



**2024 Report on Access to
Services by Cherokee Citizens of
Freedmen Descent**



CHEROKEE NATION EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATION

Report on Access to Services by Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent

To: Chuck Hoskin Jr., Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation

From: Melissa Payne, Community Liaison

CC: Shella Bowlin, Canaan Duncan, Marilyn Vann, Ashawna Miles, Paula Starr, Derrick Vann, Austin Patton

Date: June 19, 2024

Dear Principal Chief Hoskin,

In accordance with the 2024 Addendum to Executive Order 2020-05-CTH Order On Equality, I am pleased to submit the attached report with recommendations from the Equality Task Force. We have assessed access to Cherokee Nation programs, identified gaps, and proposed strategies to address deficiencies for citizens of Cherokee Freedmen descent.

The Task Force has worked diligently to ensure equality for all Cherokee citizens, regardless of descent or other protected statuses. Our strategies aim to be sustainable for future generations, fostering a more inclusive community.

Task Force members include Shella Bowlin, Secretary of State; Canaan Duncan, Deputy Secretary of State; Marilyn Vann, Environmental Protection Commission Member; Derrick Vann, Registrar; Ashawna Miles, Director of Self Governance; Paula Starr, Chief Information Officer; and myself, Melissa Payne, Principal Chief's Liaison to the Freedmen Community. We extend gratitude to Channing Rogers Special Projects Officer for managing our scheduling, and to Austin Patton, Sr. Special Projects Analyst and our Task Force On Equality Liaison, for their invaluable contributions.

As Chair, it has been an honor to work with such dedicated individuals in the spirit of Gadugi (working together for the common good). Their commitment to the Cherokee people is evident.

Over the past four months, we have gathered data from Cherokee Nation departments and community centers led by Cherokee Freedmen descent. These efforts have provided crucial insights into our community's needs. We believe the recommendations in this report will promote greater equality and inclusivity, paving the way for a more unified and supportive Nation.

Sincerely,

Melissa Payne
Community Liaison

INTRODUCTION

The Cherokee Nation has a diverse population, including descendants of Freedmen, who were formerly enslaved individuals held by the Cherokee people before emancipation. There was mixed-race individuals of Cherokee enslavers and African descent, the label “freedmen” still persist despite their mixed heritage, the presence of African ancestry often led to these individuals being classified within the social and legal category of Black people, due to prevailing racial attitudes and laws (such as the “one drop rule”) in the United States.

Measuring the participation rates of Cherokee citizens of Freedmen descendants in Cherokee Nation (CN) programs and services is crucial to ensure equitable access and inclusion. This report examines current participation rates, challenges, and strategies for reaffirming outreach efforts by various departments to these communities.

1. The Cherokee Nation is now working towards incorporating a robust data collection mechanism to track participation rates accurately. This involves integrating identifiers within enrollment and program databases for each department that keeps track of detailed information. The Departments currently do not separate Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent from other Cherokee Citizens for this would be another form of exclusion, however having all Citizen’s records documented the same will allow access for annual reviews to be pulled with the assistance of the Cherokee Nation Registrar and Information Technology Department. This will give the task force the ability to run tribal numbers giving us detailed data to review status of participation rates in the freedmen descendant population assuring equal opportunities. Collected information from all departments include:

DATA COLLECTION: Cherokee Nation Tribal Registration, through the assistance of Task Force for Equality member and Tribal Registrar, Executive Director Derrick Vann, provided data indicators to identify Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent.

To gauge the engagement of Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent in Cherokee Nation programs, Cherokee Nation departments were asked to submit the following data for the programs by April 2024 under their operation from FY 2020 – FY 2024.

- a. Cherokee Citizen ID Number
- b. Program of Participation
- c. Year of Participation

After the collection of this data, the Task Force for Equality worked with Task Force member Paula Starr, Cherokee Nation Chief Information Officer, to align this data and seek out Cherokee citizens of Freedmen Descent.

Where programs did not track Cherokee Citizen ID Numbers, it was asked that the following data be supplied in place of Citizen ID Number:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Date of Birth

This data was less consistent and more prone to error than the reporting of Citizen ID Number, so it is highly probable that any data reported lacking a Citizen ID resulted in unreliable reporting of engagement with Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent for the program being represented.

