

Building the California We Deserve:

A Framework to Advance Racial Equity with Communities at the Heart

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Will list contributors including Commissioners, Staff, Consultants, etc.

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Executive Summary

Purpose and Vision

The *Racial Equity Framework* (framework) is a practical guide developed by the California Racial Equity Commission (commission) to help government entities advance racial equity across the state. Rooted in the belief that California thrives when all communities thrive, the framework offers tools, strategies, and guiding principles to dismantle systemic racism and promote inclusive, equitable governance. It is designed for use by state government entities—including administrative, legislative, and judicial branches—as well as local governments and other sectors seeking to embed racial equity into their operations to build a place where everyone belongs. Throughout the structure of government, servant leaders work hard to support basic needs and increase access to supportive programs and services for communities throughout California. We aimed to design a framework that acknowledges the existing efforts of government entities, meet them where they are in their equity journey, and provides tools and examples to help government entities continue the amazing work already in motion.¹ This framework encourages servant leaders at all levels of government to center communities and see them as the heartbeat that maintains the wellbeing of our thriving state.

Commission's Guiding Values

The commission's work is grounded in seven core values: equity and racial justice, community and lived experience, intentional collaboration, data-driven decision-making, transparency and accountability, prevention and repair of harm, and continuous learning. These values guide the commission as it learns from community, engages with experts, and researches tools and strategies to advance racial equity.

Core Principles

Community-Centered and Data-Informed to Advance Opportunity for All: The framework emphasizes the importance of acknowledging historical and current racial inequities, using disaggregated data to inform decisions, acknowledging the breadth and depth of equity beyond and inclusive of race, and centering community voices and experiences in policy and program development.

¹ The areas of law relevant to racial equity work are dynamic and subject to ongoing change. This report does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for consultation with your agency's legal counsel. Agencies and departments are strongly encouraged to seek independent legal guidance to ensure that all applicable federal, state, and administrative laws are appropriately considered in their decision-making.

Flexibility to Adapt to Needs: Recognizing the diversity of California’s communities and government structures, the framework avoids a one-size-fits-all approach and instead offers adaptable tools and strategies. The commission is available to help explore how to adapt and apply tools and strategies presented in the framework.

Fostering Trust and Accountability to Deliver Results for All: The framework promotes informed decision-making between government and communities, fostering transparency, trust, and mutual accountability.

Key Tools and Strategies

1. Community Engagement

- **Restorative Practices:** Encourages healing and trust-building through providing space and opportunity for dialogue and shared responsibility.
- **Spectrum of Community Engagement:** Moves organizations from informing to deferring to community leadership; the framework outlines levels of engagement to deepen collaboration, ensure sustainability, and secure results.
- **Language and Accessibility:** Emphasizes plain language, language access services, in-person and virtual engagement, and inclusive communication to ensure all Californians can participate meaningfully.

2. Data and Information Use

- **Disaggregated Data:** Calls for breaking down data by race, ethnicity, age, gender, and other identities to uncover hidden disparities.
- **Storytelling:** Combines qualitative narratives with quantitative data to humanize and contextualize community experiences.
- **Equity Indices and Mapping:** Visualize disparities with tools like the National Equity Atlas and Los Angeles County’s Equity Index to help inform equitable investments including programs and services.

3. Budget Equity

- **Budget Equity Toolkit:** Provides standardized questions and case studies to assess the equity impact of budget proposals.
- **Understanding the Budget Process:** Promotes civic engagement and understanding opportunities to share the impacts of programs and services with policymakers.
- **Tracking Spending:** Encourages transparency in how public funds are allocated and their impact on communities.

4. Organizational Infrastructure

- **Equity in Strategic Plans:** Weaves equity goals into strategic plans to support institutionalization of strategies.
- **Equity in Job Descriptions:** Recommends including equity responsibilities in employee duty statements.
- **Leadership and Coordination:** Proposes the establishment of an Office of Racial Equity and senior-level equity roles as a tool to ensure coordination and accountability.

5. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement with Support from the Commission

- **Self-Evaluation Tools:** Provides tools and guidance for government entities to assess their readiness and progress in advancing equity.
- **Impact Indicators:** Monitoring key metrics and publishing annual reports with updates, more tools, and outcomes.
- **Technical Assistance:** Ongoing guidance to help government entities implement and evaluate equity strategies.

How did we do this

The framework was built upon countless miles and hours traveling throughout California to ensure communities, advocates, and subject matter experts had the opportunity to learn about the commission and inform its efforts over the last 20 months:

- Over **50 hours of public commission meetings**
- Nearly **160 hours of community meetings** with residents, advocates, and allies
- Nearly **1,000 community residents** have attended our meetings across the state

The commission has gathered in places like the farmworker communities of Salinas, Yuba City, Imperial Valley, and Central Valley. They have engaged residents in urban and suburban areas like Fresno, Sacramento, Oakland, Martinez, Los Angeles, Riverside, and Antelope Valley. They've even traveled to the mouth of the Klamath River to learn from tribal elders about the impacts of inequitable access and historical harm. The commission remains committed to engaging communities throughout the state and helping other government entities build their capacity to listen, engage, and transform our government together.

Looking Ahead

The framework is not a checklist but a call to action. It invites government entities to reflect, learn, and act with humility and purpose. With strategic balance and understanding, we can advance racial equity in government, in alignment with state and federal law. The framework accounts for the complexity of who we are as individuals, family members, neighbors, and broader community members – people living with disabilities, aging with grace, learning and growing, building a livelihood, and safe communities. Through its charge in Executive Order N-16-22 (toolbox 1.1), the commission will continue to provide technical assistance, gather community feedback, and add to the framework to meet emerging needs of residents throughout California. Through collective efforts, California can become a model for a multi-racial democracy rooted in equity, justice, and belonging – with communities at the heart.

Introduction

The Racial Equity Commission's (commission) efforts to build a racial equity framework (framework) in California comes at a unique moment in our country's history. During a time when many are experiencing unease and uncertainty, the commission encourages us to focus on what Angela Glover Blackwell calls, "a radically inclusive, mutually accountable, multi-racial democracy in service of universal human flourishing." This is the true goal of California for All – centering community at the heart of society. California is primed to thrive holistically when all regions and communities are positioned to thrive. We must find ways to ensure all can benefit, define our challenges through data and stories of Californians, and ensure all are able to participate in solving the challenges that have led to only some benefitting while many others are burdened.

Government entities throughout California have worked tirelessly to address disparities and advance equity despite current and other historical challenges. We are more than prepared to transform and serve as a model for others on how to use existing resources and apply tools and strategies to push towards an inclusive and fair society where the opportunities to thrive are endless for all. Inclusivity within our society calls for acknowledging the intersectionality of race across many different social identities such as gender identity, sexual orientation, ability/disability, religion or spiritual belief system, nationality/immigration status, language, age, income, education level, and geographic location. The concept of intersectionality, [coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), describes the way people's social identities can overlap. Race is a compounding factor for the social identities we all carry. The framework provides government entities with an opportunity to acknowledge intentional and unintentional policies and practices that have fallen short. It is an opportunity to truly align with our core values through shifting our norms and beliefs to ensure inclusion and belonging, while fortifying our programs and services to reach those in greatest need.

The framework we present represents the commission's engagement with community residents, subject matter experts, and deep research to find what is not only needed but also what works. The commission has **defined the audience** for this framework as state government, inclusive of administrative, legislative, and judicial branches, boards and commissions, while also in support of local government entities advancing racial equity. The commission believes that others outside of government can use the tools and strategies in the framework in their respective sectors to advance racial equity.

The purpose of the framework is to provide guidance to inform action at the program, management, and leadership levels of government. The strategies outlined in the

framework are designed to guide government entities with tools and strategies that can be applied within an organization’s context – steering away from the framework being a performative check list and acknowledging the uniqueness of the various elements of government that cumulatively impact the wellbeing of its constituents.² We know that “one size fits all” does not apply when it comes to the charge of government entities as well as the communities and populations we serve. We must be mindful of the context in which each is operating and be willing to be curious and dynamic in our efforts to transform not only how government operates but allowing ourselves to be race-conscious, data-informed, and community-centered.

Advancing racial equity will not be easy, but it is necessary for survival of our democracy and economic solvency. It requires self-reflection, difficult but required conversations, learning and re-learning, and growing as individuals, co-workers, and neighbors. We all have a vested interest.

To support the use of the framework, the commission offers the use of the following key terms to level set and ground us in a common language to help us do better and serve all Californians. These key terms and suggested definitions (Table 1) were researched by Vital Research, reviewed and refined by the commission, and where feasible, intentionally written in plain language to support similar understanding.

Table 1 Key Terms and Suggested Definitions

Key Term	Suggested Definition
Data Disaggregation	Breaking big categories of information or data into smaller, more detailed parts so you can see differences that may be hidden in the overall numbers. For example, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) are often grouped together in data collection for different issues such as college degree attainment or health challenges. This often leads to missing the unique disparities and issues impacting those communities in both diasporas of Asia and the Pacific or Oceania and limits effective targeted solutions.

² The areas of law relevant to racial equity work are dynamic and subject to ongoing change. This report does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for consultation with your agency’s legal counsel. Agencies and departments are strongly encouraged to seek independent legal guidance to ensure that all applicable federal, state, and administrative laws are appropriately considered in their decision-making.

Key Term	Suggested Definition
Diversity	The many identities and characteristics that make people different from one another. Aspects of diversity include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, national origin, immigration status, socioeconomic status, education, age, language, and more.
Equity	Equity means giving people the resources they need, rather than giving everyone the same thing, to reach similar life outcomes.
Ethnicity	A social group of people that share a common culture, customs, history, language, and/or values. For example, someone might be racially categorized as Asian but ethnically identify as Vietnamese.
Explicit Bias	Beliefs and stereotypes that people are aware of and will often express directly to others.
Implicit Bias	Beliefs and stereotypes that people are unaware of. These biases can influence how people behave and the actions they take towards others, even if they do not mean them to affect how they treat others.
Inclusion	Authentic representation of all groups in activities and decision-making processes. In particular, to make sure historically excluded communities can contribute and share power.
Individual Racism	When a person’s beliefs, biases or actions result in unfair treatment of others based on their race. This includes things like racial slurs or discrimination.

Key Term	Suggested Definition
Institutional Racism	Policies and practices within institutions, such as schools, workplaces, or government agencies, that have disproportionately favored or served certain racial groups. Historically the data suggests has historically been White people.
Intersectionality	A way to look at how different types of identities interconnect to create unique experiences. Having many identities, like being Black, over 65 years old, and a woman, can mean experiencing different forms of discrimination at the same time. The mixing of these forms of discrimination, like racism and sexism, can sometimes make inequities worse.
Race	A social concept that groups people by physical features like skin color or where their family comes from. For example, in the U.S., people are often categorized as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. Race is not based on biology, and categories for race have changed over time. People in power have historically used the concept of race to justify inequitably spreading power and resources across racial groups.
Racial Equity	Efforts to ensure race can no longer be used to predict life well-being, outcomes, and conditions for all groups. In other words, a heightened focus on groups experiencing disproportionate outcomes in order to address disparities in those outcomes and their experiences.
Racial Inequity	When race can be used to predict life outcomes. People of color are disproportionately more likely to experience negative life outcomes because of unfair systems.

Key Term	Suggested Definition
Racial Justice	To seek fair and ethical treatment and thriving life outcomes for people of all races. It requires reimagining and transforming society to address existing racial inequities perpetuated by systems. Finding ways to advance racial equity helps to move us towards a more racially just world.
Structural Racism	Social forces, institutions, policies, and programs that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups. In other words, a combination of policies and practices across institutions that disadvantage communities of color. Structural racism creates and upholds inequitable access to things like housing, education, healthcare, and jobs.
Targeted Universalism	A policy strategy that identifies universal goals that can be achieved through targeted implementation strategies. This approach makes it clear that certain policy changes will benefit all people as well as address the particular needs of specific groups, recognizing that some people have faced disparate past or current barriers. This approach overcomes a zero-sum mindset.

Part 1 – Building the Framework for your Organization

PRIORITY 1: Working with **Community** to Better Serve All Californians: Keeping Communities at the Heart

Community engagement is essential for advancing racial equity because it ensures that the voices, experiences, and needs of all Californians are seen, heard, valued, and have the opportunity to be acted upon. Engaging with communities ensures that government services are grounded in real-world experience. It helps rebuild trust and credibility between government and community and shifts power toward those who have been historically marginalized. Community engagement builds civic leadership within communities and prevents unintentional harm that can perpetuate or worsen inequities. Community engagement strategies used by government entities must reflect reciprocity with community. For example, government employees are paid to gather data and information from community residents. Reciprocally, community residents should be compensated similarly to share their experiences with government. Community engagement is the foundation for the sustainable advancement of racial equity because it creates more inclusive systems, more responsive and efficient governance, and more just outcomes for all.

