LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON
RACE & EQUITY

Racial Equity Action Plans

A How-to Manual

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOOLKIT
**Racial Equity
Action Plans**

Government
Alliance on
Race and Equity

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While local governments may consider themselves fair and just, people of color fare worse than their white counterparts in every area: housing, employment, education, justice, and health. Current day disparities are just as bad and sometimes worse than they were before the Civil Rights era. Since then, most governments have not made significant changes in outcomes for employees or residents of color, even with years of effort.

Because local governments have a unique responsibility to all residents, these racial inequities can and must be addressed. The public sector must be for the public good; current racial inequities are destructive. We must go beyond individual, intentional discrimination or acts of bigotry, and examine the systems in which we all live. We must investigate—honestly—how our longstanding systems, policies, and practices, unintentionally or not, have created and continue to maintain racial inequity, and we must change them.

> **WHAT IS RACIAL EQUITY?**
> Racial equity is realized when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.

Racial Equity Action Plans can put a theory of change into action to achieve a collective vision of racial equity. Plans can drive institutional and structural change. However, the goal we seek is not a plan. The goal is institutional and structural change, which requires resources to implement: time, money, skills, and effort. It requires local governments' will and expertise to change our policies, the way we do business, our habits, and cultures.

Our theory of change requires normalizing conversations about race, making sure we have a shared understanding of commonly held definitions of implicit bias and institutional and structural racism. Normalizing and prioritizing our efforts creates greater urgency and allows change to take place more expeditiously. We must also operationalize racial equity, integrating racial equity into our routine decision-making processes, often via use of a **Racial Equity Tool** and development and implementation of measurable actions. Operationalizing a vision for racial equity means implementation of new tools for decision-making, measurement, and accountability. We also organize, both inside our institutions and in partnership with others, to effect change together. Organizing involves building staff and organizational capacity through training for new skills and competencies while also building internal infrastructure to advance racial equity.

This manual provides guidance for local governments to develop their own Racial Equity Action Plans after a period of research and information gathering. This manual also provides guidance and tools to conduct this research. GARE created a Racial Equity Action Plan template after a national scan of promising practices from cities and counties that have developed plans for racial equity and the structures that supported successful planning processes. We are also appreciative of the **Results Based Accountability** framework as a disciplined way of thinking and taking action that communities and government can use to achieve meaningful improvements, eliminate racial inequities and lift up outcomes for all.

Racial Equity Plans are both a process and a product. A successful process will build staff capacity which can be valuable during implementation. A process can also serve to familiarize more staff with the jurisdiction's racial equity vision and its theory of change.

Preparing leadership support, forming a skilled planning team, designing community engagement structures upfront, and securing resources to support all participants are key preparatory steps key to set the process on the right path. Your research must not only influence the content of your plan but also how it is framed. The methodology should include

both quantitative and qualitative data collected through community engagement. A clear set of findings can provide a solid foundation to inform your plan. Areas to analyze include:

- workforce demographics, hiring, retention, and promotion;
- contracting practices;
- jurisdiction commitment, leadership, and management;
- community access and partnership; and
- data, metrics, and on-going focus on improvement.

Figure 1: The Racial Equity Action Plan Process

A strong Racial Equity Action Plan is guided by a clear vision of racial equity and structured to achieve meaningful and measurable results. A simple plan structure provided by GARE includes the following components:

- Results: Community level conditions we are aiming to impact.
- Community Indicator: Community indicators are the means by which we can measure impact in the community. Community indicators should be disaggregated by race.
- Outcome: A future state of being resulting from a change at the jurisdiction, department, or program level. Strong outcomes articulate a clear improvement or define how much improvement will take place.
- Action: They are the specific things your jurisdiction will do to achieve the outcomes.
- Performance Measure: A quantifiable measure of how well an action is working. Different types of measures include 1) Quantity—How much did we do? 2) Quality—How well did we do it? 3) Impact—Is anyone better off?

Successfully implementing a plan will require well-resourced stewardship, strong accountability structures, and clear communications with all partners during the rollout and beyond. An organizational body, with authority to remove barriers during implementation and monitor progress, is critical infrastructure over the life of the plan. Regular tracking of performance and reporting on progress provides a level of accountability to follow through on the jurisdiction's commitment to action. Using data and the opportunity to reflect develops a culture of learning and innovation to improve upon commitments in the plan over its lifetime. The quality and consistency of communication about the plan both within the government and with community will be a major indicator of whether the plan is another exercise in maintaining the status quo or whether it is truly the harbinger of your jurisdiction's commitment to advancing racial equity.

ACHIEVING LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S VISION OF RACIAL EQUITY

A jurisdiction's clear and bold vision for racial equity is important for the success of a Ra-

TOOLKIT
**Racial Equity
Action Plans**

Government
Alliance on
Race and Equity

cial Equity Action Plan. The vision should be heavily informed by communities of color impacted by institutional and structural racism—those with the real expertise. Your jurisdiction may already have made a formal commitment to achieving racial equity and expressed this through adoption of legislation, a general plan, or executive proclamation. If so, then Racial Equity Action Plans can layout the approach to operationalizing this commitment. If not, then Racial Equity Action Plans are an excellent opportunity to make such a commitment paired with the change necessary to achieve it. Figure 2 shows the City of Portland's Citywide Racial Equity Goals and Strategies, adopted unanimously by City Council as binding policy in 2015.