Some programs were able to provide data for all years requested and more while others were able to provide only data from more recent years.

DATA ANALYSIS

Population Analysis

At the time of the creation of this report, there were 468,619 Cherokee Citizens. Of this population, there are 15,679 Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent residing in 44 states of the United States and one province of Canada. The only states that do not have any residents who are Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent are Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Vermont.

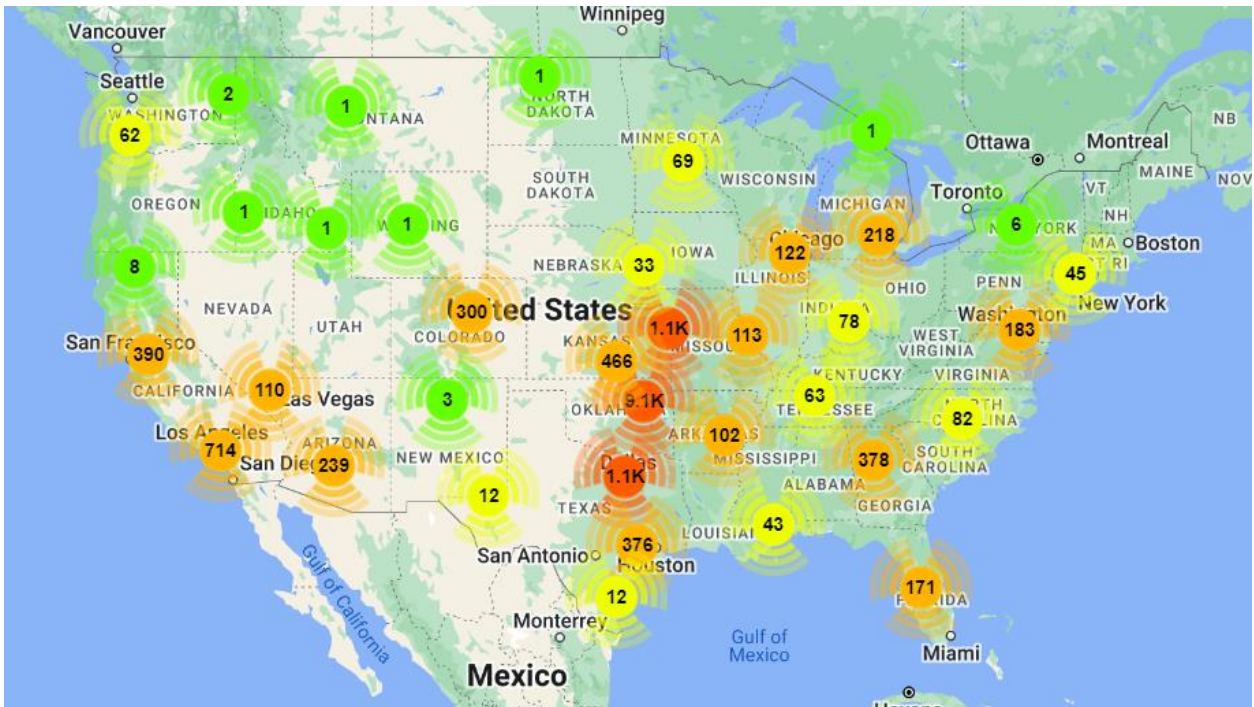


Figure 1. Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent Population Heatmap

Eighty-five percent of Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent live in twelve metropolitan areas in the United States.

Metro Area	# Citizens	% of Overall Population
Tulsa	6,200	40%
Oklahoma City	1,500	10%
Muskogee	1,300	8%
Kansas City	1,000	6%
Dallas	930	6%
Los Angeles	642	4%
Wichita	620	4%
San Francisco	336	2%
Atlanta	334	2%
Denver	271	2%
Houston	242	2%
Phoenix	219	1%

Table 1. Twelve most populous metropolitan areas for Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent

The top 12 cities account for 87% of registered CN freedmen. The majority of registered freedmen reside in the state of Oklahoma approximately 58%, 40% in Tulsa, 10% in Oklahoma City and 8% in Muskogee. Followed the state of Kansas and Texas with 10% and 8% respectively.

There are 2,945 Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent living within the borders of the Cherokee Nation reservation. Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent comprise 3.35% of the overall population of Cherokee citizens, 2% of the Cherokee citizens living within the borders of the Cherokee Nation, and 3.89% of Cherokee citizens living outside of the Cherokee Nation reservation.