STRATEGY 1: Build trust with communities through existing networks of community organizations

Building and restoring trust with community is foundational for government entities embarking on their racial equity journey. It is important to acknowledge that working with community requires listening first and understanding the experiences and historical and present-day impacts of discrimination and racism. Government entities should lean into or adopt restorative justice practices and strategies as a starting place to build trust with the community before moving into conversations around community ideas and ways to improve government services and programs.

TOOL: Restorative practices to address harm, promote healing, and strengthen trust

Restorative practices represent a transformative approach to addressing harm, navigating healing, and strengthening relational trust across institutions, communities, and public systems. When used consistently, restorative practices help government entities respond with care and support, particularly for historically underserved or marginalized communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Youth Law Center, 2023). For more information on how to integrate restorative practices, take a look at the restorative practices toolkit by Global Urban Strategies in toolbox 1.2.

STRATEGY 2: Collaborating and building capacity with community organizations

Partnering and working with community organizations such as non-profits, grassroots organizations, tribal organizations, and local associations, are central to working with community. Building long-term relationships with community organizations takes time and intention. It builds capacity beyond event planning. It creates the relationship that allows for real-time engagement and guidance on resident outreach strategies, meeting needs on the ground, and building long-term strategy – leaning into goals like shared governance. There are existing networks of trusted community organizations that have been established over time that are poised to serve as great partners to begin to build or grow a government entity’s community engagement strategy. These trusted community organizations are experts in connecting directly with residents and ensuring community voices are heard. Through connecting with these organizations, government entities can reach community residents throughout California who are eager to learn more about government and how they can help inform the development of programs and services. For example, the commission visited with Black elders in Los Angeles who are members of the Sankofa Elders Project. Upon learning about the work of the commission, the elders were eager for ongoing engagement with the commission and to share their own wisdom and experience in support of advancing racial equity in California.

The [Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications](#) (OCPSC) is charged with supporting the state’s outreach and engagement with communities throughout California. OCPSC provides funding and tools to educate and engage communities on priority areas such as healthcare, mental health, food assistance, housing, emergency preparedness and disaster relief, legal and public safety, education, jobs and training, transportation, financial assistance, and climate. OCPSC also has a network of community-based organizations, faith leaders, businesses, elected officials, and ethnic media throughout the state that serve as [Trusted Messengers](#) who support the Office’s efforts to engage Californians and ensure messaging is timely, accurate, accessible, and culturally appropriate. This network was successful in supporting outreach and engagement during [Census 2020](#), [Vaccinate All 58](#), and [Extreme Heat](#) statewide campaigns.

Government entities should leverage existing networks of community organizations to advance community engagement efforts. OCPSC has hosted several “Trusted Messenger Learning Labs” which featured leaders from community-based organizations and other

subject matter experts who shared their experiences on community engagement and outreach. Best practices on reaching urban communities, building and maintaining coalitions, ethnic media, language and communication access, and more are captured in “Action Briefs” – available on [OCPSC’s website](#).

Throughout the commission’s public meetings, several commissioners have noted the importance of tribal engagement. In a series of efforts by California, our collective tribal engagement efforts have been strengthened and continue to grow through the [Office of Tribal Affairs](#) and the institutionalization of tribal liaisons throughout state government entities. The Office of Tribal Affairs oversees and facilitates government-to-government consultation between the State Administration and California tribes on issues that affect California tribal communities, as well as provides resources to support state agencies with respectful and successful engagement. It also staffs the [California Truth and Healing Council](#) which was established to clarify the historical record through a variety of pathways including receiving California Native narratives in the “spirit of truth and healing”. Tribal liaisons are an important partner for government entities to ensure the protection of tribal spaces and resources. Tribal consultation is another way to honor tribal sovereignty. Tribal consultation through liaisons ensures tribes are involved with decision making and program development processes, while centering listening to and addressing culturally sensitive concerns. Government entities should include tribal liaisons as their subject matter expertise is invaluable and necessary to advance racial equity and ensure the state is doing meaningful and respectful work in California.

TOOL: Spectrum of Community Engagement

The commission has used the [Spectrum of Community Engagement](#) (González, Facilitating Power, 2019) framework as a tool to inform and assess its community engagement efforts to deepen connections with communities (Figure 1). The Spectrum consists of five levels of community engagement: 1) inform, 2) consult, 3) involve, 4) collaborate, and 5) defer to. These levels can help identify where a government entity is and help set goals for their own community engagement efforts. As a tool, the Spectrum of Community Engagement details why it is important to move from engagement towards ownership and how the tool supports government by facilitating community participation in the development of solutions (e.g., programs or services) and decision-making.

The commission has utilized levels 1-4 of this tool to inform its efforts in alignment with its charge to develop trusting, collaborative relationships with communities throughout the state. The commission’s public meetings, community meet-n-greets, and listening sessions demonstrate levels 1-3 of the Spectrum spaces where the commission engages

community directly. The following is an example of how the Spectrum applies to the commission’s engagement activities:

Level 1 – Inform: staff provide an overview of the commission, its charge and limitations;

Level 2 – Consult: attendees engage in an interactive activity that allows them to share input and feedback on topics and issues they care about;

Level 3 – Involve: the commission engages trusted organizations and welcomes community feedback through storytelling;

Level 4 – Collaborate: the commission continues to collaborate with community-based organizations and are committed to returning to communities previously visited to report back how their perspectives and feedback have been reflected in the framework, impacted commission activities, and to continued conversations;

Level 5 – Defer To: the commission continues to hear from community residents, leaders, and advocates, building consensus around tools and strategies included within the framework.

THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP



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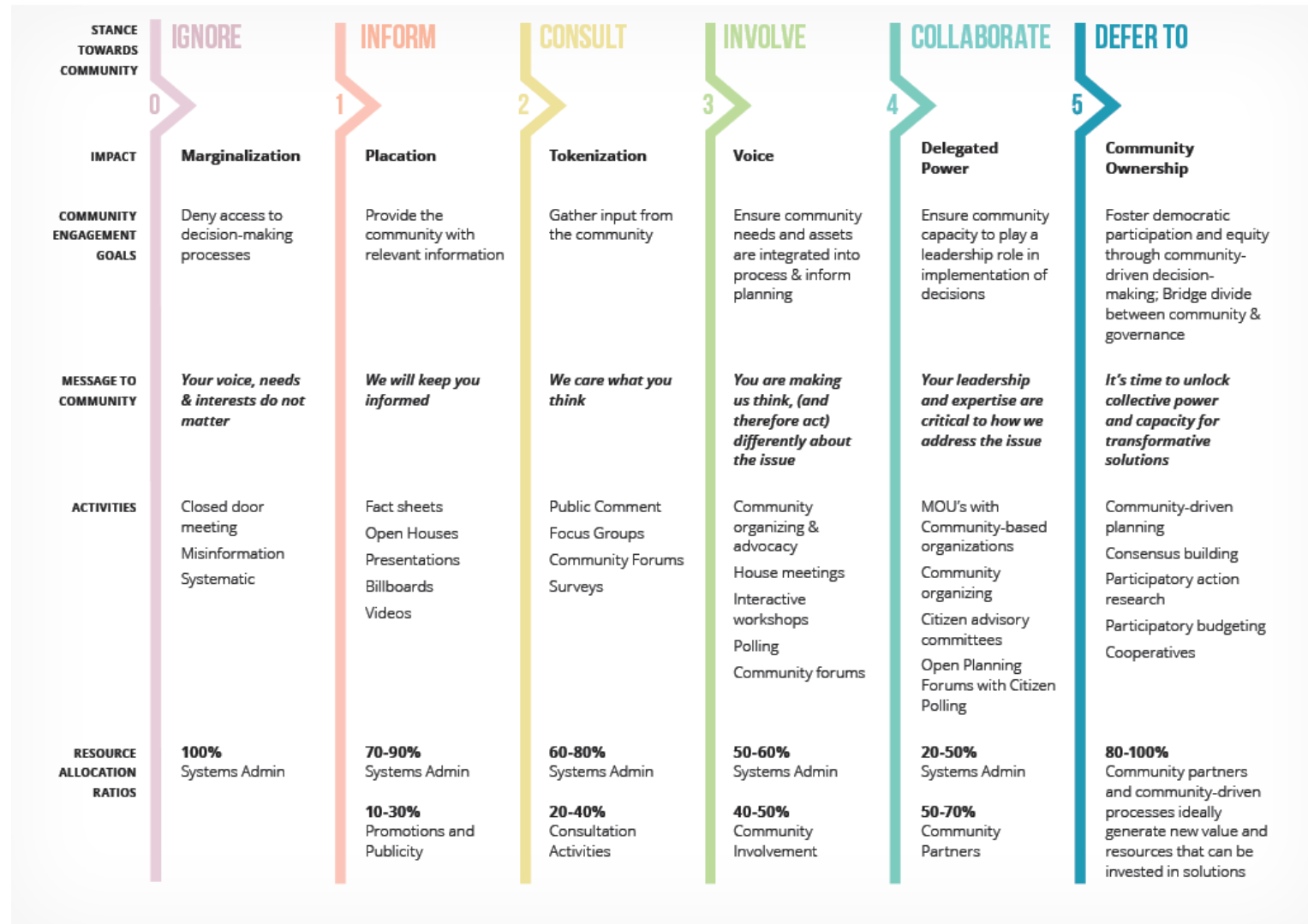


Figure 1. Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

STRATEGY 3: Establishing philanthropic partnerships to support community participation

State law places significant limitations on the ability of government agencies from giving or lending public funds or resources to any individual or entity unless there is a clear public purpose, which may limit how government interprets their ability to engage with communities. Partnering with philanthropy and exploring opportunities with corporate community benefit or social responsibility (e.g., healthcare systems, financial institutions, large corporations, etc.) can help fund community engagement strategies and best practices.

One best practice the commission has implemented is collaborating with philanthropy to support community engagement activities. In 2025, the commission partnered with a fiscal sponsor to directly support community organizations and residents to attend community meet-n-greets and listening sessions. The philanthropic funds managed by the fiscal sponsor support expenses such as stipends, food and refreshments, transportation, and childcare. The commission serves as a capacity builder by helping community organizations build relationships with philanthropy and develop grant writing and reporting skills. Community-based organizations are directly connected to the fiscal sponsor for planning and coordination of the event and associated funding. The commission covers the cost of the meeting location and translation services.

STRATEGY 4: Publicly acknowledge challenges and work towards shared governance

The commission recognizes that racial equity work is not easy; there are various challenges that come with the implementation of government programs and services as individuals have diverse experiences, and government entities are at various levels in their journey to advance racial equity. Having ongoing, honest conversations with community is important. Sharing the challenges we experience regularly as public servants and servant leaders humanizes the work and helps create more understanding with community. It contributes to the concept of shared governance because more shared understanding can lead to shared action and accountability.

Shared governance is defined as co-ownership of decision-making, processes, and outcomes among different key informants, such as community members, leaders, and institutions. Within shared governance, all sides commit resources and must stay engaged throughout the process. Community residents shape the outcome. The first three levels on the Spectrum of Community Engagement (inform, consult, and involve) are the prerequisites for shared governance, because shared governance cannot exist without first

building strong, respectful, and inclusive community engagement, which is foundational for collaboration between communities and government and shifting systems toward equity. An example of what shared governance looks like in government is the California State Water Resources Control Board’s SAFER Advisory Group. The SAFER Advisory Group provides the State Water Board with constructive advice on feedback on the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund Expenditure Plan.

agencies and departments should also establish community advisory bodies their community engagement work. For example, the California Department of Aging (CDA) has an Equity Advisory Committee on Aging and Disability (EACAD). The purpose of EACAD is to advise the Administration on the implementation of the [Master Plan for Aging \(MPA\)](#) initiatives and deliverables to achieve equity outcomes for older adults, people with disabilities, and family caregivers. Community advisory bodies can help create tools to ensure programs and services meet the needs of clients or consumers. To ensure accessibility, CDA provides their presenters with a tool that outlines best practices and rules for creating accessible documents such as formatting, plain language, and alternative text for images (toolbox 1.3).

Shared governance ensures decisions are not made by a single entity without engaging with those impacted by the decision. It guarantees the inclusion of diverse perspectives which leads to more informed and relevant decisions. Shared governance leads to co-creation which can result in sustainability and effective implementation. Shared governance builds trust between government and communities while strengthening civic engagement and social cohesion.

STRATEGY 5: Best ways to receive information

To support community engagement, the commission works closely with community partners to identify language needs of the region and coordinates interpretation services for every community engagement event, including public meetings. The average reading skills of U.S. adults is at the eighth-grade reading level ([Center for Plain Language, 2017](#)). The commission is committed to providing information in plain and simple language. In a world where people have a variety of visible and invisible disabilities or may have limited English proficiency, documents written at no higher than an eighth-grade reading level may provide broader accessibility. Providing information at a reading level aligned with your audience can support a more comprehensive understanding of information across different audiences and makes translation into other languages a lot easier. If jargon or technical terms are used, they should be explained clearly. Plain language is also an

accessibility standard that ensures information is accessible, reliable, and usable for all residents.

