



Promising Practices in Government to Advance Racial Equity

Below are examples of racial equity plans completed or in progress. With few examples to draw upon, this is an opportunity for Portland bureaus to break new ground. Fortunately, there is a nascent set of promising practices for bureaus to draw from as they develop action plans to achieve equitable outcomes.

It should be noted that no jurisdiction is implementing all of these practices and many of the practices are being implemented by the City of Portland in some form already. Also, deploying these practices in isolation is a transactional strategy, e.g., passing topic specific policies or funding focused programs that have fairly limited impacts. Ultimately, to advance racial equity, these practices should be part of a structural strategy designed to maximize impacts. This will allow transactional approaches to be more effective.

Examples of Jurisdiction Wide Equity Strategies

1. *City of Seattle's [Race and Social Justice Initiative's Vision and Strategic Plan](#).*

This is Seattle's second strategic plan. This three year plan builds on past lessons learned and was informed by a broad and inclusive engagement process. Three issue areas are prioritized:

- Education
- Criminal Justice
- Equitable Development

Three strategies are used to achieve equitable outcomes in the above issue areas. They are a combination of inside and outside strategies:

- Ensure racial equity in City programs and services
- Work with community-based organizations
- Lead regional and national networks for racial equity with other governments and institutions, the private sector and philanthropy

In addition, all City of Seattle departments complete annual action plans. These action plans are available on-line at [Seattle's RSJI Outcomes, Strategies and Actions website](#).

2. *King County's [Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan](#)*

This plan is in the development process and scheduled to be completed in 2016. A robust community engagement process is underway.



The planning process is identifying strategies to achieve equity both within the institution and also in community outcomes. An explicit goal of the process is to develop a “Regional Equity Compact” to then be adopted by governing bodies of public and private institutions throughout the county.

3. *Dane County’s (WI) [Racial Equity Assessment](#)*

CSI and GARE are supporting Dane County in a racial equity assessment of county operations. Key short-term and long-term strategies are identified that serve to achieve equitable outcomes within the institution and also in the community. Key goals and strategies include:

- Develop infrastructure and tools to ensure employees and residents understand and are committed to achieving racial equity.
- Implement strategies to ensure residents view the County as effective and inclusive government that engages community.
- Ensure communities of color share in the county’s economic prosperity.
- Ensure all neighborhoods and people are safe and racial disproportionalities in the criminal justice system are eliminated.
- Ensure that all residents have healthy life outcomes.

A comprehensive set of community indicators and county performance measures focus on using data to track success. In addition, templates were provided by CSI and GARE, both for an overall county racial equity action plan and departmental action plans.

CSI and GARE Framework for Achieving Equity in Government

In 2014, the Center for Social Inclusion and the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) conducted an assessment of national best practices in government that advance racial equity. These best practices suggests government is most successful in addressing inequity when all employees and the institution *normalize* racial equity as a key value, *operationalize* equity via new policies and institutional practice, and *organize*, both internally and in partnership with other institutions and the community.

Across the country, best practices focus on these three goals: normalize, operationalize and organize. The following six strategies have been found to be most critical:

Normalize

1. *Use a racial equity framework:* Jurisdictions must use a racial equity framework that clearly articulates racial equity, implicit and explicit bias, and individual, institutional and structural racism.
2. *Operate with urgency and accountability:* While there is often a belief that change is hard and takes time, it has been repeatedly seen, that when change is a priority and urgency is



felt, change is embraced and can take place quickly. Building in institutional accountability mechanisms via a clear plan of action will allow accountability. Collectively, greater urgency and public will must be created to achieve racial equity.

Operationalize

3. *Implement racial equity tools:* Racial inequities are not random; they have been created and sustained over time. Inequities will not disappear on their own. Tools must be used to change the policies, programs and practices that are perpetuating inequities. New policies and programs must also be developed with a racial equity tool.
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 towards goals. Use of data in this manner is necessary for accountability.

Organize

5. *Build organizational capacity:* Jurisdictions need to be committed to the breadth and depth of institutional transformation so that impacts are sustainable. While the leadership of electeds and top officials is critical, changes also take place on the ground, and infrastructure that creates racial equity experts and teams throughout local and regional government is necessary.
6. *Partner with other institutions and communities:* The work of local and regional government on racial equity is necessary, but it is not sufficient. To achieve racial equity in the community, local and regional government needs to work in partnership with communities and other institutions to achieve meaningful results.

