmore

Feb 25, 2019 10:00AM • By WLMagazine



**(d) Grand Rapid Business Journal- "[50 Most Influential Women in West Michigan](#)"**

- In 2020, the Grand Rapids Business Journal highlighted Sheriff Michelle Lajoie-Young as one of the most influential women in West Michigan. The excerpt highlights the Sheriff's career and contributions to the community.



### MICHELLE LAJOIE-YOUNG

Sheriff  
Kent County

**AFTER RISING** through the ranks of the Kent County Sheriff's Office since 1989, Michelle Lajoie-Young became the county's first woman sheriff in 2018, now overseeing a \$60 million budget and 700 employees. Numerous accomplishments throughout her time in every department include implementing technology solutions for computer-aided dispatch, in-car reporting, ticketing and accident reporting; and jail management solutions and performance measurements. She implemented information-based decision-making throughout the department, tracking key performance indicators to optimize resource deployment. She also helped implement a 911 surcharge and public safety rads. In her 31-year career with the county, Lajoie-Young said she has met people of many cultures and heritages. "I have worked to deliver informed, empathetic and appropriate services to everyone I come into contact with." A veteran of the U.S. Army Reserves, Lajoie-Young spent 12 years in various assignments and ranks, ending as a captain in 1997. All that, and she's a "proud mother of two boys." "I have worked very hard to be a leader in an industry where women are underrepresented and can provide a perspective that would take law enforcement in a more positive direction," Lajoie-Young said. "I think by recognizing women who seek to lead, we encourage other women to take leadership roles in nontraditional fields." Lajoie-Young is a board member for the Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County, Boys and Girls Club of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Community College Criminal Justice advisory board.

**(e) 16/50 Project- "[Women's Municipal Leadership Program 2021](#)"**

- 2 out of 28 women from local governments around the state selected to participate in the 2021 Women's Municipal Leadership program were current employees of Kent County.