TOOL: Plain language checklist to help increase accessibility of materials

The [Plain Language Equity Standard](#) in California calls for state agencies and departments to provide print and digital information to the public at an eight-grade reading level or lower (Office of Data and Innovation, 2025). Vital Research created a plain language checklist to support government entities increase accessibility to its materials (toolbox 1.4).

TOOL: Language access plans

The Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act (Stats. 1973, Ch. 1182) requires state and local agencies to provide language access services to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). In addition, [California Government Code Section 11135](#) prohibits discrimination by state government and state-funded programs which includes ensuring the provision of language access services to people with LEP. The California Civil Rights Department has clarified that offering services like interpretation and translated documents is necessary to ensure all individuals can access state services, regardless of language background.

Several state government entities have Language Access Plans that aim to address language barriers and ensure individuals with limited English proficiency have meaningful access to state services and programs. Plans should address four factors to determine steps to ensure meaningful access for individuals with LEP, including:

1. Number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee;
2. Frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the program;
3. Nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the recipient to its members; and
4. Resources available to the grantee/recipient and the costs of interpretation/translation services.

Government entities establishing a language access policy set minimum language access standards which include interpretation in sign language and any spoken language upon request and translation of vital documents or public website content into at least the top

QUOTES FROM COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

“If I don’t understand what is being shared with community in one language, I don’t trust what is being said to me if I don’t have interpretation.”

“If it’s not in my language, I think you’re hiding something from me.”

five threshold languages spoken by individuals with limited English proficiency in California. The top five threshold languages in California are Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

STRATEGY 6: Focused outreach and engagement strategies for hard-to-reach groups and communities

Through the commission’s public meetings, we heard from commissioners, advocates, and members of the public about the need to ensure outreach and engagement with specific populations including those with lived experience, recipients of governmental services and programs, and communities who historically experience disproportionate disparities in access and outcomes with low civic and program engagement. The commission is actively working to add to its engagement strategy to reach these specific groups.

TOOL: Leveraging ethnic media to engage the diverse populations of California

Ethnic media is a community engagement best practice and serves racial and ethnic minorities, immigrant communities, and indigenous populations in the following ways:

- Provide news and information in many different languages and formats, including television, radio, newspapers, websites, and social media;
- Make the news relevant to their diverse audiences by illustrating how current events are directly impacting their communities;
- Focus on events and issues that are often overlooked by mainstream media; and
- Ensure underrepresented voices are part of the conversation.

State agencies and departments should leverage ethnic media outlets (EMOs) to better serve Californians by reaching a wider audience, who are often more receptive to information via ethnic media. In addition, EMOs serve as trusted messengers and can help combat misinformation. In 2023, the Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications (OCPSC) offered a training called [“Speaking to Multicultural California: Ethnic Media as an Effective Channel”](#) to help government entities learn about the role EMOs can play in their service delivery and programs.

When done intentionally, digital engagement is an effective community engagement strategy because it helps reach broader, more diverse audiences, removes barriers to participation, and creates ways to include community voice in decision-making. Digital engagement can reach underrepresented and often excluded voices such as youth and young adults, communities of color, immigrant communities, and other groups that traditional outreach might overlook or miss. Digital tools can also expand access to

participation for those who are often excluded due to geographic distance, transportation barriers, childcare needs, work schedules, or different abilities. The commission recently partnered with a local community organization to host [a listening session for the Mam speaking community from Guatemala](#). Our partner organization uses a text and voice messaging service and videos to share information and promote events to the Mam speaking community. During our listening session we saw the importance of digital engagement in real time. The first portion of the listening session was broadcast live on social media. As we continued the listening session, additional families and community members showed up to participate. When asked what led them to come, many reflected that after seeing the conversation on social media, they wanted to learn more and they could see that the event space was safe place to gather, learn, and share their stories.

In addition, digital tools such as online surveys and polls, platforms with commentary, virtual listening sessions and workshops, and social media allow communities to provide input and feedback. These platforms also serve as a record so that individuals are aware of others' input, how their feedback is being used, and what decisions are being made. These tools help build trust and transparency between government and community. To be effective, digital engagement needs to be inclusive and accessible, culturally relevant, and supported by non-digital options for those without access to internet or digital literacy. It is important to note that some areas in California have limited to no access to broadband and cellular phone services. While digital engagement is a great strategy, it is important to use a variety of communication strategies to reach and engage communities.

TOOL: Using online platforms to connect with residents in real-time

One recently launched platform is [Engaged California](#). Engaged California is a virtual platform for communities to use their voice to shape their communities. It is currently being used to rebuild communities impacted by the 2025 Eaton and Palisades fires. Residents can share their ideas on rebuilding Altadena and the Palisades, weighing in on decisions that can guide the short and long-term recovery process. The information collected by the state supports data-driven decisions through ongoing engagement and feedback. These feedback opportunities have allowed leaders at the state and local level to streamline the permit process, develop a mortgage assistance fund, and provide mental health support to impacted families. Moving forward, Engaged California can serve as a bridge between community and government, supporting community engagement and civic participation on a larger scale.

STRATEGY 7: Helping communities work with decision makers

Helping communities work with decision makers throughout government requires sharing knowledge, raising confidence, increasing access, and building power so that communities

can help shape the decisions that affect their lives. Government entities embarking on a community engagement strategy to inform their own work also builds capacity to further the community’s engagement with decision makers. Their experiences with government entities build knowledge, confidence, access, and power.

Knowledge – To have influence, communities need to understand how government works and where decision-making points in its processes are. Civic education, understanding their rights, and understanding how to navigate public meetings are ways to help communities build their fluency in government processes.

Confidence – Advocacy skills such as providing comments in public meetings, engaging with elected officials, using social media for storytelling, or forming coalitions can build confidence and empower communities to work with government effectively.

Access – Communities can also work with government when they have access to the leaders who make decisions. Creating access can look like promoting community attendance at local or state public meetings or organizing community meetings and inviting elected officials or agency leaders to these spaces. Relationship-building is necessary to maintain community access to government spaces.

Power – In addition, communities must define their own priorities rather than government assuming what is important. Community listening sessions can support the process of community identifying key issues they need government to address.

TOOL: Co-Governance Tool for a Multi-Racial Democracy

In May 2025, Race Forward published “[Co-Governance Tool for a Multiracial Democracy](#),” which serves as a guide for cross-sector collaboration. Through participatory governance, communities can work with government by shifting and sharing power to drive transformative, equitable outcomes. The tool is a series of steps and considerations that community and government can work through together to help determine the best structures, agreements, and processes needed to support cross-sector collaboration. Government entities should explore how this model can be used and adapted within their context to support collaboration across sectors and with community.

Throughout every approach to help community work with government, equity must be prioritized. Communities can work with government best when language access resources are available; events provide stipends, childcare, and food to community members in attendance; and trusted community leaders/groups are involved. We describe these strategies earlier in this section. When done right, shared governance can transform communities from passive recipients of decisions to powerful agents of change.

Steps of the Co-Governance Tool

Pre-step: Determine readiness for engaging in co-governance

Step 1: Align on the problem/opportunity

Step 2: Design participation and inclusion at the table

Step 3: Determine how decisions are made/the table functions

Step 4: Define success

Step 5: Build collective accountability

Final step: Build a shared governing document

STRATEGY 8: Building a community engagement strategy

Early in the commission’s history, it became clear that the commission needed a cohesive strategy to ensure communities were engaged in the development of the framework as required by Executive Order N-16-22. Commission staff began working with consultants to identify best practices in community engagement. This resulted in the development of a community engagement plan.

TOOL: Community engagement plan

The commission’s Community Engagement Plan (toolbox 1.5) was designed to serve as a model for outreach efforts to ensure communities throughout California have an opportunity to learn from, inform and collaborate with government. The goal of the Community Engagement Plan is to articulate how the commission and its staff intend on establishing relationships with communities that build trust, support civic engagement, and provide an ongoing connection to government work.

After the commission approved the plan, several government entities reached out to commission staff to learn more about the strategies the commission has used to engage community. In addition, commissioners at our December 2024 meeting suggested the

development of a toolkit to support not only the staff but other government entities with building their own community engagement strategy.

TOOL: Community engagement toolkit

Commission staff developed a community engagement toolkit to support intentional community engagement (toolbox 1.6). The toolkit serves as a tool to standardize the commission's community engagement activities, model how to authentically and intentionally engage community, and promote transparency between government and public. The toolkit provides the commission's process for planning and implementing a community meet-n-greet and/or community listening session, which includes identifying region/location, community based organizations to partner with, and commissioners to attend, coordinating logistics (date, time, venue, interpretation requests, fiscal sponsor, travel, etc.), promotion (flyers, newsletter, social media, etc.), and content/programming (agenda, slides, talking points, etc.), and post-event follow up (event summary, website posting, etc.).

The toolkit also highlights how to center equity in engagement efforts such as language, disability, and geographic access. For example, the commission aims to travel to and engage with a variety of communities. Going to communities rather than expecting communities to reach or find them. These efforts include reaching those who do not have easy access to government meetings by hosting events in the evening and in places that are less well known and accessible. We have traveled to the Central Valley, Imperial Valley, Antelope Valley, and along the Central and North Coast, rather than hosting meetings exclusively in major metropolitan areas such as Sacramento or Los Angeles. The commission did this to reduce the travel burden on communities.

In partnership with community-based organizations, the commission identifies language needs in the community, coordinates interpretation services, and collaborates with the community partner to translate materials. In addition, the toolkit includes samples of a visually accessible tool that the commission has utilized during meet-n-greets and listening sessions. The commission has contracted a graphic notetaker to travel throughout the state with the commission to attend the meet-n-greets and listening sessions. During these community meetings, the graphic notetaker listens to community stories, feedback, and questions, and illustrates the different themes and visually captures community voice in real time. Throughout the state, many community members have shared how much they enjoy seeing their thoughts and perspectives illustrated in the graphic notes. Community members have also shared that seeing the graphic notes during the meetings empower and encourage them to participate in the dialogue. At the end of meet-n-greets and listening sessions, many community members take photos of the graphic notes.

TOOL: Acknowledging community contributions

The toolkit also provides an example of learning from community and integrating the learning into operations. In a community listening session in Antelope Valley, a resident noted the many contributions of the different communities that make up this nation. In response, the commission developed a [Community Acknowledgement](#) statement that honors and acknowledges different contributions to building America and further amplifies contributions to the fabric of our country and the great state of California (toolbox 1.7).

Future Strategies for Community Engagement

There is a series of future tools and strategies the commission will continue adding to its racial equity toolbox, including but not limited to public meetings and community compensation strategies. The [Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act](#) (California Government Code §§ 11120–11132) was enacted to ensure transparency and public access in meetings of state boards and commissions. However, the law may unintentionally discourage or limit meaningful community engagement. The strict boundaries on outside conversations between officials may limit informal, human-centered conversations and shut down trust-building work with communities.

Exploring strategies to compensate community residents for their time and expertise is an approach that may support more Californians engaging with government. As discussed above state laws regarding public funding “gifts” may be interpreted by governments as prohibiting some community compensation strategies. The commission is focused on strategies to ensure that especially those Californians who may not have the means or resources to participate or inform public processes have the opportunity to do so. State and local governments in Washington, Oregon, and California are implementing community compensation efforts in various ways. For example, Washington State has a [statewide framework](#) for government compensation of community members, while Oregon’s Department of Transportation has a [policy](#) that seeks to remove barriers that have systematically prevented marginalized populations and others from participating in public engagement and advisory activities with the Department. State and local entities in California have also explored different approaches to compensating community members in the context of specific engagements. For example, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has developed a consistent approach to its community engagement through the agency’s [Community Engagement Model](#). CARB contracted with 19 community experts from various regions of California to inform the model. CARB’s community experts have lived, professional, and leadership experiences uncommon to government bodies or the air quality industry. The model includes elements highlighted in the commission’s framework including but not limited to language equity, building trust with communities, and

evaluating engagement efforts. Another example is in Yolo County, where the new [Community Advisory Program](#) will compensate community members for their contributions to the County’s Community Health Improvement Plan.

Over the last 12 months, the commission has traveled throughout the state listening to residents share stories about what they love about their communities but also the challenges they experience (See Part 3 – Our Historic Journey and Toolbox 3.1). We have reflected their stories through briefs and graphic note renditions of the key themes. The commission may consider adding a strategy to its Community Engagement Plan that focuses on how to share key themes or opportunities for action learned from the commission events with government entities.

To ensure we are continuing to grow our relationship with communities we visit, commission staff are developing a survey to receive feedback from community on their experience and information on how to make the experience better and more meaningful. Staff anticipate launching the post event survey in 2026.

