Descriptive Representation: Collecting Data to Construct Your Mobility Metric

As mentioned, you can choose to use or collect local information to help further inform your understanding of mobility conditions in your community. As a metric, "Descriptive Representation" refers to a ratio of the share of local elected officials of a given racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same racial or ethnic group in your community. This ratio is a valuable insight: research shows that when the demographic characteristics of elected officials match that of their constituents, people feel more able to exercise power over the actions of their government (Gleason and Stout 2014). This metric is widely used by political scientists to reflect the extent to which groups are represented by their communities' elected leadership.

To calculate this metric, you should divide the numerator (a count of the number of elected officials that belong to each racial or ethnic subgroup) by the denominator (your local population numbers by race and ethnicity). If you are interested in creating the Descriptive Representation metric, here are some steps you can follow:

If you do not already possess an exhaustive list of local government officials, use the official web portal for the federal government (https://www.usa.gov/local-governments) to look up and record every individual who holds elected office in your jurisdiction.

Using their public contact information, send out correspondence asking for each official to self-identify their race or ethnicity. Sample language for this email is provided here:

> Dear XX,
>
> My name is YY, and as an employee of ZZ, I am collecting information to better understand our local status on boosting upward mobility from poverty in our community. We are conducting this analysis using the Urban Institute's Mobility Metrics Dashboard, which provides data on 26 metrics associated with upward mobility. We need your help to complete one of these metrics, Descriptive Representation. This metric refers to the share of local elected officials of a given racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same racial or ethnic group in your community. Research shows that when the demographic characteristics of elected officials match those of their constituents, people feel more empowered and involved with the actions of their government. By answering the following questions, you will help us gain insight to how well our local racial and ethnic communities are represented by their elected leadership.
>
> Please answer the following:
>
> Do you identify as Hispanic or Latinx?
>
> o   Yes
>
> o   No
>
> Among the following races, with which do you identify? (Please select all that apply)
>
> o   Black or African American

    o   Asian

    o   American Indian or Alaska Native

    o   Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

    o   White

    o   Other race

Many thanks in advance for your participation.

If you are unable to collect or complete this information through direct outreach (due to lack of response), consider filling in the gaps or consolidating this information by independently gathering the race/ethnicity of each elected official as reported in public outlets or self-reported through their websites or public communications. Because this approach provides less reliable information, it is important to note that data gathered this way would be of poor quality. For further documentation or information on data quality, please consult your municipality's Mobility Metrics.