Processes for Governing for Racial Equity

These promising practices can be considered the institutional infrastructure needed to sustain organizational transformation to end institutional racism in government. These practices can change the culture, the DNA if you will, of government to eliminate racial disparities and improve outcomes for everyone.

1. **Racial Equity Teams:** Organizational teams serve as internal resources to support the mission of the government's equity program or strategy.
 - a. *Seattle's RSJI Change Teams:* Departmental teams of staff at all levels of authority who implement their departments racial equity work plan, provide counsel during the use of racial equity tools, ensure inclusive engagement practices are used, and coordinate trainings.



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- b. *Dane County's Race Equity and Social Justice Team*: A strategic leadership body made up of leaders from across operations and action teams focused on data; training; assessments and tools; and city, county, community communications.
 2. **Trainings**: Racial equity trainings for employees at all levels create a shared understanding and increased skill to advance racial equity. For an example of a government's comprehensive approach to racial equity training, see the [City of Seattle's RSJI Training and Education](#).
 3. **Racial Equity Tools**: Analytical processes that lay out a set of questions to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impacts on racial equity.
 - a. *Multnomah County's [Equity and Empowerment Lens](#)*: A transformative quality improvement tool used to improve planning, decision-making, and resource allocation leading to more racially equitable policies and programs.
 - b. *City of Seattle [Racial Equity Tool](#)*: This tool is another strong example of inserting racial equity into routine decision making. Seattle first used the tool during the annual budget process to ensure that racial equity was a key consideration, and then expanded the use of the tool to include policies and programs.
 - c. *GARE Racial Equity Tool template*: This template is not yet available on line but the draft content can be provided upon request.
 4. **Racial Equity Action Plans**: Department specific plans with timelines for implementation and designation of accountability for advancing racial equity within each department's lines of business.
 - a. *City of Seattle's [RSJI Outcomes, Strategies and Actions](#)*: The Office for Civil Rights provides a template for departmental work plans that includes a drop down menu of priority equity areas and their associated equity goals that each work activity is oriented toward. Each departmental work plans is posted on-line. The [Department of Human Services](#) has an exceptionally strong plan with clear measures and timelines.
 - b. *Seattle Public Utilities [Strategic Framework Environmental Justice and Service Equity Division](#)*. This new three year plan provides their vision, mission, and values. It used these to guide the development of three strategies with accompanying actions, measures, and timelines.
 5. **Measurement Frameworks**: Excellent measurement frameworks include community indicators and performance measures. Community indicators measure the impact in the community. Performance measures are at the organizational, department or program level. Performance measures allow monitoring of implementation of actions that have a reasonable chance of influencing indicators.

A number of jurisdictions have issued reports that document disparities. The necessary next step is the development of strategies and tracking mechanisms to monitor results and inform course corrections. Examples of these reports include:



- a. *Fairfax County, Virginia's [Equitable Growth Profile of Fairfax County](#)* (developed by PolicyLink)
- b. *Dubuque's [Inclusive Dubuque Community Equity Profile](#).*
- c. *Dane County's [Racial Equity Analysis](#)*

Examples of community indicators and performance measures include:

- a. *[Seattle's RSJI Indicators](#)*: This beta site tracks community indicators.
- b. *Dane County's (WI) [Racial Equity Assessment](#)*: Indicators and measures are proposed for each of Dane County's strategies beginning on p. 26.
- c. *[PolicyLink's Equity Atlas](#)*: This resource provides data on changing demographics, racial inclusion, and the economic benefits of equity—by city, region, state, and nationwide.