[Last thoughts on community engagement](#)

Community engagement is foundational to racial equity. Community engagement strategies ranging from collaboration to shared governance foster co-ownership and supports more equitable and sustainable outcomes. The commission has presented a range of tools and strategies to help build and strengthen your government organization’s commitment to deliver equitable and adaptable community engagement. It is important to be curious, willing to listen, and open to making changes to not only how you engage the community, but also in the operation of programs and services within the context of its existing requirements and policy. We encourage government entities to take note of what you are already doing with community engagement and identify how you can strengthen those efforts through simple, no or low-cost changes. Making time for community will make our programs and services more accessible, efficient, and effective, helping us to achieve our desired outcomes and serving a California for All.

PRIORITY 2: Gathering and Using Information and **Data** to Serve All Californians Successfully

Information to guide government in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services comes in different forms. It can come from a conversation with a resident or groups of residents, or through immersion by directly observing how communities live and the challenges they experience. Information can also be collected as numbers in a survey, recorded as the number of people using a program or service, or a specific indicator like high blood pressure, the number of electronic vehicles purchased in a month, or the number of individuals moving from transitional/temporary housing to permanent housing in a year. Data is representative of the experiences residents have with the various systems and processes everyday Californians touch. Government entities should use data driven approaches to not only ensure they meet their respective missions but also to inform its efforts to advance racial equity. Applying standards strategies and methodologies can further how we not only build innovative programs and services, but also how we make our legacy efforts more efficient and effective.

STRATEGY 1: Apply the use of existing information categories to organize information

The [Office of Data and Innovation](#) has developed a set of strategies to support the standardization of data practices. The [Data Standards](#) provides a strategy to streamline data collection processes by coordinating data collection practices across state government entities (Office of Data Innovation, n.d.). They provide best practices for collecting demographic and geographic data. If applied consistently across government entities, data standards support a more comprehensive understanding of the needs of Californians and help with interagency understanding of complex issues impacting individuals, families, and communities while providing the foundation to collectively work towards addressing those needs across systems.

STRATEGY 2: Requiring information to be more specific (data disaggregation)

The use of data and data collection is critical to effectively advance equity efforts and inform equitable policies. Data disaggregation means breaking big categories of information into smaller, more detailed parts so you can see the difference that may be hidden in the overall numbers. When data is not properly disaggregated in the collection and analysis processes the results collected will not accurately reflect disparities within diverse populations and cannot adequately inform programs and services to meet the needs of community. Not disaggregating data can lead to worsening the issue or creating new challenges like skewed data and missed outcomes unique to those communities. The

level of granularity needed is often experienced in balancing the depth of insight needed for a specific purpose, privacy protection, and resource limitations. It depends upon the purpose of the data analysis and the question you are trying to answer using data.

QUOTE FROM COMMUNITY RESIDENT

“They change our identity [Mayan Mam]. They put us as Latinos and that is a problem...we are indigenous. We are native.”

We saw the impact of not adequately disaggregating data during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 data reflected that Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians had the highest COVID death rates in 14 states (Sy, Buhre, & Nagy, 2022). The response to support these specific groups was limited because the COVID-19 death data was initially combined with Asian groups who had relatively lower death rates to create an Asian and Pacific Islander category. In response to not having disaggregated data for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, the [Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Data Policy Lab](#) increased access to disaggregated COVID-19 data providing clearer picture and understanding of what was happening among the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community (Morey, Penaia, Tulua, Chang, Tanghal, Tran, & Ponce, 2024). This allowed for a more focus public health prevention response to support a community that was disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Data disaggregation for Asian and Pacific Islander demographics is required by law (**A.B. 1726, Ch. 607, Stats. 2016**). Data disaggregation supports better service delivery and community empowerment. It provides data access that more accurately reflects the conditions of a community and provides the opportunity to develop more equitable and intersectional solutions. It is important to move away from grouping and diluting unique inequities within differing demographic categories. We recognize the challenges that this can pose to ultimately protect the privacy of its clients or consumers, thus government entities must follow all associated federal and state data privacy laws and practices.

The [California Privacy Act](#) (**Prop. 24, Ch. 735, Stats. 2020**) sets forth that California residents have rights regarding their right to know how data will be used, collected, and with whom it will be shared. Maintaining protection protocols is critical for data collection. Staying within the laws of identity protection and setting identity parameters before collecting data ensures protection of personal information for the communities involved.

Lastly, make data collection and disaggregation a collaborative process between researchers and community, engage and build relationships with community members early on to begin trust building and acknowledge concerns. When exploring how your

government entity can approach data disaggregation, be sure to engage individuals internal or external to your organization that hold data privacy and legal subject matter expertise.

TOOL: Data disaggregation best practices and considerations

It is important in data collection to record the disparities and highlight the strengths or assets of community or an individual. It is important to highlight community assets to understand existing resources and capabilities as a form of empowerment. It also shows what currently works for that community while promoting sustainable engagement. A series of best practices and considerations for data disaggregation by Vital Research is available in toolbox 1.8.

STRATEGY 3: Where people live can help with understanding inequities

To understand the cause of racial inequities, it is important to analyze the root causes. Understanding root causes can be complex, however, it is often driven by complex systems that interact with each other to produce inequities. Understanding where people live, work, play, pray, and learn can be used to inform solutions to unique challenges and identify where successful programs and services may be duplicated in similar communities or geographic regions. Geography is an indicator for a community or individuals' level of access to quality education, transportation, or economic opportunity for chances of achieving upward mobility ([Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, 2022](#)). Where we live can predict outcomes across sectors like education, civic engagement, health, child development, and economic self-sufficiency.

STRATEGY 4: Learning how to tell Californians' stories and connecting them to data

The power of storytelling provides more context to what traditional program or service data often reflects. Storytelling can come in the form of interviews, group discussions, or photographic images. Storytelling can dive deeper into racial disparities by articulating root causes and describe the challenges that are hidden behind the indicators that often represent a singular point in time and experience. Communities can listen to stories, walk through the data with subject matter experts, and have dialogue on what may be accurate or not as accurate with program and service indicators.

When incorporating simple data visuals, use images that connect back to the story the data is showing without perpetuating racial stereotypes but instead reflect community. Also incorporate elements of storytelling that relate to the audience, describe the relevancy to the reader and how these results inform racial equity strategies and solutions. The power of storytelling enhances data by providing more information and forming a picture of what the data means. When sharing and describing data it is also important to

ensure it is written in plain and simple language so any reader can have a clear understanding of the data or any information. This also allows communities to better engage with government entities to discuss how programs and services work well and how they could be improved.

STRATEGY 5: Identify different types of information to spot unfairness and take action to make things more equal

The use of data is critical for the development and advancement of racial equity. Including information that reflects disparities within community informs policy decisions and supports the policymaking process. The use of different types of data information from qualitative and quantitative methods, data dashboards, infographics, and more can be used to better identify complexities within issues impacting diverse communities. Data visuals and mapping of data sets can support advancing racial equity strategies and program development.

An equity index combines both data and visuals to reflect demographic needs and disparities based on geography. The use of an equity index by agency, department or program can be a tool to inform the distribution of resources to geographic communities experiencing disproportionate disparities and inequities. The purpose of creating an equity index is to show the concentrated disadvantage of specific communities. Applying an equity index informs government entities which communities face the greatest disparities, lack resources, and are impacted by specific factors. Communities with higher needs often require specific focus and programming. Through identifying these communities, government entities can take specific action. Over time, equity indices can help with monitoring progress over time through public facing, interactive charts and maps. An equity index should be used to inform the development of budget proposals for new funds and evaluating existing programs and services. Government entities should be clear on the purpose and framing question you are trying to answer with an equity index, keeping in mind the audience and how the information could be used.

The [National Equity Atlas](#) was designed to highlight racial and economic equity for data and to inform policy decisions (PolicyLink and USC Equity Research Institute, 2014). The Equity Atlas measures, tracks, and advocates for inclusive growth through data and analysis for communities. The Equity Atlas includes a series of different indicators for demographics including workforce, population growth, and more. The Atlas also contains indicators for different data collection elements on economic vitality, readiness, connectedness, and economic benefits.

The County of Los Angeles, led by the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Anti-racism, Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative developed the [Equity Explorer](#) (ARDI, 2022) a mapping tool for applying equity to programming, planning, and development. The Equity Explorer uses targeted outreach, locations, and service areas to support strategic planning and implementation in accompaniment of the Equity Action Plan. Through efforts led by Supervisorial District 2 Supervisor Holly Mitchell and from advocates from the Coalition for Equitable ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Implementation, CEO-ARDI also created the COVID Vulnerability and Recovery and formula to allocate ARPA dollars. The Funding Formula (Formula) distributed ARPA resources based on LA County’s COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index (Index), which correlated risk, severity and recovery needs for vulnerable communities to high-need ZIP codes. The indicators in the Index included factors related to Risk (e.g., overcrowded housing units), Severity (e.g. uninsured population), Recovery Need (e.g. essential workers), Hard to Count Populations, Non-Geographically Targeted Communities, and Department Identified Indicators.

Future strategies for data

There is a series of future tools and strategies the commission will continue adding to its racial equity toolbox, including but not limited to deepening our application of race conscious strategies in program evaluation. Improving administrative data collection and analysis within government entities should complement demographic or outcome data and create new pathways to examine how persistent disparities might be exacerbated by program design. Program evaluation is necessary to address the effectiveness of equitable deliverables and identify solutions to reduce disparities impacting communities. The pursuit of racial equity is an ongoing practice and program evaluation can be a guiding tool to measure outcomes and support progressive systematic change that ensure government entities are seeking to continuously improve how it serves Californians.

Last thoughts on data

The use of data informs policy decisions, program practices, and services to better address issues and improve solutions. Government entities should understand their own data practices and standards and where they may be able to strengthen their own practices to more accurately reflect the experiences of Californians through disaggregation, storytelling and geography. Identifying future measures and factors to affect policy and budget can include intersectional data collection, disaggregated data, equitable analysis or distribution of funds, understanding the relationship between demographic data and

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geographic location of communities to racial disparities. These data practices can better inform policy decisions and program design to better achieve equity.

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PRIORITY 3. Understanding **Budgets** and how it impacts Communities

Advancing equity within budgets requires leveraging tools and best practices that center data and community to inform investments, policies, services, and programs. Budget equity focuses on the allocation of public resources to ensure all communities have access to opportunities and services they need to thrive. The following strategies are part of the commission’s budget equity work and ensure access to opportunities that lead to widespread benefit.

STRATEGY 1: Questions to ask when evaluating new requests for program money and current program reach

Standardized budget equity questions embedded within the state’s budget change proposal (BCP) process would provide a structured way to inform internal assessment and evaluation. Standardized questions build upon existing guidance and provide the opportunity for further dialogue and reflection by program staff and government leaders. Additionally, leveraging data in the application of a budget equity worksheet during the budget process allows government entities to identify ways to improve resource strategies to be responsive to data regarding need and effectiveness. The application of equity questions within a budget process is critical at the state and local level to explore the benefits and/or burdens of budget decisions on communities and to ensure a fair and transparent budget process that focuses on meeting the needs of all taxpayers.

The incorporation of a series of standardized questions as part of the BCP by state government entities can inform the assessment of programs and initiatives under its authority. These questions encourage the use of data and community engagement to reflect the realities of communities throughout California. Embedding standardized questions into the BCP would provide decision-makers with the ability to better assess individual BCPs across the totality of requests. This drives success and learning through creating measurable indicators, outcomes, and impacts. Upholding budget equity demonstrates that government can advance programs that close gaps while maintaining efficient and effective government operations and fiscal solvency.

TOOL: Budget Equity Worksheet

Through the engagement of subject matter experts, the commission helped design a series of standard budget equity questions that can be incorporated into the state’s BCP as a Budget Equity Worksheet (toolbox 1.9). State government entities can respond to the questions in narrative form and should consult with program or equity subject matter experts on how to best respond to each question.

When gaps in service or disparities in access are identified through the BCP process or within other analyses, government entities should explore how to best close those gaps. This should include applying performance indicators to monitor after intervention and engaging in systematic community engagement or data collection to gather more information on the context that may contribute to the disparity. Trusted providers and community members can share information on why gaps persist, what programs or changes to existing programs are needed, and what additional investments can improve performance.

TOOL: Budget equity toolkit

The commission developed a Budget Equity Toolkit (toolbox 1.10) support the use of standardized budget tool. The tool provides sample responses to the questions as well as a case study on how a local jurisdiction applied a data-based framework to inform specific programmatic funding. The case study included with the toolkit is meant to articulate where government entities can evolve by applying equity indices to inform fiscal allocations.

STRATEGY 2: Understanding the state budget through tools that promote transparency and accountability

The state budget represents more than dollars; it is a statement of the state government's values and priorities. Decisions on which programs and services get funded and how taxpayer dollars are spent impact all Californians. Budget equity means applying an equity lens to every stage of the state budget process, moving beyond 'what's in the budget' to 'who benefits, who is left out, and how to fix it'. Without an equity lens or active participation, the process can unintentionally deepen racial disparities. Therefore, it is essential for state leaders to apply an equity lens to the state budget and for Californians to not only understand the state budget but also participate in the state budget process.

