

INTRODUCTION:

Embracing a Racial Equity Approach

We believe that public policy can be a tool for advancing equity and justice. However, we also acknowledge that the public policy making process on most every issue—from land use and zoning to policing, education and voting access—has perpetuated racial inequality in our country whether through malicious intent to exclude communities of color or as the impact of race-blind policy making.

The policy briefs in this book cover a range of ideas for communities: from strengthening worker rights and protections, improving public education, expanding transportation and increasing the supply of affordable housing to supporting small businesses, implementing community benefit agreements and more. The framework outlined below focuses on getting to results, but it's not sufficient without a racial equity lens that focuses on addressing inequities. In addition to this analysis, we encourage you to add to this framework: examine community engagement practices to ensure broad, equitable and substantive engagement; analyze budgets for unequal or discriminatory funding allocations; and grapple with bias and barriers in institutions and governmental structures that put communities of color at a disadvantage to influence outcomes.

The larger institutional ecosystem must be part of the solution in order to fight decades and centuries of systemic racism; long-term policy change requires the input and participation from city, non-profit, philanthropy, community based organizations and others. Most importantly, a racial equity approach to policy begins at the visioning process, continues during the planning process, and continues through implementation and policy evaluation.

USING A RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY (RBA) FRAMEWORK

The Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) describes “Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) as a tool that starts with the desired results and works backwards towards the means, to ensure that your plans

work toward community results with stakeholder-driven implementation. This disrupts historic patterns of “doing what we’ve always done, because we’ve always done it that way.”¹ The framework has seven steps and the first four comprise the data analysis: desired results, envisioning what the result looks like, identifying the appropriate community indicators and analyzing the data. Steps five, six and seven emphasize selecting appropriate community partners, identifying how to shift the overarching data trends towards racial equity, and selecting a starting place.

Applying a racial equity lens to the RBA framework helps illuminate and surface currently existing discrimination and structural disparities at play in the community. It also helps ensure that changes do not perpetuate inequities.

INDICATORS AS MEASURES OF STRUCTURAL RACISM: After articulating population wide results, the framework requires identifying community indicators to measure results, and then focusing on the key activities and consequent performance measures of various programs, activities, functions and agencies.

Picking indicators where longitudinal data is available helps show comparisons (and long-standing structural inequities) for communities of color over time. In getting to the root of why something is inequitable, it is important that indicators not be constructed or determined in a mindset that assumes certain behaviors among communities of color lead to inequitable outcomes, otherwise known as “deficit thinking.” Instead, the conclusion should be that discrepancies are driven by deeper structural racism in the system.

An example of deficit thinking would be to assume that worse health outcomes for those in poverty come from poor eating habits instead of a lack of access to fresh, healthy, affordable food options. The indicators in this scenario would include unemployment rate, the percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunches, or academic achievement rates.

Community indicators crystalize the need for change because, when aggregated and analyzed, they highlight vital disparities and systemic inequities at a community level population. It is essential to identify the appropriate indicators so that the data will surface community inequities and future progress made to eliminate them.

- An example of a community indicator could be the level of asthma rates between Black and White children, which is connected to air quality in different parts of a community, as well as exposure to toxic waste. **Oakland, CA** is one place where this has been well-documented.²

RBA FRAMEWORK: HOMELESSNESS Maybe there is a desire, or policy goal, to eliminate homelessness in your locality. The first step in an RBA framework is to develop a positive statement that articulates the desired outcome for all residents. Note the difference between the following two statements We want all families and individuals to be housed vs. “we want to eradicate homelessness.” These are statements have different outcomes.

How would it look if we eliminated homelessness? The RBA framework asks what the vision and solution would look like for everyone: “All people in our community are able to afford and access safe quality affordable housing in the area they choose to live.”

Next, it is important to identify community indicators that will prove progress towards this desired result. Specifically, a racial equity analysis tool helps define root causes of homelessness, and how those realities disproportionately and negatively impact people of color, to avoid a racially inequitable outcome. Examples include:

- Given that eviction is a primary contributor to housing instability and homelessness, particularly for communities of color, a higher eviction rate for African American residents means that they are disproportionately impacted and are more likely to be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Analyzing eviction rates by demographic, over time, could be helpful in understanding disparities in the homelessness crisis. Understanding why eviction rates might be higher for people of color, as a root cause of homelessness, is also critical.
- To help understand inequalities in housing and homelessness may relate to understanding poverty. People of color, particularly women, may work in lower-paid jobs, therefore having less ability to access housing in the city. Analyzing job availability, a lack of access to job training programs, higher education and lower average salaries in a given locality may provide a better understanding of wage and earning disparities for people of color in communities. Again, understanding root causes should be disconnected from “deficit thinking” and assumptions.

RBA: AFTER THE DATA ANALYSIS Organizations and allies, along with community, are vital partners for systems change. The alliance should be selected for strategic reasons: each partner should bring unique perspectives to build a complete understanding of inequities and solutions. This group of stakeholders is responsible for moving from data analysis to ideas and brainstorming ways to create the systems change. This space is a valuable opportunity to do two things: 1.) consider which policies currently reinforce structural racism and 2.) identify new programs or evidence-based pilots that would address the root causes of a community’s most significant challenges .

Finally, there is the practical question of where to start. GARE’s **Racial Equity Action Plan** manual emphasizes the key components of this process and how to make that individual assessment. We strongly encourage policymakers to review for next steps beyond the RBA framework. Below, in the tradition of Local Progress, we highlight a few inspiring examples of how cities are working to realize a commitment to racial equity.