6. **Inclusive Engagement and Community Capacity Building**: Local government needs to work in partnership with communities and other institutions to achieve meaningful results. This collaboration will have the biggest impact on overall racial equity when engaging communities of color in ways that also increase their capacity for self-determination.
 - a. *City of Dubuque, Iowa's "[Inclusive Dubuque](#)"*: A partnership that includes government, community based organizations, business and philanthropy dedicated to advancing justice and social equity in their community. They serve as a hub for data, a facilitator of relationships and collaboration, and an accelerator of learning.
 - b. *[Twin Cities Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute](#)*: The City of Minneapolis recognized that boards and commissions are instrumental in shaping key policy decisions, as well as designing and providing input on administration of city services. A unique partnership between the City and Nexus Community Partners works to improve racial equity in board and commission membership, which in turn influences major policy decisions toward more equitable outcomes.
 - c. *[Seattle's Racial Equity Fund](#)*: A small investment of the City's general fund supports community collaborations working to eliminate structural racism. Projects must strategically advance the elimination of inequities at the community level, engage community in both process and achieving the outcome, and develop process and tools that are shared and sustainable.
 - d. *[Puget Sound Regional Equity Network](#)*: The Network was formed in 2011 as part of the Puget Sound Regional Council's [Growing Transit Communities Partnership](#) which planned for equitable development along the region's major transit corridors. It is composed of 40 community organizations, advocates for social and economic justice, public health, and philanthropy funded through the program to: 1) Ensure an equity framework is used; 2) Ensure low-income communities and communities of color have a real voice in decision-making; and 3) Promote policies that support equitable outcomes and meaningful community engagement.
 - e. *[City of Seattle Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement](#)*: Established by executive order, Seattle's practices of inclusive engagement are the responsibility of all departments. The Office for Civil rights developed the IOPE guide in 2009 as the Race and Social Justice Initiative began to pivot its attention externally to achieving equitable outcomes in the community. The Department of Neighborhoods [Public](#)



[Outreach and Engagement Liaisons Program](#) best exemplifies the best practices of this guide.

Outcomes of Governing for Racial Equity

Outcomes are government programs, policies or practices that aim to eliminate racial disparities. Below are promising practices local governments have adopted:

- 1. Contracting and Hiring Opportunities:** Governments' workforces and contractors should reflect the racial diversity of the communities they serve. This workforce diversity should exist across the breadth (functions) and depth (hierarchy) of government. This contracting diversity should also exist across the breadth of government functions and sizes of firms selected. To accomplish this government can use data to identify disparities and set goals to eliminate those disparities, use racial equity tools to analyze and change policies and practices, and organize internally to build skills and a culture supports racial equity. Developing programs that create workforce pipelines and build firms capacity to compete for contracts are clear steps governments can take to achieve representative racial diversity in contracting and employment. More detail on these practices are found in the Government Alliance's recent publication [Public Sector Jobs: Opportunities for Advancing Racial Equity](#)
 - a. *Madison, Wisconsin's "Equity in Hiring and Employee Development":* This report is a review of initiatives in Human Resources designed to increase diversity in City employment utilizing most of GARE's "Public Sector Jobs". It provides highlight of the City's equity efforts and accomplishments from 2012 to 2015.
 - b. *Multnomah County's "Minimum Qualifications: Best Practices in Recruitment and Selection":* This guide provides resources for hiring managers to remove barriers to employment in county government. This tool is part of a larger plan to advance racial equity through examining and transforming hiring practices within the County using their racial equity tool described above.
 - c. *San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Community Benefits Program:* The Program is guided by a [2011 Community Benefits Policy](#). The program provides equitable contracting and job opportunities with the utility, implements community education and workforce programs related to new capital facilities, and provides environmental education and urban agriculture programs in low-income communities.
 - d. *Emerald Cities Collaborative Multi-Craft Core Curriculum and E Contractor Academy:* The Academy prepares small, minority, women and veteran contractors to perform energy and water efficiency retrofit and other green infrastructure projects. The Curriculum provides disadvantaged youth a gateway from high school or community college to industry registered apprenticeships in the building and construction trades.
- 2. Complaint Based Systems:** Maintaining government functions and providing services in an equitable manner requires being aware of barriers to services and proactively lowering



or removing those barriers. A major barrier to accessing services for communities of color, especially immigrants and refugees, is initiating a request for services. Systems that anticipate and meet needs do not require this unnecessary step and result in higher participation/use.