TOOL: Plain language overview of the state budget process

The development of a plain language one-pager would be a tool that explains the state budget process along with a brief timeline overview, resources, and public participation tips can help promote civic and community engagement in the budget process. It can also boost public trust through supporting residents' understanding of how funds are allocated and where they can provide informed input. Increasing access to information on how the state budget process works is foundational for state government entities to begin engaging communities more intentionally to inform and support the alignment of budget investments with community needs.

TOOL: Interactive web-based timeline of the state budget process

A live timeline of the budget cycle, updated as changes occur, would provide additional transparency on the budget process. The establishment of a web-based interactive timeline on the budget process can help support communities with understanding the real-time status of the budget process and visually see where they can be able to better engage in the process.

TOOL: User-friendly visuals budget charts

Many government entities have summary chapters that include categorized charts of how funds are allocated either through the initial proposal, modification, or final enactment. Categories include TK-12 Education, Higher Education, Climate Change and Environment, Health and Human Services, Housing and Homelessness, Criminal Justice and Judicial Branch, Labor and Workforce Development, and General Government and Statewide Issues. These static charts could be transformed into interactive charts or tables. In addition, including user-friendly visuals such as infographics or maps with the support of plain language explanations will promote civic engagement and understanding of a very complex policy process.

The commission is committed to collaborating with budget experts across government entities to help develop accessible documents and interactive web-based tools to increasing transparency and engagement with the budget process.

STRATEGY 3: Exploring how to best track how money is spent in community

Using equity indices to understand concentrated disadvantage and tracking how money is spent in those communities is essential to advancing racial equity. Budgets alone do not guarantee equitable outcomes; tracking spending builds accountability and ensures dollars reach the communities and programs they were intended for. In addition, tracking spending allows government to see if spending is closing disparities or reinforcing them. By tracking spending alongside results, government can measure improvements in access and outcomes. And when communities can see where funds are being spent (or not being spent), they can advocate for changes and participate in the budget process.

QUOTE FROM COMMUNITY RESIDENT

“We work, we pay taxes, but those tax dollars do not reach our community.”

TOOL: Data-driven tools to track spending

Government entities can work towards developing these interactive tools like a web-based equity index or spending tracker. One state agency has created a public facing dashboard

based on its efforts to be transparent in how transportation funds are spent in California: CalTrans’ “fix-it-first” program known as the SHOPP (State Highway Operation and Protection Program). The SHOPP project development begins with the identification of individual transportation needs which are bundled together into conceptual projects years before construction actually starts. This long-term process includes stakeholder engagement prior to the completion of formal project planning and the fiscal commitment of funds by the California Transportation Commission. Through a [web-based platform](#), the public can see how projects are prioritized and the many parts that go into improving our state highway system.

In collaboration with community organizations, Catalyst California released the [Los Angeles City Equity Index](#), which aims to guide equitable investment by illustrating disparities in access and opportunity across different neighborhoods in Los Angeles – highlighting communities with higher levels of need. According to Catalyst California, the index is grounded in lived community experiences and was developed through surveys and facilitated discussions, emphasizing that any equity tool should remain rooted in community voices. The Los Angeles City Equity Index serves as a powerful tool for aligning budget allocations with community needs in the following ways:

1. Mapping zip codes by community needs or challenges (e.g., pedestrian fatalities, early childhood education, rent burden, voter turnout, grocery store access, etc.) helps identify opportunities areas for interventions
2. Aligning spending by target area (e.g. safe environment, economic and opportunity, democracy and power, and longevity and vitality) to inform the interventions
3. Using the index as a baseline helps track progress over time and assess indicators to see if community conditions have improved
4. Keeping community input ongoing ensures work is community-centered, with feedback loops on implementation and outcomes from impacted residents

Government entities interested in working towards building indices to inform programs and services should have a clear understanding of existing data sources. In addition, government entities should seek technical assistance on selecting indicators that are relevant to program goals, combining indicators into a composite measure, and validating the index is reflective of what happens in community.

Future strategies for budget equity

There is a series of future tools and strategies the commission will continue adding to its racial equity toolbox, including but not limited to making it easier to work with organizations and businesses that support community (equitable contracting and procurement). To strengthen existing procurement practices in California with an equity lens, it’s essential to

make contracting and procurement more accessible and supportive of community-based organizations and businesses within the limits of federal and state law. One key approach includes simplifying certification processes for small businesses under the Department of General Services Certification Programs. Many small community or grass roots organizations face administrative barriers with limited staff and budget resources for consultants. Providing clear guidance, capacity building assistance, and outreach can help more small businesses get certified by the state and compete for contracts effectively.

Another critical area is improving access to capital. Small businesses often cannot meet upfront costs or bonding requirements, which may limit their participation or willingness to apply for contracts. By consistently offering upfront payments and helping with bonding and insurance, procurement practices can lower these financial barriers, enabling a broader range of small businesses to compete for state contracts. In a recent survey, [The Little Hoover Commission](#) recently learned that “upfront or advance payments, simplified application processes and reporting requirements, and higher indirect cost rates would ‘enhance’ the experience for non-profits working with the state.”

Developing standard practices in advance pay across state government entities is important to ensure all non-profit government contractors have a consistent experience when working across state government. In 2023, Governor Newsom signed [AB 590](#) into law, which allows nonprofit government contracts to be eligible for advance payments from state agencies. This policy advances access and equity for nonprofit and state government partnerships. With advance pay, nonprofit organizations will not have to float significant expenses until reimbursement to implement programming, which removes a barrier particularly for nonprofit organizations in marginalized communities.

Once community residents have better access to information about government budget processes, one strategy to explore moving towards is participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting, also a co-governance model, is a process in which community members directly decide how to spend a portion of a public budget. One place participatory budgeting is happening is [Vallejo](#). Vallejo residents and stakeholders develop project proposals, residents vote on projects, and the list of projects that receive the most votes are submitted to Vallejo City Council for consideration. Other governmental entities that implement participatory budgeting include Rhode Island, the City of Grand Rapids (MI), and the City of Boston (MA).

Last thoughts on budget equity

Budget equity strategies build upon community engagement and data tools, methodologies, and strategies described in previous sections of the framework. These strategies support transparency, user-friendly, visually appealing information to

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understand how government entities invest taxpayer dollars back into communities.

Working towards budget equity is crucial for fostering a fair, just, and thriving California. It ensures that all eligible Californians can contribute their fair share while benefiting from public programs and services. It requires helping communities understand government budget processes which strengthens public trust, building tools to ensure that funds create impact as authorized or directed, and exploring different approaches that prevent disadvantaged communities from bearing the burden of economic downturns.

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PRIORITY 4. Infrastructure to Help Create a California where All Can Thrive

A strong infrastructure is important to ensure the above tools, methodologies, and strategies are implemented with intention, flexibility, and consistency within and across government entities. Infrastructure ranges from specific “homes” for the work to subject matter experts. Infrastructure accounts for the foundational needs for state government entities to make racial equity real transform our systems to be learning and community centered.

STRATEGY 1: A statewide Office of Racial Equity

The establishment of an Office of Racial Equity can provide the necessary structure to support the implementation of the racial equity framework and the evaluation of the state’s progress to advancing racial equity and a California for All. In support of state government entities, an office a tool to support coordination across state government entities, build capacity through training and technical assistance, ensure alignment of state efforts with federal and state laws, and support self- and impact evaluation of racial equity efforts. The office should serve as a tool to connect equity efforts across state government entities. The commission has heard from advocates on the importance of the office as a tool for increased coordination across programs and services. Advocates have emphasized an office could serve as a centralized structure that can research best practices and challenges experienced by government entities with offices,

STRATEGY 2: Working in and across our organizations

There are many efforts happening across government entities working towards creating a more efficient and effective government with an equity centered lens, including the state’s first Chief Equity Officer within the Government Operations Agency (Gov-Ops). The positioning of equity work within an organizational structure is critical to ensure that the work is fully embedded. There is an opportunity to strengthen the breadth of the role to ensure consistent implementation and understanding of collective impact of each government entity’s contribution to ensuring a California for All with a racial equity lens.

There is a need for stronger coordination to ensure consistent communication on policy and legal considerations within the bounds of existing state and federal laws, as well as coordinating across and within government entities to support shared learning. The programs and services offered across a variety of agencies and departments, including in departments under different constitutional officers, may contribute to one or several key impact indicators and the only way to ensure government entities are moving in concert is the support and advancement of key equity indicators. To support better coordination and

collaboration across state government entities, a new or existing role could serve as a tool to address silos across government entities around coordinating and tracking racial equity activities and impact outcomes and streamlining communication.

To support better coordination within agencies and departments, executive leaders should consider establishing a team of subject matter experts with a deputy, director, or manager level leader within their own structure. This leader would be responsible for coordinating equity efforts within their respective structure and ensuring consistent communication. This leader would also be responsible for representing the government entity in regular convenings by a cabinet level or senior advisor leader. Executive and subject matter expert leaders should consider regular communication across their respective government entity on the importance and intersection of their organizational charge and equity. Clear and consistent demonstrations of leadership buy in will actively promote the commitment to fulfilling Executive Order N-16-22 through existing and future efforts of organizational teams.

STRATEGY 3: Making equity everyone's job

One consideration is how we include equity as part of the culture of the state within the duty statements of state employees. Duty statements describe the tasks, functions and responsibilities of a position and are essential to ensuring the success of government employees. Duty statements set clear expectations for the employee and the supervisor/manager, while also articulating the core values of the State and its subsequent government entities. Embedding equity into everyone's duty statement is a methodology that will support everyone seeing their role in ensuring all eligible Californians are fairly served and the application of an equity lens in doing so.

Adding Equity to Duty Statements

One way to embed equity into each duty statement for its employees which represents five-percent (5%) of their time being dedicated to participating in professional development trainings, as well as tasks and activities that support programmatic and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthering their commitment the agency emphasized its core values and commitment on each duty statement by reflecting,

“In all job functions, employees are responsible for creating an inclusive, safe and secure work environment that values diverse cultures, perspectives and experiences and is free from discrimination. Employees are expected to provide all members of the public equitable services and treatment, collaborate with underserved communities and tribal governments and work toward improving outcomes for all.”

STRATEGY 4: Moving from ideas and goals to action

Executive Order N-16-22 required equity to be embedded into agency and department strategic plans through fiscal year 2025-2026. Those strategic plans were to reflect the use of data and inclusive practices to advance equity and gather input from California communities that have been historically disadvantaged and underserved to inform the development or update of the strategic plans. Embedding equity into strategic plans into the future is important to continue to advance a California for All. Advancing racial equity should be included within each agency and department thinking about their own strategy to center equity more broadly across its programs and services. We recognize however that each government entity is at a different place, and it is important to support grounding government entities in the framework and tools to help them move their equity ideas and hopes into impactful actions. Government entities can use the strategies described throughout the framework to inform their action plans and strategies to achieve the equity goals outlined in their strategic plans.

Strategies to embed to Build Equity into Your Strategic Plan (ESRI, nd)

- 1. Understand your audience or eligible Californians, how they access programs and services, and key community organizations that can help you connect directly with customers/clients.**
- 2. Acknowledge that “one size does not fit all” and that place can impact access.**
- 3. Determine how you will monitor the reach of programs and services.**
- 4. Identify indicators to track impact and set benchmarks to support your journey.**

TOOL: Training government entities on the framework and advancing racial equity

One starting point to support is the establishment of a racial equity training or a primer, for government entities. This could be developed by the commission in partnership with subject matter experts. Some of the elements that should be included for a training or primer are (1) an introduction to the racial equity framework, (2) the role of government in addressing racial equity including opportunities for capacity building and technical assistance, (3) key terms, (4) state and federal legal considerations, and (5) the use of data to support quality improvement.

TOOL: Self-assess your government entity’s readiness

Another way to support moving from ideas to action is for government entities to conduct an equity readiness assessment. An equity readiness assessment is intended to help an organization self-identify where it is in its equity journey and articulate specific actions it

can take to lead to improved outcomes among overburdened communities (toolbox 1.11). A readiness assessment tool helps understand your current culture, informs change management strategies that may be unique to your organization, builds buy-in and ownership, and increases the likelihood of success and sustainability. Having a baseline can encourage dialogue among organizations to lead to greater understanding and commitment, as well as facilitate the coordination of information and resources in alignment with its strategic plan and with current federal and state laws (Eliminating Disparities in Child & Youth Success Collaborative, October 2013).

STRATEGY 5: Understanding impact of proposed actions

Part of advancing racial equity is to be willing to explore unintentional consequences that may be present in proposed policies, practices, programs and fiscal decisions (Race Forward, nd). Race Forward has composed a [series of questions](#) that should be considered to “anticipate, assess, and prevent” potential unintentional consequences of proposed actions. We have adapted these questions to be used when evaluating proposed policies or programs, or to inform fiscal decisions.

