

## **ORANGE COUNTY RACIAL EQUITY PLANNED APPROACH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the country, more and more communities are committing to achieving racial equity. Many are seeking collaboration and technical assistance as they make plans to turn their commitments into actions. The Town Council voted unanimously to become members of GARE (Governmental Alliance for Race and Equity). Our jurisdictional partners are also members of GARE.

Since October 2019, Orange County, Carrboro, and Chapel Hill each have had a team of staff in the North Carolina GARE Learning Community Cohort to Advance Racial Equity. The North Carolina Learning Community is comprised of nine North Carolina local governments and one agency. This Learning Community, the first-ever in the South, has been an opportunity to build institutional capacity to advance racial equity within our local jurisdictions to dismantle systemic and institutional racism.

Let's review some key terms and thoughts of interest prior to looking at the framework for moving forward.

### **WHAT IS "RACIAL EQUITY"?**

The Government Alliance on Racial & Equity defines racial equity as "when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes and outcomes for all groups are improved."

- The difference between racial equity and equality is that equity is about fairness, while equality is about sameness.
- Equity cannot be achieved until everyone starts from a level playing field.
- Across all indicators of success, racial inequities continue to be a factor (e.g., education, housing, criminal justice, jobs, public infrastructure, and health).

Over the history of our country, government has created and maintained a hierarchy based on race, of who succeeds, fails, benefits, and burdened by the laws, policies, and practices. Inequities are sustained by historic legacies, structures, and systems that support these patterns of exclusion. To achieve racial equity, a fundamental transformation of government is necessary.

In prior years, the government has focused on addressing the symptoms of racial inequity by:

- Funding programs and services that have proven to be mostly ineffective at addressing underlying causes; and

- Passing Civil Rights laws, which made racial discrimination illegal, but, after more than 50 years, racial inequity continues to exist.

Government efforts, instead of focusing on symptoms of racial inequity, should focus on the policies and institutional strategies that are driving the production of inequities.

## **WHY RACE?**

Race is a social construct and not biological, as people often think. Defining racial categories has changed over the years. Issues involving race are often “the elephant in the room” but rarely discussed with a shared understanding. To advance racial equity, it is imperative we talk about race.

In the United States, while race, income, and wealth are closely connected, racial inequity is not just about income. Even when income is the controlling factor, there still exist many inequities across multiple indicators of success, including education, jobs, housing, health and incarceration. It is important to talk about race to advance racial equity. To advance racial equity, we must normalize the conversation about race and operationalize strategies for advancing racial equity. In advancing racial equity, we will also be building systems that allow us to address income and wealth inequity and recognize the bias that exists based on gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, and religion. Focusing on race allows us to develop a framework, tools, and resources that apply to other areas of marginalization, recognizing that different strategies will be necessary to achieve equity in other areas.

## **ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY IMPROVES OUR COLLECTIVE SUCCESS**

Focusing on racial equity is critical in helping us achieve different outcomes for our communities. The goal is not just to eliminate the inequities between whites and people of color, but to increase and enhance the success of all groups. To eliminate disparities, we must strategize based on the experiences of communities being underserved by existing institutions, systems, and structures. To understand the experience of those communities, they must be included and engaged. In this process, we move past looking at disparities and find racialized systems that are costly and, depress outcomes, and life chances for all groups. Systems that are failing communities of color failing are us all by depressing life chances and outcomes.

## **RACIAL EQUITY IS A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE**

Over the last several decades, we have seen the introduction of many policy and programmatic efforts to advance racial equity. These individual efforts are essential but are not enough. A comprehensive strategy is necessary to achieve racial equity. Over the next several months, we will work with the GARE teams of Orange County, Chapel Hill and Hillsborough to develop a Countywide Racial Equity Plan. The Countywide Racial Equity Plan will focus on undoing racism both within our own individual jurisdiction and across our institutions that combine to create a system that negatively impact communities of color. We will invite also other regional partners to participate.