Locale	Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent		Other Cherokee Citizens		Total
	# Citizens	% of Locale Population	# Citizens	% of Locale Population	
On Reservation	2,945	2.09%	137,936	97.91%	140,881
Off Reservation	12,734	3.89%	315,004	96.11%	327,738
Totals	15,679	3.35%	452,940	96.65%	468,619

Table 2. Cherokee Citizen Populations and Locales

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION ANALYSIS

Program participation was analyzed in two distinctive categories- programs offered exclusively or almost exclusively to residents of the Cherokee Nation reservation and programs offered to Cherokee Citizens regardless of jurisdiction.

In Jurisdiction/On-Reservation Programs and Populations

Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent comprise 2.09% of the overall Cherokee on-reservation population. Five departments submitted usable participation data for programs exclusively or primarily impacting reservation citizens- Career Services, Health Services, Housing Authority, Natural Resources, and Public Health.

Department	% Participants of Freedmen Descent	Years Analyzed
Career Services	1.85	2020 - 2024
Health Services	1.23	2019 - 2024
Housing Authority	2.96	2021 - 2024
Natural Resources	0.50	2022
Public Health	2.90	2023

Table 3. Participation of Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent in programs exclusively or primarily impacting reservation residents

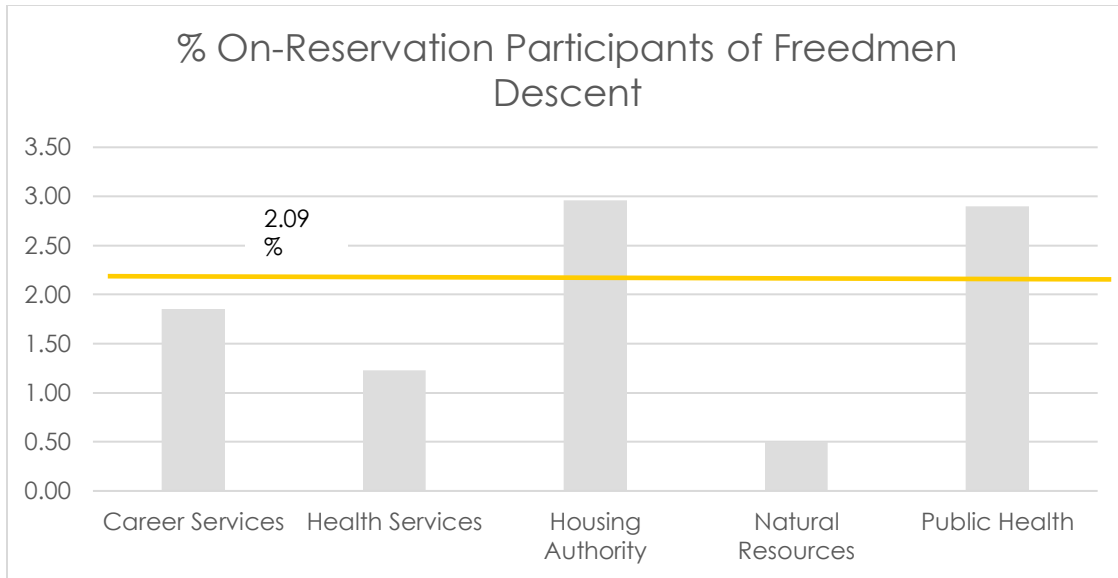


Figure 2. Comparison of the program participation of Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent with the overall on-reservation population percentage (2.09%)

Global Populations and Programs

Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent comprise 3.35% of the overall Cherokee population. Six departments or service areas submitted usable participation data for programs open to citizens both within and outside Cherokee reservation boundaries- Cherokee Phoenix, Education Services, Emergency Storm Relief, Government Relations, Natural Resources, and Veterans Services. .

Department / Service Area	% Participants of Freedmen Descent	Years Analyzed
Cherokee Phoenix	3.15	2024
Education Services	3.78	2022 - 2024
Emergency Storm Relief	6.39	2022 - 2023
Government Relations	4.51	2022 - 2023
Natural Resources	1.53	2021 - 2024
Veterans Services	0.35	2021 - 2024

Table 4. Participation of Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent in programs open to citizens both within and outside reservation boundaries.