- a. [*Seattle City Light Street Light Replacement Policy*](#): Prior to 2008 Street lights in Seattle were only replaced when residents called to report an outage. Numerous barriers exist for people of color to report an outage resulting in many more outages in neighborhoods where a majority of residents were people of color. This presented a public safety issue. The City changed its policy to change light bulbs on a consistent schedule thus eliminating the need for any resident to have to call in a complaint and increasing the city-wide quality of service.
3. **Equitable Development – Planning, Land Use, and Growth:** Government can ensure the benefits and burdens of growth and investments are equitably distributed to advance opportunity and minimize harm for marginalized populations. This means planning and investing in ways that meet their needs and reduces disparities, taking into account past history and current conditions, so that quality of life outcomes are high for the people currently living and working in a neighborhood, as well as for new people moving in.
- a. *Equity Analysis of Growth Strategies:* Environmental Impact Statements have long analyzed the impact growth has on places with little or no attention given to the people or the inequities they experience. A new model of analysis is being pioneered to assess the benefits and burdens of growth on vulnerable populations, primarily looking at two major equity issues: involuntary displacement due and access to high opportunity areas. Two examples are:
 - i. [*Seattle's Comprehensive Plan Equity and Growth Analysis*](#)
 - ii. [*Association of Bay Area Governments' Equity Analysis of Plan Bay Area*](#)
 - b. *Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments' [*Equity, Environment and Jobs growth alternative*](#):* A [*coalition of community organizations*](#) demonstrated that leading with the critical needs of disadvantaged communities can better meet the goals and aspirations of the entire region. Their community-based alternative—which scored higher on benefits to vulnerable communities, reducing GHG emissions and environmental toxics—won support from the agencies' policy boards.
 - c. *The City of [*Los Angeles' TOD Consolidated Plan*](#):* This plan includes equity criteria directing the City's allotted HUD funds to create affordable housing along future transportation corridors in order to stabilize and revitalize the City's diverse neighborhoods as these areas redevelop and displacement pressures increase.
 - d. *Association of Bay Area Government's [*Anti-Displacement Early Warning System*](#):* A California Senate Bill requires regions to set greenhouse gas emissions targets for cars and the development of a comprehensive land use, transit, and housing plan to



achieve these targets. ABAG's tool helps predict neighborhood change that may result due to transit investments that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The system analyzes the benefits and burdens of neighborhood revitalization precipitated by large transit investments on low-income communities and communities of color.

- 4. Environmental Conservation, Management and Justice:** Government's role in creating a healthy environment requires protecting vulnerable communities against cumulative environmental harm and also from displacement as their neighborhoods are cleaned up, empowering communities, growing green industries to benefit those vulnerable communities, and ensuring access to green and open spaces.
 - a. *San Francisco Public Utilities Commission's [Environmental Justice Policy](#):* This 2009 policy led to the creation of an environmental justice training curriculum, assessment tool for disproportionate environmental impacts on communities, and new culturally relevant communication resources for the utility.
 - b. *Seattle Public Utilities [Environmental Justice and Service Equity Division](#):* This division of the utility has a [clear strategic plan](#) with measureable goals to implement the City RSJI. Their primary strategies include supporting community equity work, increasing contracting opportunities for minority firms, and providing support of their [racial equity tool](#) in strategic and project planning processes.

- 5. Facilities and Venues:** Government oversight of unique civic institutions provides an opportunity to further a racial equity agenda. Some examples are by providing space for community organizations working on equity issues, modeling racial equity best practices within the institution, providing training and educational opportunities, and developing creative programming to foster cross-cultural interactions and relationships.
 - a. *[Seattle Center's Festal Cultural Festivals](#):* The Seattle Center in partnership with community organizations, provides a year-long series of free world festivals highlighting the distinct cultures and common threads of ethnic communities in the region through traditional and contemporary art, music, foods, youth activities, and workshops.

- 6. Parks:** The [health and environmental benefits](#) that parks and green spaces have, especially for low-income communities and communities of color, is well documented. Government plays a unique role in ensuring these resources are accessible, relevant, and affordable for communities of color.
 - a. *[Seattle Park Legacy Plan Outreach](#).* During the planning for Seattle's ballot proposal to develop a permanently funded Parks District, the Parks Department's RSJI Change Team tailored the [IOPE Toolkit](#) referenced above to course correct an outreach process that did not engage historically underrepresented communities in a substantial or culturally appropriate way.
 - b. *Metropolitan Council's [2040 Regional Parks Plan](#):* Informed by a [qualitative study](#) of barriers to park facilities experienced by communities of color, the Met Council adopted a long-range plan with equity-related policies in three domains: 1) funding and investment, 2) planning and design, and 3) information and convening. The plan requires the use of an equity toolkit in funding requests, the creation of an equity



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grant program, an ambassador program to introduce community members to the parks system, and robust community engagement requirements.

- c. *New York City's [PlaNYC](#), [Million Trees Initiative](#).* New York City's comprehensive sustainability plan PlaNYC, protects open spaces from over development and ensures walking access to parks and green spaces for all communities, particularly low-income communities and communities of color.