



## AI fights discrimination: Milwaukee County team identifies inequity in local policies with SAS tech

SAS Hackathon an incubator for innovation and social justice

Cary, NC (May 10, 2022)

This spring, a team of data scientists and technology enthusiasts from around the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area used artificial intelligence (AI) to analyze the outcome of foreclosure policies and procedures in Milwaukee County, aiming to identify potential inequity, bias and racism.

In 2020, Milwaukee County passed an ordinance to treat racism as a “public health crisis.” The ordinance included a call to “track and analyze data to better understand the impact of County services and find solutions accordingly.” Team MKE Equity is part of greater efforts from the government, businesses and the area’s tech community to meet this mandate.

Team MKE Equity participated in the 2022 SAS Hackathon, a monthlong event sponsored by SAS, the leader in analytics, and its preferred cloud partner Microsoft. Hackathon teams from around the world collaborate with experts and SAS mentors to address big challenges in business and government and use the hackathon as an incubator for innovation.

According to Lynn Fyhrlund, Chief Information Officer for Milwaukee County, “Our team was determined to apply innovative technology to identify and correct institutional bias that often leads to racial inequities and racially disparate outcomes. By using SAS analytics to analyze the words of county policies and ordinances, Milwaukee County aims to be a leader in achieving racial equity.”

The team used SAS Viya® software running on Microsoft Azure cloud platform. The combination of AI in the cloud gives Hackathon teams – and businesses, government agencies and universities worldwide – the power to quickly transform data into better, faster decisions.

With SAS Viya software, the MKE Equity team was able to apply advanced machine learning techniques to analyze data using a variety of modeling approaches.

MKE Equity was supported by MKE Tech Hub Coalition, a non-profit membership organization that serves as a unifying voice for the Milwaukee tech ecosystem. The Coalition is committed to diversity and inclusion in the Milwaukee region’s tech community.

MKE Tech Hub Coalition CEO Kathy Henrich added, “Milwaukee County is showing its leadership in adopting advanced technologies to improve equity in our communities. MKE Tech Hub Coalition was so excited to be able to bring this opportunity to Milwaukee County through our national relationships.”

MKE Equity was also supported by the pro bono effort of Nicholas Schmidt, the CEO of SolasAI, an AI software company that helps organizations determine whether algorithms they employ are biased or discriminatory, and then fix any problems that may be found.

“The emergence of explainable AI allows us to better understand how seemingly innocuous policies may lead to bias in practice,” said Schmidt. “Together, we can use this innovation in algorithms to affect truly positive change in the communities in which we live. It has been thrilling to begin this work with the dedicated and passionate teams at MKE Equity and SAS.”

Per Reggie Townsend, Director of the SAS Data Ethics Practice and recent appointee to the National Intelligence Artificial Advisory Committee, “As part of our responsible innovation efforts, SAS encourages researchers and communities to understand the sources of inequities and bias, using data. The work by the MKE Equity team highlights AI’s powerful potential to reveal and confront barriers to human progress.”

What is the SAS Hackathon?

During the SAS Hackathon, teams of participants collaborate and compete to develop the best solutions to a business or humanitarian challenge using SAS technology. Unlike many hackathons where participants meet in person for a couple days, the SAS Hackathon was all-digital and spanned one month. Teams had access to a learning portal and a SAS mentor. Hackathon teams can create potentially viable applications and products for the marketplace that SAS will assist in developing and commercializing in collaboration with the team.

To learn more, visit [SAS Hackathon](#) and follow [#SASHackathon](#) on Twitter.

Today's announcement was made at the virtual SAS Media & Influencer Briefing. To keep up with the latest news from SAS, follow [@SASsoftwareNews](#) on Twitter.

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