IN ADDITION TO RBA: CITY EXAMPLES

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: The results-based accountability framework incorporates a comprehensive community engagement process to imagine what a truly equitable and desired result would mean for the most vulnerable and systematically oppressed among us. The **Minneapolis 2040** planning process, although imperfect, is an appropriately instructive example.

The city grounded their planning process in the community through a robust effort to solicit widespread engagement from start to finish, which included the creation of a Civic Engagement Plan to help ensure efficiency and transparency. This commitment to community engagement produced a clear need for a long-term vision of the city grounded in racial equity that could begin to address past historical injustices. The result of this engagement was a city plan whose goals included: eliminating disparities, creating affordable and accessible housing, and fostering a healthy, safe and connected populace, to name just a few.

In many cases, growth and economic development intentionally leave people behind, particularly communities of color. Historically, many communities have been left out of decision-making and deprived of the ability to build wealth. Minneapolis acknowledges that there were systemic and racist barriers which they must address to move forward, creating a vision of their city that is for everyone. The Minneapolis 2040 plan, both in creation and design, offers a compelling case for cities seeking to realize similar commitments to equity and justice for their communities.

BUDGET AND FUNDING ALLOCATIONS: Budgets are more than just numbers; they are moral documents. While they could potentially advance a vision for community investment and equity, they more often perpetuate existing oppression and resource scarcity simply by how government chooses to spend its resources. Not a single community is exempt from a history of funding: patterns of neighborhood health and vitality clearly demonstrate the impact of structural racism. Whether through redlining, zoning for environmental hazardous waste plants or transit corridors that cut through or completely cut off communities of color, funding priorities and decisions have shaped our history as much as they will continue to shape the future unless we address boldly address them in policymaking.

Of even greater consideration, policy decisions intentionally deprived people of color of the ability to build wealth in their communities. Housing is traditionally the best way to build generational wealth and in recent years, deregulation has resulted in devastating financial outcomes as predatory financial institutions offered high-risk loans to people of color, and foreclosed en mass during the Great Recession.

In the spring of 2019, the **City of Durham** finalized their FY 2020 budget. The most difficult and controversial topic in this year's budget was a request by Chief Davis and the Durham Police Department for 72 additional patrol officers over the following 3 years. While the City Manager modified this request for 2019 to 18 officers, it was the city council who decided not to include any funding for additional officers in the final budget. Their rationale was that the Durham community has over-invested in policing and incarceration at the same time it has under-invested in housing, jobs, education, health. This punitive investment strategy has a devastating impact on communities of color, across the country, and study after study shows that it is not successful in reducing crime and increasing safety.⁴

Instead, Durham chose to invest in living wages for part-time city workers, expungements and drivers license restoration with the DEAR program for returning residents, eviction diversion through Legal Aid, and support for residents returning home from incarceration through its "Welcome Home" program. Shifting funds from criminalization and incarceration infrastructure, primarily directed at communities of color, recognizes the long-standing inequitable investments for people of color and helps make entire communities stronger and safer.⁵

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS: Healing Informed Governance for Racial Equity is an important practice to help address the root causes of inequity and division in communities. Supported by Race Forward, this innovative practice resulted from an innovative multi-sector partnership in Salinas, CA. The model combined racial healing with systemic equity, helping to ensure widespread and shared understanding around how race impacts members of the community in vastly different ways. Of equal importance, it built a joint process for the work that helped in building a collective sense of "we," which was led by both city government and community advocates.⁶

Women and people of color face real and constant barriers to access when it comes to occupying positions of power and authority. Frequently denied a seat at the table, and pathways through which to access those seats, the very interests that direct resources and determine priorities are skewed in favor of certain neighborhoods and interests. Often this has an inequitable impact across race.

In the past decade, local governments began to establish offices of racial equity or race and social justice initiatives to focus on closing equity gaps in their cities. The **Seattle Racial and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI)**, established in 2005, focuses on realizing the city's vision for racial equity and eliminating institutional racism. The city is committed to addressing institutional racism, structural racism, and institutional racism. Their racial equity toolkit can be found online.⁷ **Austin** partnered with GARE to establish their office of racial equity, focusing on tackling institutional racism and implicit bias and creating a culture of equity to meet the needs of all residents.⁸ **San Francisco** expects to vote on creating an office of racial equity in late summer 2019.

Finally, localities should conduct an analysis of the current policies and internal operating procedures (hiring, recruiting, revaluation) for city institutions, specifically when it comes to recruitment, hiring, evaluation and internal promotions. City level procedures and processes should undergo evaluation to help ensure robust public feedback and comment opportunities, across the jurisdiction. Staff should all receive training and professional support for implicit and unconscious biases. Staff spaces for collaboration should be designed to ensure all staff feel supported in speaking up.

There are a number of expert organizations who lead in this work.⁹ This introduction summary is heavily

based on many of them. For many, particularly communities of color, policies have long existed to exclude and oppress. The centuries of deprivation result in vast inequalities and poverty today. All policy decisions should begin with a population wide result and vision, the specific solutions and ideas come later, and should be a product of a group of stakeholders who together assess the viability and opportunities of ideas and specific policies. The RBA framework with an equity lens should challenge conventional assumptions and long-standing practices around resource allocation, bias and power in government institutions, and unique barriers that exist for people of color.