The combined GARE Team (all Orange County jurisdictions) will form committees to concentrate on various aspects of the Racial Equity Plan. The committees will focus on the Racial Equity Tool, Community Engagement, Data Collection and Analysis, Training, and Communication, Evaluation, and Accountability. In addition, teams will continue with their own jurisdictional demonstration projects begun through the Learning Community program. In November or December, a symposium will be held highlighting the work of the GARE local and regional teams.

The Combined local GARE Teams will use GARE's six proven strategies described below in advancing racial equity and government transformation to create a shared equity framework to develop a Racial Equity Plan. This is a work in progress, however we envision something like -

1. Building organizational capacity:
  - Build internal organizational infrastructure by inviting a diverse array of stakeholders to collaborate toward a shared vision of equity.
2. Develop and Implement a Racial Equity tool:
  - Develop and implement a racial equity tool that mechanizes the practice of considering racial impact when making and implementing policy. Include the following:
    - Promote racially inclusive collaboration and engagement;
    - A Racial Equity Scorecard that uses data and metrics to develop strategies to close gaps and track progress;
    - Develop and implement Integrated program and policy strategies for eliminating racial inequity;
    - Develop cross-section, cross-jurisdictional partnerships to achieve systematic structural and institutional change; and
    - Educate internal and external stakeholders on racial issues and raise racial awareness.
3. Developing a Racial Equity Index to track racial equity metrics to measure success, develop baselines, and set goals. Use data to develop strategies to close gaps and track progress over a period. Metrics can also be used to align outputs with outcomes across cross-departmental and cross-jurisdictional lines to evaluate community progress on racial equity throughout the County.
4. Develop Community Engagement Plans that include partnering with other institutions and communities to collaborate in this work. Collaborate with stakeholders, including communities of color, to have a "collective impact" to advance racial equity. Collective impact refers to when a group of organizations from different sectors work on a common issue to solve a specific social problem.
5. Communicate to communicate and act with urgency, - when change is a priority and urgency is felt, change is embraced and can take place quickly. While racial equity is a long-term goal, we are committed to prioritizing action with a shared vision, specific priorities, and strategic actions and organizing that can lead to change.
6. Develop an Accountability Plan. Build an institutional accountability mechanism and a clear plan of action that demonstrates accountability to elected officials and a transparent way to show responsibility to the community.

## Committees Structure and Formation

While community participation will be sought throughout each step of the racial equity process, it will be a necessary to have community member's partners in the discussion of a plan for community engagement and accountability. Committees will be staffed with GARE team members from all jurisdictions, as well as staff and others with expertise in specific areas.

**Racial Equity Tool Committee.** The Racial Equity Tool Committee will lay out a process and a set of questions to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impact of racial equity. The racial equity tool will help align racial equity goals with desired outcomes.

The Racial Equity Tool looks at:

1. **Desired Rules.** Community Indicators measurements that quantify the achievements of the desired results
2. **Data Collection & Analysis.** Whom do the policies, programs, initiatives, and budget issues negatively impact? Where are the gaps?
3. **Community Engagement/Partnership.** How was the community engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement and partnership? Design a Community Engagement Plan.
4. **Strategies.** Create a root cause analysis for racial disparities. Determine and refine your priority strategies to maximize racial equity. Organize outcomes and performance measures. Use community engagement/partnership to get feedback on the negative impacts based on performance measures and root causes analysis to disparities. Identify short and long-term strategies and organize outcomes to achieve desired results.
5. **Implementation.** Develop an implementation plan. Using the Racial Equity Toolkit, develop one short strategy and one long-term strategy, which includes an action step, person (or agency) responsible, deadline, and what resources are needed.
6. **Communication, Evaluation, and Accountability.** How will we ensure accountability, communicate with stakeholders, and evaluate results?
  - a. How will the impacts be documented and evaluated? Are you achieving the anticipated outcome?
  - b. How will you continue to partner and deepen relationships with impacted communities while you continue to achieve organizational outcomes?
  - c. Craft a message using Race Forward's ACT Tool:
    - i. Affirm. Hook and engage the audience by immediately mentioning phrases and images that speak to their values
    - ii. Counter. Open the audience's minds to an alternative explanation of frameworks about race. Unconscious attitudes and stereotypes toward individuals and social groups that "affect our understanding, actions, and decisions." (Adapted from Kirwan Institute)
    - iii. Transform. End your message with a solution that leaves your audience feeling engaged and included in your next steps.