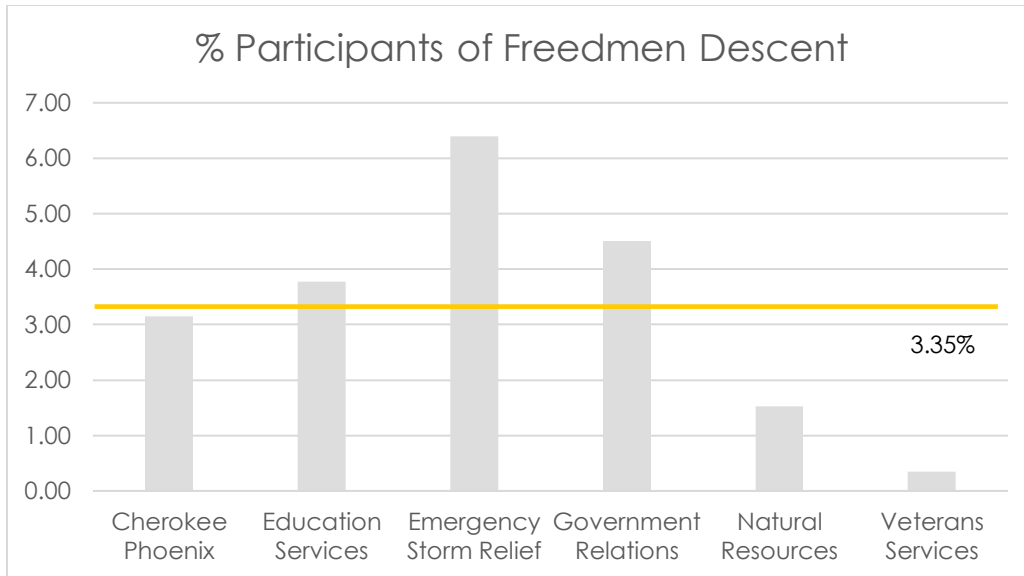


Figure 3. Comparison of the program participation of Cherokee Citizens of Freedmen Descent with the overall population percentage (3.35%)

PROGRAMS AND SERVICE UTILIZATION

- For the programs and services that were able to provide data that assesses the percentage of the freedmen population within the reservation and the overall CN population this does not compare to the percentage of the overall CN population program and services participation and or utilization.
- On the reservation -
 - o Housing Authority (HACN) and Public Health participation rates were higher than the 2.09% of the population of freedmen on-the reservation at 2.96% and 2.90% respectively.
 - o Whereas Career Services, Health Services and Natural Resources were all below 2.09% at 1.85%, 1.23% and 0.50% respectively.
- Global Cherokee Nation Population -
 - o Education Services, Emergency Storm Relief and Government Relations show higher participation rates vs the percentage of freedmen who comprise the overall Cherokee Nation population of 3.35% at 3.78%, 6.39% and 4.51% respectively.
 - o Cherokee Phoenix is slightly lower at 3.15% and Natural Resources and Veteran Services are lower at 1.53% and 0.35% respectively.

Current data suggest that while there is representation, this has identified gaps to sufficiently assess the participation rates of freedmen vs overall CN population.

There is limited access to some federal programs due to being in At-Large areas and not on the reservation, this affects all citizens. Members of the Task Force reached out to Community Leaders of Freedmen Descent on the reservation in Oklahoma; North Tulsa, Chelsea, Fort Gibson and Tahlequah . Qualitative findings from discussions are; the due to historical, and systemic barriers

there are some who feel they have experienced barriers to obtaining information to seek and obtain services.

CHALLENGES

1. Historical Context and Trust Issues

- The historical context of exclusion and subsequent legal battles over the citizenship rights of Freedmen descendants has led to a trust deficit between these communities and the Cherokee Nation.

- Rebuilding trust requires acknowledging past grievances and demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity, we see this attempt taking place now. Trauma response takes time and consistency to heal.

2. Barriers

- Freedmen descendants often face challenges, including lower income levels and limited access to resources, North Tulsa community of freedmen descent believes they are not receiving the same amount of funding going into housing rehabilitation programs as other communities such as Catoosa, Rogers County and areas they are not predominantly populated in. The limited access to resources impedes their ability to participate fully in available programs and services. More time is needed, looking into funding distribution in these areas.