TOOL: Understanding racial equity impact on programs, services and policy

An impact assessment tool can be helpful for program staff to build scenarios to describe the potential impact if programs shift their scope or populations served. The tool should be used to help explore the impacts of proposed action. While questions like these may already be considered during the policymaking process, adapting a standard tool or series of questions will allow for a more consistent approach across decision-makers.

The policymaking process provides an important opportunity to explore the impacts of proposed and existing legislation. Individuals and government entities participating in the process should start with the racial equity impact analysis to develop, inform, and refine their decisions on policy proposals. It is also important to continue thinking through the questions included in the impact analysis throughout the policymaking process. The impact analysis questions should be applied as worksheet for decision-makers. Introducing an impact analysis would give decision-makers a clearer picture on the impacts and ensure that the information was grounded in data and with community.

Questions to Ask to Understand Impact of Proposed Action

Identify and engage key informants

What groups may be most affected by and concerned with issues related to this proposal? Have those most adversely affected been informed, experienced meaningful engagement on the issue, and been authentically represented in the proposal's development and refinement? Who is missing and should be engaged?

Identify inequities and understand the causes

What groups are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged? How are they affected differently? What data (qualitative or quantitative) documents the inequity? What information is missing or needed? What political, environmental, social, or technological factors may contribute to the inequities (e.g., PEST Analysis)? Does the proposal address root causes? If not, how could it?

Clarify the proposal purpose and consider adverse impacts

What does the proposal seek to accomplish? What impacts or unintended consequences could result from the policy or program? What groups could be negatively impacted and how could the negative impacts be prevented or minimized?

Advancing equitable impacts and alternatives

What positive impacts could result from this proposal? What groups could benefit? Are there other ways to maximize opportunities and positive impacts for all? Are there other ways to reduce inequity? What could be changed or added to ensure positive impacts that account for equitable impact?

Ensuring the proposal can become a reality and continue beyond the proposal

Is the proposal realistic, adequately funded to ensure successful implementation and evaluation? Does the proposal provide for ongoing evaluation, reporting, and community engagement? How will you know if it is successful and impactful?

In the [United Kingdom](#), all public authorities have a legal duty to assess proposed policies and practices on different groups and to take steps to advance equality and foster good community relationships using a systematic race equality impact assessment (Research Excellence Framework, 2025). The United Kingdom equality impact assessment is a systemic process for examining a policy, project or service to determine if it could create disadvantages. If disadvantages could be created, changes would be recommended then

implemented to ensure fairness and advance opportunity for all. In 2008, Iowa passed the first racial impact statement measure ([HF2393](#)) which allows policymakers to assess the racial impact of proposed changes to sentencing and parole policies within the criminal justice system. In 2021, Maine lawmakers authorized a racial impact statement policy ([LD 2](#)) requiring the state’s legislative council to conduct a study to determine the best strategy to establish and implement a racial impact statement policy for legislation. Also in 2021, The California State Assembly adopted [House Resolution 39](#) (Gipson) which committed the assembly to “explore methods to integrate equity more formally into its daily activities, including the potential adoption of equity impact analysis into the existing committee and floor bill analysis process.”

Future strategies for organizational infrastructure

There is a series of future tools and strategies the commission will continue adding to its racial equity toolbox, including but not limited to funding equity within government entities and strengthening government workforce pathways that reflect California. One resourcing strategy to research is the “pooling” or “braiding” of funds and creating efficiencies to support racial equity efforts in state agencies and departments. Government entities may have flexibility within their operating and program budgets that can support a more sustainable funding source for equity efforts.

Last thoughts on organizational infrastructure

The use of tools and methodologies without infrastructure creates risk for racial equity not being fully integrated into government systems. It must be considered to ensure successful implementation and our collective efforts to counteract systemic inequities.

Key Takeaways for Building the Framework for your Organization

- **Center Community in Governance:** Build trust through reciprocal, ongoing engagement, and informed decision-making with historically marginalized communities.
- **Ensure Access and Accountability:** Use plain language, provide language access, and create tools that make government processes understandable and participatory for all Californians.
- **Use Data with Depth and Humanity:** Disaggregate data, pair it with storytelling, and apply equity mapping tools to uncover root causes and inform solutions.
- **Make Budgets Reflect Equity:** Apply budget equity tools, track spending outcomes, and ensure transparency so that public funds close gaps rather than widen them.
- **Build Inclusive Infrastructure:** Institutionalize equity through strategic plans, job descriptions, and leveraging a dedicated office and team to coordinate efforts and ensure sustainability.

Part 2 – Delivering Real Results that Matter

PRIORITY 1: Helping Leaders Shift Mindsets, Behaviors, and Habits to Successfully Advance Racial Equity

Organizational culture change is most successful when there is demonstrated buy-in throughout an organization and especially from senior leadership. To prepare government entities for cultural shifts like using racial equity tools and embedding racial equity strategies, organizations must prepare their staff by clearly identifying the impact of racial inequity within the scope of their organization’s programs and services. In addition, government entities must build awareness of why change is needed and the root causes of inequities. The more buy-in a government entity can achieve, the easier implementation of the tools and strategies will be for organizations. Building buy-in across an organization can take time and requires meeting employees where they are – including being willing to lean into difficult conversation and not have all the answers but always encouraging curiosity. Managing organizational change can be challenging as it is not a linear path, and there may be competing interests and priorities that must be balanced.

In a literature review (toolbox 2.1) developed for the commission, the University of California, Berkeley Possibility Lab identified key elements of effective organizational change to advance equity across government entities.

Key Elements of Effective Organizational Change to Advance Equity Across Government Entities

- Vision for change
- Readiness for change
- Implementing change
- Evaluating change

In support of the key elements, clear communication on the purpose and urgency of the desired change is necessary. Executive Order N-16-22 lays out the purpose and urgency for advancing equity in California, however government entities should be more explicit on how inequities impact those who use or receive their services and participate in their programs. Support for government employees getting ready to shift in a new direction with support from leadership requires safe spaces for learning and processes to understand the effectiveness of change.

STRATEGY 1: Figuring out where to start on your journey

It is critical for government entities to figure out where to start in their racial equity journey, not only to do the work effectively, but also due to the complex, highly visible spaces in which they operate. Public trust and use of public resources as well as compliance with current state and federal laws are important factors for government entities to consider when identifying a starting point to advance racial equity.

TOOL: Understanding your organization's infrastructure to advance equity

Whether a government entity is just getting started or has been engaged in this work for several years, there are tools, strategies and approaches for every level. One California agency developed a [Virtual Equity Toolkit](#) to support local jurisdictions with building out an equity infrastructure within their respective jurisdictions. The toolkit includes an [Annual Organizational Assessment for Equity Infrastructure](#), an overview of 12 competencies on equity infrastructure, with definitions, examples, resources, and spotlights for each competency. The goal of this toolkit is to help users identify the best-fit starting point, with the resources divided into the following phases for each competency – Early, Established, and Strong (Figure 2).

Early		Established		Strong	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Not yet, or learning stage	Planned but not started or in initial/pilot stages of implementation	Working towards this but not fully achieved	Fully achieved	In place with evidence of its use (e.g., policies, procedures, robust evaluation plan)	Practices are sustainable and ongoing and may be shared with others as “best practices”

Figure 2: Scale for the Organizational Assessment for Equity Infrastructure

STRATEGY 2: Ensure people feel comfortable speaking up, sharing ideas, asking questions or admitting mistakes

Psychological safety describes a [workplace] environment of low interpersonal fear and a shared expectation within a team that employees will not be shamed, rejected, or punished for sharing ideas, taking risks, asking questions, or seeking feedback.

Psychological safety is a shared responsibility within agencies and departments, and between leaders and employees (CalHR, 2019). To create psychological safety in government entities, it may require the adaptation of restorative strategies previously described under community engagement that acknowledge the lived experience of employees, including cumulative and persistent discrimination.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The CalHR DEIA Office has listed five best practices for psychological safety in the workplace.

- **Define Psychological Safety:** Define psychological safety in the organization. Create guidelines that align with organizational policies. Base meetings and workplace interactions on them.
- **Illustrate with Practical Examples:** Provide real examples. Encourage open communication, acknowledge mistakes without blame, and promote diverse perspectives without interpersonal labeling.
- **Prioritize psychological safety at work:** Reinforce it to keep the staff aware.
- **Develop Core Competencies:** Employees can learn to foster safety. They can do this through practice and continuous improvement.
- **Train and Evaluate Leadership:** Conduct training on making and keeping psychological safety.

Many civil servants and servant leaders experience heaviness while working to make California a better place. Government organizations can also explore training and coaching that center concepts like [trauma stewardship](#) which can help employees understand how to manage work that can feel overwhelming and traumatic.

STRATEGY 3: Following the law, protecting against discrimination and navigating the unknown or the unclear

Following federal and state laws are important to protect the programs and services government entities provide. There are often many questions of how current law impacts programs and services – specifically what you can and cannot do related to racial equity. There are three primary laws that we must pay attention to when advancing racial equity within government entities: California Proposition 209, the Equal Protection Clauses of the California and U.S. Constitutions, and the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964. Other California civil rights laws play a significant role as well, including the Fair Employment and Housing Act (Gov. Code, § 12900 et seq.), the Bias Free Government Funded State Services & Programs Law (Gov. Code, § 11135), and the Unruh Civil Rights Act (Civ. Code, § 51).

In 1996, California voters passed [Proposition 209](#). This law eliminated affirmative action programs in public education, public contracting, and employment to prohibit preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, nationality, or ethnicity.

The [Equal Protection Clause](#), within the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, ensures that states cannot deny any person within their jurisdiction equal protection under the law. In other words, it says that government must treat people in similar situations the same way and that it cannot unfairly treat someone differently because of race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. California’s constitution mirrors these protections. The Equal Protection Clause is vital and serves as a cornerstone of civil rights and its principles – promoting equality and ensuring the promise of equal protection for all. The [Civil Rights Act](#) is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or nationality in, among other things, employment and public accommodations (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

Advancing racial equity consistent with these laws requires implementing approaches and strategies that do not include racial classifications yet still address systemic inequities and disparities. Government entities interested in more specific strategies to address structural racism in sectors such as health, economic justice, and criminal justice should check out [The Structural Racism Remedies Repository](#) by the Othering and Belonging Institute. The repository features recommended strategies that are “race-neutral” which can allow for a universal approach that benefits all.

During its public meetings, the commission received guidance on Proposition 209 and race-neutral strategies from the University of California at Berkeley School of Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, Attorney and former California Reparations Taskforce Member Lisa Holder, and the Othering and Belonging Institute’s [Stephen Menendian](#). These conversations underscored the opportunity demographic data provides to inform race-neutral strategies. The gathering, collection, organizing, analyzing, tracking, and monitoring of data involving race is not prohibited as there is not a benefit or burden to individuals who are labeled based on race. Another strategy is process-based policies such as providing learning opportunities, including training or lectures to provide more information about root causes of inequities as they do not use racial classifications. At our March 2024 commission meeting, Lisa Holder introduced a remedies cake to demonstrate opportunities to move racial equity efforts in iterative phases and allow for systematic review (toolbox 2.2).

STRATEGY 4: Making sure government is improving and sharing its process and progress

As state government entities move their racial equity work forward, it is critical to share progress towards their goals and objectives with policymakers, senior leadership, and communities or clients that benefit from programs and services. To achieve this, state agencies and departments must identify clear roles, measurable goals, a process for

tracking progress and evaluation, and a plan for quality improvement and/or corrective action. In addition, state government entities must also have a system and process for sharing their plan, progress, and results. Government entities can do this with annual agency reports based on their current strategic plans or setting SMART goals that can measure change through existing data sources. SMART goals is a framework for setting clear and attainable objectives by ensuring they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound ([University of California Office of the President, 2017](#)).

DRAFT

PRIORITY 2: Helping Staff Build Skills, Knowledge, and Experience

STRATEGY 1: Teaching basics on the framework and racial equity

The framework contains different components to support government entities with the advancement or launching of racial equity tools, methodologies, and strategies. For racial equity to be woven into systems and organizational practices, the framework will need to have an accompanying training to break down how to use the framework as a guide implementing racial equity initiatives and strategies. The training will position government entities to effectively institutionalize and operationalize racial equity while centering community.

Training can be a starting point for organizations to learn more about opportunities to advance racial equity. It can also help identify gaps or challenges to support systems change and organizational shifts. Training can be foundational or targeted with topics such as bias, understanding root causes, or cultural humility. It is important to pair learnings from training with the use of tools and implementation of strategies to continue ongoing commitment to systemizing and operationalizing racial equity. In addition to training, continuing to develop and improve racial equity tools and methodologies can respond to the needs of both government entities and community. When developing equity tools, it's important to keep community at the heart of technical assistance by including simple language and making the tool available and accessible for any audience to reference and understand. These tools can be helpful in making organizational shifts to embed equity into best practices.