**Community Engagement Committee.** Develop a plan to provide for meaningful community engagement. Consider the current and unlikely partners needed to accomplish the organizational outcomes. Who are the decision makers with whom you need to inform, consult, or collaborate?

Building meaningful community engagement/partnership toward power shift means:

1. The desired result is co-designed and shared by both government and the community.
2. Community engagement expectations and processes are aligned between the community and government.
3. Government is ready to listen, hear, and implement input from all communities, especially impacted communities of color.
4. Government is ready to make a transformational and structural change toward a new power dynamic.
5. Principles of community engagement at the enterprise level are known and carried out across all departments.
6. Designate a specific department to provide coordination, training, and technical assistance to other departments seeking to engage and build partnerships with the community.
7. A guide exists and is shared broadly across the enterprise.

**Racial Equity Index Committee.** The use of data and metrics to track progress of County's racial equity initiatives and to follow trends in racial disparities. Metrics will also facilitate the alignment of outputs with outcomes and the coordination of efforts across departments and jurisdictions. The Racial Equity Index will be a transparent public access to data with built public data dashboards to help assess questions of equity. The dashboards contained within the Index will include sub-county maps and key performance indicators (KPIs) to help track essential indicators and equity performance. Wherever possible these KPIs would be disaggregated by geography, race/ethnicity, income, and gender. This data may be used to address historical oppression by:

- Examining existing policies and procedures
- Equitably targeting use of resources
- Fostering equity-centered decision-making (ie. in policies and procedures)
- Guiding community-centered engagement
- Developing a participatory budgeting process
- Unifying local response to pressing issues
- Creating a user-friendly, public facing data portal
- Collaborating across institutions and systems
- Implementing accountability structures that align with local government equity efforts

The Racial Equity Index Committee will develop a countywide Racial Equity Index and Community Scorecard to track equity metrics across Orange County. Data demonstrating racial inequities is frequently available. What is not often available is data tracking the progress of the strategies used for closing the gaps over time. Metrics and data can be used to align outputs with outcomes across cross-departmental and cross-jurisdictional lines to evaluate community progress on racial equity throughout the County. If the goal is to eliminate racial inequities and improve success, we must follow the impact of our efforts over time so we can see the effect of our efforts. Measurement at the program level is needed to track the impact of specific public investment and policy changes.

The model used for the Racial Equity Index will be a local modified version of the Policy Link's National Equity Atlas. To see examples of these resources as:

- a. Policy Link National Equity Atlas <https://nationalequityatlas.org/research#reindex>
- b. Equity Profile of Battle Creek, MI  
<https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/BattleCreek-profile.pdf>
- c. Policy Link Racial Equity Tool:  
<https://nationalequityatlas.org/research/index-findings>

**Training Committee.** The training committee will develop a plan to provide training to policymakers, managers, staff, boards and commission members, and community partners to build capacity to advance racial equity and to embed racial equity into countywide systems.

**Evaluation and Accountability Committee.** The Evaluation and Accountability Committee will develop an Evaluation Plan based on the principles of the Results-Based Accountability (“RBA”) framework. RBA is a national model and provides a disciplined, data-driven, decision-making process to help local governments take action to solve problems. An Evaluation Plan will help local governments apply racial equity principles embedded into the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) methodology into Racial Equity Action Plan.