3. Awareness and Accessibility

- There is often a lack of awareness among Freedmen descendants about the programs and services available to them. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles deter participation. The complicated rules and procedures that cause long delays cause trauma response of not being excepted and rejected causing low participation.

4. Representation and Visibility

- Ensures the Freedmen descendants are visible and acknowledged as part of the Nation. This representation is crucial in affirming their identity and heritage, which has historically been marginalized. Including images on flyers brochures camp sites etc. This promotes an inclusive view of the Cherokee Nation. It communicates that all members, regardless of their ancestral background are valued and integral to the community seeing themselves represented can strengthen their culture identity and connection to the tribe. The Images will symbolize the equality of all Cherokee Citizen's regardless of lineage. This will have a powerful impact on belonging and equality within the tribe.

REAFFIRMING OUTREACH EFFORTS

1. Targeted Communication Strategies

We recommend updating Cherokee Nation government website and media platforms to address some of the earlier concerns above under awareness and accessibility, with processes and procedures to continually update the website by each department to make it easier to navigate resources for some level of self-service for all -

- Annual Review

Each department is required to revisit their existing outreach plans developed in response to the 2020 Order on Equality by May 31st each year. The reports received by departments for outreach plan are Develop and implement communication strategies, some examples;

Departments send list of all programs including updated resources and calendar with upcoming events to Freedmen Community Liaison; Melissa Payne and CCO, Community Cultural Outreach. Information will be sent to all the Community Leaders. In return we ask Community Leaders send their calendars with all activities happening monthly so that more interaction with CN departments and communities are assessable.

Community meetings, and collaboration in the communities. If you do not know of a Non-profit organization in your area, reach out to your District Counselor or Community Liaison for the nearest organization. This will help keep you informed and build relationships within your communities.

- Host events in freedmen communities so that you can announce the upcoming event and activities you would like citizens to attend make sure this event includes all citizens at the CN so that all can interact and build relationships.

- Utilize multiple channels, create a Cherokee Nation podcast that starts off listing all departments and all sub programs. Rotating each department weekly as keynote speaker sharing information about their programs and giving them an opportunity to connect with all Cherokee citizens. Then use multiple channels such as social media, local newspapers, radio stations to reach a broader audience and share the podcast station the Nation has built.

2. Community Engagement and Trust Building

- Establish a Resource Team that includes representatives of Freedmen descent who can guid citizens seeking information and/or services. Providing step by step information and direction.

- Host regular community forums and listening sessions to address concerns, share updates, and build trust.

3. Enhancing Program Accessibility

- The Established Resource Team will simplify application processes for programs and services to make them more accessible. This can include providing assistance with paperwork and offering translations if needed.

- Develop mobile and online platforms to facilitate easier access to information and services.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Implement a monitoring and evaluation framework to regularly assess the effectiveness of outreach efforts and participation rates the Task Force will be able to pull data quarterly for the first year then annually. This data will be used to make informed adjustments to strategies and programs

- Conduct regular surveys and feedback sessions with Freedmen descendant participants to identify areas for improvement.

CONCLUSION

There are data gaps - once a process is defined and implemented to collect and analyze data this will provide insights to understand program and service participation rates to support equality efforts to provide quality services for all CN citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure Inclusion

All current and future marketing materials such as flyers, brochures, or advertisement with groups and children includes freedmen descendant. The inclusion of images of Cherokee Freedmen descendants alongside other Cherokee citizen's on promotional materials is a powerful way to promote representation, inclusivity, historical accuracy, education, community cohesion, cultural identity, and equality.

2. Increase Funding

- Allocate additional funding to programs that specifically support Freedmen descendant communities, ensuring they have the resources needed to overcome barriers to participation. Fund a Resource Team with representation of Freedmen Descendants that has support programs providing tailored resources and services to meet specific needs of the freedmen community.

3. Educational Initiatives

- Develop educational initiatives that raise awareness about the history and contributions of Freedmen descendants within the Cherokee Nation, have all departments schedule a date for Community Liaison to share Freedmen Presentation. Being educated properly can foster a more inclusive cultural narrative.

Sources

1. Cherokee Freedmen descendant Community Leaders.
2. Data from Cherokee Nation Departments.
3. Task Force