STRATEGY 2: Building best practices and lessons learned through working groups and learning communities

Identifying best practices to further develop racial equity strategies is required to make racial equity work sustainable and long standing. Working groups provide opportunities to test, practice, and learn how to improve racial equity practices and to better inform proposals. Community or stakeholder engagement spaces can also share lessons learned to improve efforts to effectively center community and their needs from securing interpretation for language support, translating meeting materials, writing documents or any public facing information in simple language, making information available for those with disabilities, ensuring events and location spaces are accessible and available, and more.

STRATEGY 3: Focusing on communities facing multiple challenges helps address everyone’s challenges

Targeted Universalism is a powerful approach to advance racial equity because it combines a shared vision with tailored solutions, ensuring no one is left behind while everyone moves forward. Instead of one-size-fits-all policies and programs, Targeted Universalism designs universal goals that are achieved through targeted intervention strategies that address structural barriers that disproportionately impact specific communities. With targeted universalism, focusing on communities facing multiple, overlapping challenges not only improve outcomes, but it also often creates broader benefits that improve systems and outcomes for everyone (Othering & Belonging Institute, 2021). The Othering and Belonging has shared an overview of Targeted Universalism with the Racial Equity Commission. The Targeted Universalism overview (toolbox 2.3) includes exercises for government entities to practice on how to apply the approach in their sector.

Universal goals avoid the false narrative that helping one community takes away from another community, and by implementing targeted strategies for those facing multiple barriers, the deepest flaws in systems that ultimately affect everyone can be identified and addressed. With Targeted Universalism, everyone benefits. By focusing on those facing multiple, compounding challenges, targeted universalism addresses the root problems in systems, creating solutions that lift everyone.

Five Steps to “do” Targeted Universalism

1. Establish a universal goal based upon a broadly shared recognition of a societal problem and collective aspirations.
2. Assess the general population performance relative to the universal goal.
3. Identify groups and places that are performing differently with respect to the goal and the overall population. Groups should be disaggregated.
4. Assess and understand the structures and conditions that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal.
5. Develop and implement targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal.

STRATEGY 4: Finding experts around us to help build our programs

Resourcing our own subject matter experts and staff is critical to supporting the advancement of racial equity within our systems to create a substantive impact. This should include establishing a “one-stop-shop” for resources and facilitating connections to

subject matter experts to provide individual and group coaching for government entities implementing the framework. Identifying subject matter experts is critical to supporting implementation strategies for racial equity. Subject matter experts can be found in a range of different fields from academia, advocacy organizations, community spaces, equity experts, and more. Subject matter experts will have experience working and/or studying systems change, structural inequities, an understanding of how intersectionality is present in disparities, or be familiar with issues of discrimination. Subject matter experts can help identify and operationalize solutions or build programs to combat racial inequities through policy development, networking to support building partnerships with other subject matter experts, program designs or creating racial equity initiatives.

The Strategic Growth Council (SGC) has a [racial equity resource library](#) that contains different tools and resources to support racial equity work. The resource library includes a Racial Equity Toolkit developed by the Government Alliance of Race and Equity (GARE) (Brooks, Lisa and Nelson, Julie, December 2016) to help inform racial equity policies, practices, decisions, budgets, and programs. The Racial Equity Toolkit supports strategy development and actionable practices to mitigate racial inequities and in this way policies and programs are informed and implemented by racial equity.

Future strategies on delivering results that matter

There is a series of future tools and strategies the commission will continue adding to its racial equity toolbox, including but not limited to building a technical assistance and training plan and launching a statewide equity summit to share best practices across government entities.

A technical assistance plan and training will be developed to support agencies implementing racial equity tools, methodologies, and strategies. Future training will guide users on how to use the framework and either begin or start forming equity strategies. The technical assistance plan may include components of strategic planning support, impact analysis, and highlighting tools for institutionalizing racial equity.

Hosting a statewide equity summit could bring together champions and highlight best practices to implement and strategize racial equity for systems change. The summit could be annual and be a learning space for practitioners and learners to better understand how to implement and advance racial equity to address racial disparities and identify solutions to benefit everyone.

PRIORITY 3: Finding Ways to Make California Better for All through Evaluation

Evaluation is essential to ensuring an efficient and effective government by providing systematic evidence on the performance of programs, policies, initiatives, and activities. Strong evaluation practices help identify opportunities for improvement, promote best practices, and support informed decision-making. This creates a culture of learning within a government that is committed to ensuring efficient, effective, and accessible programs and services.

To inform the development of the framework, the commission worked with the Possibility Lab at UC Berkeley to conduct an asset analysis of the current strategies being implemented by government entities (toolbox 2.4) and the State of Equity to identify case studies of equity work in state government (toolbox 2.5). Findings indicated that government entities need clear expectations and accountability mechanisms, and tailored support to implement equity measures effectively (Possibility Lab, 2025). Research further shows that public-facing frameworks often lack robust evaluation plans, leading to inconsistent implementation and limited long-term impact (American Evaluation Association, 2019). Without a structured evaluation strategy, the effectiveness of the framework may be undermined. To ensure the framework's success and sustainability, the commission seeks to embed a cohesive evaluation strategy that will (1) measure what works and identify areas for improvement; (2) establish quality improvement mechanisms to track progress; and (3) provide government entities with clear implementation and evaluation guidelines to strengthen and sustain their equity efforts.

STRATEGY 1: Improving our programs through information and learning from community

Self-evaluation is a mechanism to monitor internal performance, implement quality improvement strategies to improve effectiveness and efficiency, while also strengthening internal accountability, or being able to explain and own outcomes while also promoting public facing information sharing that is easy to understand. Providing space for government entities to self-evaluate and monitor their own progress is important to foster a learning environment that demonstrates a commitment to improving how government operates and its impact.

The commission will develop a self-evaluation in partnership with an external evaluation team based on a systemic literature review of measures that help support organizational change with the implementation of the framework while allowing state government entities

the flexibility necessary to identify and monitor their own metrics of success. A cohort of key subject matter experts should be convened to discuss self-evaluation metrics and strategy with ongoing engagement to allow the commission to review and refine the metrics or strategy as needed. The self-evaluation can build upon the community engagement strategies articulated above to ensure communities served are engaged and are benefiting from government programs and services. Government entities should pursue academic partnerships to support self-evaluation and ensure that evaluating its progress is connected to existing reporting requirements and evaluation strategies.

STRATEGY 2: What is working in or missing from the framework, and what can be better

In partnership with an external evaluation team, the commission will develop an evaluation strategy and conduct at least one round of evaluation of the impact of the implementation of the framework. The evaluation will use both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand technical assistance needs – or what is working or needed to support advancing racial equity, assess effectiveness of the framework, track adoption of tools and strategies, and understand progress made towards changes in policy, practice, and community. The evaluation of framework impact will support the commission in having a better understanding of how to support government entities on their racial equity journeys while also understanding how and where impact has been greatest.

STRATEGY 3: Tracking impact annually and adding to our toolbox

In partnership with an external evaluation team, the commission will host workshops with subject matter experts and community to identify key impact indicators to track over time. Key indicators will come from existing data sources to support the monitoring of progress in advancing racial equity across government entities. The commission is required to publish an annual report beginning in December 2026. The 2026 report will include an overview of key indicators, how the indicators were selected, and most current data. Communities throughout the state will be engaged on the impact indicators through the commission's public meetings. The commission will continue to identify and refine tools and strategies and add them to its annual report. In addition, the commission will issue annual reports through that track the selected indicators and learnings from communities throughout California.

Future strategies for evaluation

There is a series of future tools and strategies the commission will continue adding to its racial equity toolbox, including looking at models like Results-Based Accountability which encourages entities to strengthen their planning, managing and measuring of programs

and services by focusing on the end results. An organization called Equity and Results has developed content on how to apply [results-based accountability with a racial equity lens](#).

In shifting focus from activities to outcomes, applying this model asks:

- How much are we doing? (e.g., of people served, regions served, etc.)
- How well are we doing it? (e.g., quality of services and programs – were they timely, accessible, and responsive to needs.)
- Are Californians better off? (e.g., are the programs and services doing what it needs to do to ensure a consumer or client is better off).

The commission may look at agencies and departments already using the model and how it has supported success. The commission may also look at how the Results-Based Accountability framework could be adopted to support the government entities' context that better aligns with existing processes, metrics, and other system-wide goals and strategies that are regularly monitored.

Key Takeaways for Delivering Real Results that Matter

- **Leadership Commitment is Essential:** Organizational change starts with leaders who model equity, assess readiness, create psychologically safe environments while staying within applicable legal boundaries.
- **Build Staff Capacity Through Learning:** Foundational training, peer learning spaces, and the use of targeted universalism help staff apply equity in their daily work.
- **Start Where You Are, Grow Strategically:** Agencies should assess their current efforts and infrastructure to identify the best entry points for embedding racial equity.
- **Evaluate with Community and Purpose:** Use both data and lived experience to measure progress, identify gaps, and improve services through self-evaluation and external assessments.
- **Ensure Transparency and Accountability:** The commission will track key equity indicators over time, publish annual reports and maintain public trust.

Part 3 – Our Historic Journey with California

Race and the Breadth of Who We Are

Disparities across racial and ethnic groups in lifespan, wealth, employment, education opportunities, health care, the legal system, and more are persistent in California. It is widely documented in communities' lived experience, data and research. Racial inequities have been woven into basic systems, beliefs, and organizations within our society. These inequities continue to produce harm even as progress has been made. The commission is uplifting tools and strategies to help repair and/or fix government structures and systems that contribute to unfair results based on race because we believe this is necessary to create equity for communities throughout California. We must name the problem and challenges associated with racial inequities and disparities so we can address them.

By leading with the lens of race, it helps government entities better understand people's experiences and their outcomes. Intersectionality allows us to learn how our different and overlapping identities and experiences impact us as individuals and as communities. This is about recognizing the complexity of who we are as individuals and as communities and how we are, in fact, connected. To understand intersectionality, we must begin to see how age, gender, income, education level, language, ability/disability, place of birth or newcomer status and more, when combined with race, can lead to disparate outcomes. Seeing our collective intersectionality is critical for the advancement of racial equity -- allowing policy solutions to better address the complexities of inequities impacting the communities we serve.

Standing in the Light

The pathway to address historical wrongs has never been paved or straight. This moment calls for collective and resilient action. We must be willing to acknowledge and repair past harm, while making sure we do not cause further harm. We must be willing to choose differently – the choice to read this framework as a whole or by sections is a small choice that can have significant impacts on the communities we serve throughout California. We have an opportunity to continue to learn from each other and strengthen our relationships with community – this benefits all. This year, our state has been leading from the front on the protection of civil and human rights. Working with your experts and legal counsel with an asset-focused mindset is necessary for this moment and securing our state's legacy moving forward. We are all called to stand in the light and move forward in the name of humanity and democracy.

How Did We Get Here?

Advancing racial equity in California had a long journey to lead to the establishment of the Racial Equity Commission and this framework. From the work of the [Health in All Policies Taskforce](#) (Executive Order S-04-10) to the widespread advocacy and foundational efforts of [Senate Bill 17 \(Pan\)](#). This also includes the restorative efforts of [AB 2710 \(Johnston\)](#), the [Truth and Healing Council \(Executive Order N-15-19\)](#), former Assemblymember and current California Secretary of State, Dr. Shirley Weber and the [AB 3121 Reparations Taskforce](#). The commission stands on the shoulders of social justice champions and advocates, policymakers, and communities committed to addressing historical wrongs against specific communities because of race or place of origin.

On September 13, 2022, Governor Newsom solidified the state's commitment to a California for All through [Executive Order N-16-22](#) by directing state agencies to take action on equity and discrimination, and establishing the state's first Racial Equity Commission. Recognizing the need to drive cultural shifts and policy changes towards a just and equitable society, the Governor charged the commission with producing a racial equity framework that includes resources, tools, and strategies to advance racial equity and address structural racism. The 11-member commission is available to provide technical assistance to agencies and departments at the state and local level, as well as ensure community is part of the iterative process it will take to undo the disproportionate disparities that impact historically underserved and marginalized communities. Driving equity through policy and systems change will be a long journey, however the framework presented in this document will build upon previous efforts and drive future transformation to ensure all Californians can reach their full potential and thrive.

Planning and executing meetings is never an easy task but an important one to ensure a transparent process as the commission worked to develop the framework. From day one, the commission has been committed to meeting communities where they are and ensuring accessibility to public meetings and the opportunity to engage and inform the work of the commission. Throughout this process, we learned a lot about language access, working with partners to ensure community was compensated for their time and sharing of their lived experiences. Many of the lessons learned confirmed best practices presented in this framework.

The commission hosted its inaugural meeting on January 24, 2024, in Sacramento. Since then, the commission has hosted public and community-centered meetings in Lamont, Delano, Los Angeles, Riverside, Oakland, Martinez, Yuba City, Fresno, Bakersfield, El Centro, Salinas, Brawley, and Klamath. In July and August 2025, staff returned to six communities previously visited to share back what was learned from community and detail

how it was considered in the development of the framework. The commission believes in developing ongoing relationships with every community it visits to ensure transparency, accountability, and that we are receiving community wisdom to help course correct efforts to advance racial equity.