By embarking on a planning process you are are undergoing a reprioritization of your work and changing long-standing systems and structures. You are creating a shared practice and forming relationships across the jurisdiction's structure. Creating a culture of learning and reflection to improve upon the work as you go is essential. You are expanding a field of practice, building off of the experiences of local governments directly addressing racial inequities, and have the opportunity to break relatively new ground. Your planning process is an opportunity to take a step back and ask engaging questions, knowing that you may not have the answers, and set an actionable course toward achieving racial equity. GARE, your peers, and our network of national partners are all here to help you, and to share resources and promising practices.

ARTICULATING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE JURISDICTION

The ultimate goal of a jurisdiction's racial equity work should be to eliminate racial inequities and improve outcomes for all racial groups. Government played a primary role in the creation of racial inequities, including laws, policies, and practices that created racial inequities. Our ideas of "equality and justice" have shifted over time, and we now have collective values for a more inclusive democracy. To achieve our aspirations and to get to different outcomes, we will need to fundamentally transform government. This requires high level leadership, committed action teams, supportive community leaders, and effective structures and practices. But what guides this change?

A new theory of change to achieve racial equity should guide your jurisdiction and its plan to make transformative change. GARE's recommended theory of change does the following[1]:

1. Normalize—Establish racial equity as a key value by developing a shared understanding of key concepts across the entire jurisdiction and create a sense of urgency to make changes.

2. Organize—Build staff and organizational capacity, skills, and competencies through training while also building infrastructure to support the work, like internal organizational change teams and external partnerships with other institutions and community.

3. Operationalize—Put theory into action by implementing new tools for decision-making, measurement, and accountability like a Racial Equity Tool and developing a Racial Equity Action Plan.

WHAT IS MY JURISDICTION ISN'T READY BUT MY DEPARTMENT IS?

The framework and approach to creating Racial Equity Action Plans presented in the manual is also applicable to departments within a jurisdiction. Most often jurisdictions beginning to focus on racial equity have only a small number of departments with any emphasis on racial equity or the infrastructure to support the work. A department with some foundation to build a Racial Equity Action Plan upon is a good place to start. A strong director with capable staff and good community partnerships can develop a plan to serve as a model or proof of concept for the entire jurisdiction.

This theory of change can be measured over time to track progress and impacts, both within the organization and in the community. Activities can be quantified like the number of employees trained, number of departments with Racial Equity Action Plans, number of times a Racial Equity Tool is used to address institutional and structural barriers, or number of community members partnering with the jurisdiction to advance racial equity. Outcomes can also be quantified by measuring the improved knowledge of racial equity

Figure 2: City of Portland Citywide Racial Equity Goals and Strategies

CITYWIDE RACIAL EQUITY GOALS & STRATEGIES

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CITY OF PORTLAND

EQUITY GOAL #1

We will end racial disparities within city government, so there is fairness in hiring and promotions, greater opportunities in contracting, and equitable services to all residents.

EQUITY GOAL #2

We will strengthen outreach, public engagement, and access to City services for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, and support or change existing services using racial equity best practices.

EQUITY GOAL #3

We will collaborate with communities and institutions to eliminate racial inequity in all areas of government, including education, criminal justice, environmental justice, health, housing, transportation, and economic success.

OVERALL STRATEGIES

1 Use a racial equity framework:
Use a racial equity framework that clearly articulates racial equity; implicit and explicit bias; and individual, institutional, and structural racism.

2 Build organizational capacity:
Commit to the breadth and depth of institutional transformation so that impacts are sustainable. While the leadership of electeds and officials is critical, changes take place on the ground, through building infrastructure that creates racial equity experts and teams throughout the city government.

3 Implement a racial equity lens:
Racial inequities are not random; they have been created and sustained over time. Inequities will not disappear on their own. It is essential to use a racial equity lens when changing the policies, programs, and practices that perpetuate inequities, and when developing new policies and programs.

4 Be data driven:
Measurement must take place at two levels—first, to measure the success of specific programmatic and policy changes; and second, to develop baselines, set goals, and measure progress. Using data in this manner is necessary for accountability.

5 Partner with other institutions and communities:
Government work on racial equity is necessary, but insufficient. To achieve racial equity in the community, government needs to work in partnership with communities and institutions to achieve meaningful results.

6 Operate with urgency and accountability:
When change is a priority, urgency is felt and change is embraced. Building in institutional accountability mechanisms using a clear plan of action will allow accountability. Collectively, we must create greater urgency and public commitment to achieve racial equity.

concepts among employees, increased skills to work on and communicate about racial equity, and the changes made due to racial equity considerations being integrated into decision-making structures. We must also focus on our desired results in the community, those conditions we are aiming to impact. Community indicators are the means by which we can measure impact in the community, with clear focus on closing racial disparities, and lift up success for all groups.