What are Communities Saying?

The commission has visited many different regions throughout the state and heard many stories from residents during community meet-n-greets and listening sessions. While the personal stories were unique, residents from different communities often shared similar concerns and challenges. Several common themes emerged from community input and feedback across California (Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure 3. Common Themes from Communities throughout California, 2024-2025

Across several regions throughout the state, community members raised concerns about unmet basic needs, particularly the lack of affordable, quality housing, healthcare access for marginalized groups, and transportation barriers in rural areas. Economic inequity was a recurring theme, with residents citing the high cost of living, low wages, limited job opportunities, and the need for targeted job training, especially for youth, women, and undocumented individuals. Education was seen as a pathway to equity and justice for many communities. Language barriers were identified as major obstacles to accessing healthcare, legal aid, and public benefits, prompting recommendations for plain-language policies and expanded translation services.

Community members also voiced frustration with underrepresentation in policymaking and called for participatory governance, civic education, and immigrant inclusion. Racism – especially against farmworkers, immigrants, and marginalized racial groups – was reported as pervasive in policing, education, and health systems, compounded by historical traumas and cultural inequities. Youth expressed a strong desire for leadership pathways, safe spaces, and opportunities for peer advocacy, showing readiness to lead change. Faith-based institutions emerged as trusted hubs for healing and organizing, while storytelling was recognized as a powerful means of building solidarity and driving structural

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reform. Community members throughout the state continue to reaffirm many of the priorities identified in past engagements, with additional emphasis on addressing mental health. Language access remained a consistent need, with many residents relying on trusted organizations, community leaders, family, religious settings, and peers for information, alongside traditional outlets such as social media, news channels, and radio.

Returning to communities brought a sense of continuity to the efforts of the commission, residents remembered the commission’s earlier visits and welcomed the opportunity to build on prior conversations. Community members across all locations emphasized their eagerness to participate in shaping solutions and their desire for stronger connections with government leaders. In Fresno, where interpretation was provided in five languages, a Hmong interpreter noted that in all their years of service they had never witnessed such a large and engaged gathering, underscoring both the deep commitment to be involved and the importance of maintaining open channels for community engagement. Their input will continue to inform the commission’s work. Summaries of our engagement with community are available in toolbox 3.1.

Voices from Antelope Valley, Delano, Fresno,
Imperial, Lamont, Oakland, Riverside,
Sacramento, Salinas, and Yuba City



Figure 4. State Summary Graphic Design for the 2025 Roadshow

What Values Guide our Commission and our Pathway for Success

The commission’s values (Figure 5) are intended to guide the priorities of their work as a public advisory body and inform each step of the process outlined in the model for transformation (Figure 6). The commission approved these values in December 2024 after research and discussion on what elements were important to keep in mind as it responded to its charged articulated in Executive Order N-16-22.



Figure 5. California Racial Equity Commission Values

These seven values lie at the center of the model for transformation and provide a foundation for the commission’s actions. They are inspirational, aspirational, and operational. For example, as the commission’s staff has been charged to provide technical assistance to state agencies and local governments in a manner aligned with state and federal civil rights laws. This assistance can still be done well in a way that advances equity and racial justice, centers community and lived experiences, ensures intentional collaboration, encourages data-driven decision-making, and prevents and addresses historical wrongs.

To further guide the work of this commission and the state’s implementation of the framework, the model for transformation was developed by synthesizing existing racial equity work and through an iterative refinement process with the commission and staff. The commission’s values, activities, and collaborative efforts have provided the foundation for government entities to use the tools and strategies in this framework, strengthen relationships with community, receive support to advance equity, and ensure community voices are captured and reflected in ongoing engagement. It moves us to a collective vision, “A California for All, where every resident can live and thrive to their fullest potential.”

The Model for Transformation is grounded in a set of guiding beliefs:

1. By aiming to shift the structural conditions that uphold racial inequities, the commission can influence systems change. Impacting and transforming systems will take time and require persistent and ongoing efforts to sustain equity and racial justice for the long term.
2. Given that marginalized communities largely continue to be excluded from policy decision-making and other governmental practices, the commission's charge is to explicitly engage community. The commission's intention is that over time, power can be shifted to communities.
3. As the commission does its work, being accountable to the public is important. Accountability and transparency will be spotlighted through public meetings and regular progress and annual reports.
4. Providing practical strategies for implementation is important so that Californians can see a real positive difference in their lives.

As an advisory body, the commission is positioned to inform structural change through its development of the racial equity framework, provision of technical assistance to state and local government entities, and ongoing community engagement. Its efforts to articulate tools, methodologies, and strategies to be implemented and embedded within existing government structures lay the groundwork for broader systemic transformation in California.

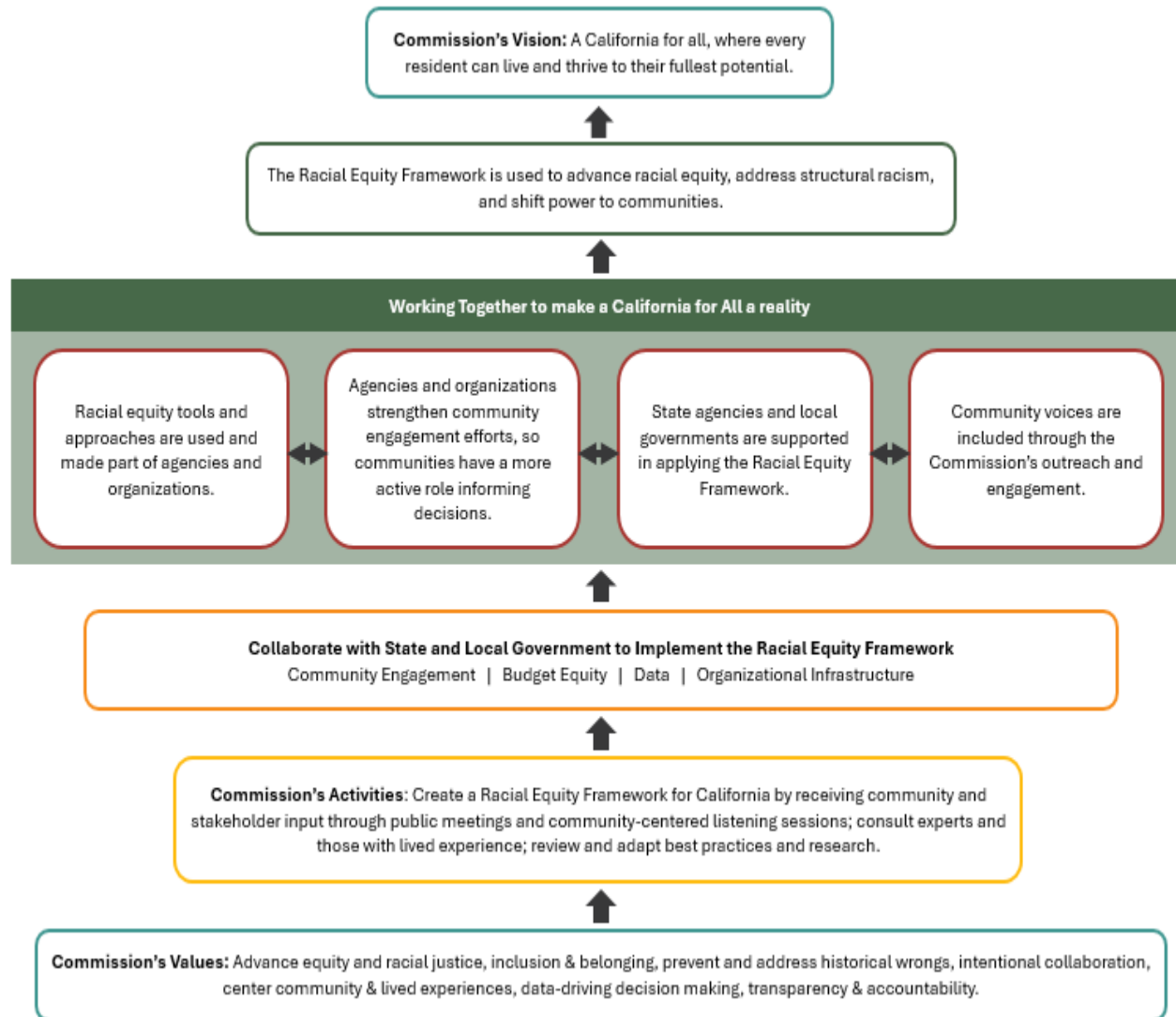


Figure 6. California Racial Equity Commission Model for Transformation

Part 4 – A Hopeful Vision

The Importance of This Journey

The framework we have presented here is one of many steps needed to challenge and resist what we are experiencing by those who benefit from existing power structures. The framework aims to fix and strengthen systems that ensure equitable access to government programs and services for all Californians. The framework intends to position government entities to take that first or next step to build upon their existing efforts. The framework encourages curiosity, dialogue, and openness to learning. Everyone has a role in taking small steps forward through the framework. Through our collective and strategic efforts, we will position California to adequately address persistent disparities and/or understand when to shift our strategy in the name of community, equity, and justice.

Advancing racial equity and addressing structural racism does not start nor stop with the development and use of tools. It will take time. We cannot simplify advancing racial equity into something as simple as following instructions or a check list. It requires relational change – relationships and connections within ourselves, with others, and especially with the communities that we serve. It is a journey – not a straightforward path but one with many ups and downs, curves and blind spots. It will involve challenging harmful narratives and constructing new narratives that center human dignity for all and focusing on a collective vision for a just and equitable society.

Much of this journey is exploring the shifts necessary to center what it takes to achieve a California for All, where every resident can live and thrive to their fullest potential. Through deep community engagement and keeping community at the heart, the framework challenges harmful narratives about community, promote understanding, and build public consensus for the changes necessary to help individuals, families and communities in California thrive. A list of the resources that we used to inform the framework is available in toolbox 4.1.

What's Next for the Commission

Government entities can start implementing the tools and best practices and reviewing the resources shared throughout the framework and the toolbox. In addition to developing the framework, the commission is also charged with helping government entities in the state and in local communities with building and using tools and strategies to advance racial equity. The commission is interested in building additional tools from this framework that support its implementation but also continuing to be transparent and accountable with community by sharing its ongoing progress. The commission may build a short brief or

brochure that outlines the framework for community. The commission may also build a training primer for government entities on the basics of the framework, how it should be used, and opportunities to either jumpstart or take existing efforts to the next level. The commission has also been charged with preparing an annual report beginning in 2026. The commission reports will summarize feedback from community engagement efforts, provide data on racial inequities and disparities in the state, and recommend additional best practices, tools, methodologies, and opportunities to advance racial equity.

Over the next 12 months, the commission will build a cohesive technical assistance strategy and evaluation strategy to support the use of the framework among government entities. The commission will review its bylaws and determine if any updates are necessary to support its ongoing function, including sunseting and/or adopting new committees. The commission will identify and prioritize additional tools and methodologies to expand the toolbox and grow the framework. This may include refining existing content as well building new or adapting tools that are outlined as future strategies in Part I and II of the framework. The commission will continue to engage communities on at least a quarterly basis through public meetings, community meet-n-greets and listening sessions.

The commission is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2030. The commission is committed to providing tools, methodologies, strategies, and technical assistance through this date, ensuring that it provides guidance that centers community with intention, is sustainable and impactful. Advancing racial equity will be an ongoing journey that will help our state provide better and more responsive programs and services to ensure all Californians can thrive.

Racial Equity Toolbox (Appendix – list only)

Part 1. Building the Framework for your Organization

- 1.1 Executive Order N-16-22
- 1.2 Restorative Justice Memo and Toolkit by Global Urban Strategies
- 1.3 Department of Aging, Equity Advisory Committee on Aging and Disability, General Best Practices and Rules for Creating an Accessible Document
- 1.4 Plain Language Checklist by Vital Research
- 1.5 Racial Equity Commission’s Community Engagement Plan
- 1.6 Racial Equity Commission’s Community Engagement Toolkit
- 1.7 Racial Equity Commission Community Acknowledgement
- 1.8 Data Disaggregation Brief by Vital Research
- 1.9 Budget Equity Worksheet
- 1.10 Budget Equity Toolkit
- 1.11 Readiness Assessment by Possibility Lab at UC Berkeley

Part 2. Delivering Real Results that Matter

- 2.1 Tools for Organization Change (Literature Review) by Possibility Lab at UC Berkeley
- 2.2 Race-Conscious Remedies Cake by Lisa Holder
- 2.3 Targeted Universalism Overview by The Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley
- 2.4 Asset Analysis by Possibility Lab at UC Berkeley
- 2.5 Case Studies by the State of Equity

Part 3. Our Historic Journey with California

- 3.1 Racial Equity Committee Community Meet-n-Greet Reports and Graphic Notes 2024-2025

Part 4. A Hopeful Vision

- 4.1 References