



Section 5: Community Partnership

AT THE HEART OF A TRANSFORMED GOVERNMENT lies a different relationship with the people it serves. Communities most impacted by racial inequities are needed to shape the government's housing work and to drive the change that can make a housing justice agenda a reality. Fortunately, equitable engagement frameworks and practices exist to help guide the long-term work of government building accountable working relationships with communities impacted by housing injustices.

Framework for Long-term Community and Government Relationships

KEY TERM

Inside/outside

Establishing partnerships between equity practitioners in government and communities experiencing systemic racism to guide and accelerate the process of transforming housing and planning agencies to advance racial equity.

(source: GARE [training](#) materials)

The Toolbox's definition of housing justice describes it as both a process and outcome that centers the experience of communities experiencing systemic racism. The process includes both short-term participation in specific policy and planning processes as well as long-term accountable relationship building for systems change. External attention from communities coupled with internal capacity of equity practitioners—as well as open lines of communication between the two—raises the visibility of racial equity issues and may motivate government leaders to act.

The productive tension has historically been expressed through community organizing and advocacy which will continue to play an important role. However as local jurisdictions have grown their capacity to partner with communities experiencing housing injustice, those communities have taken more of a leadership role in determining what the right solution is, rather

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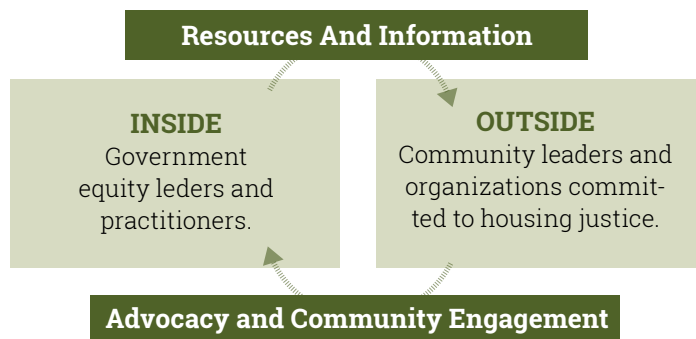
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A Toolbox For
Racial Equity
Practitioners In
Government

than only being voices for defining the problem. Thus, the productive tension can start with opposition to a government action, but it can also transition to an accountable and solutions-oriented relationship.

In early stages, such relationships may be informal and focus on individual policies and plans but can deepen and become more formal and accountable over time. Below is a graphic illustrating the roles, assets, and relationships of those using an inside/outside framework. Resources and information flow from inside to outside, and advocacy and community engagement flow from outside to inside.

Inside / Outside strategies create productive tension and accountability.



Credit: GARE's ["Organizing for Racial Equity Within the Federal Government"](#)

Best Practices to Implement the Framework

1. Offer community partners the best government has to offer

A scan of community-led housing justice initiatives conducted by Partners for Dignity and Rights found similarities in the types of government resources that seed and sustain community partnerships, starting with direct funding for community partners (see best practice #2 below). In addition, in-house resources can be made available externally in formats that are most useful to outside partners such as:

- Collecting and making available racially disaggregated data.
- Conducting research on community-identified research questions and using community-collected data.
- Developing communications materials partners can use in their own work.
- Providing administrative support to reduce barriers to receiving funding and participate in policy processes.
- Providing access to brief and educate decision makers.

TOOLBOX

Advancing Racial Equity in Housing, Land, and Development

A Toolbox For Racial Equity Practitioners In Government

Timely, accurate, and honest information about how government operates and when and how decisions are made is another powerful and low-cost resource an agency can offer communities. In addition, acknowledge when a government commitment to action is not being kept and figure out what to do to move to action. These practices can foster a learning environment rather than the oppositional dynamic often found between local government and community organizations.

2. Direct funding to organizations building community capacity

Funding leaders accountable to communities of color for their time and expertise is a minimum standard for participation in a government process. However, for community partners to deeply engage in government work over a long period of time, the government should provide sustained funding for organizations. Early seed money is especially critical for community partners to establish the capacity to partner. Eligible uses should include:

- Operations and staffing
- Capacity-building activities such as leadership trainings and cohorts
- Consultant costs for technical assistance
- Community engagement and education activities

Procurement practices can be tailored to reduce bureaucratic barriers to funds. For example, an agency could use a single RFQ process to establish open task-order contracts with multiple organizations for community engagement services. Then when funds are secured for specific projects, a simple task-order can be executed for services from one or more of the organizations.

Agencies can also leverage their relationships with philanthropy to support community partners in ways the government cannot. Philanthropy can deploy funds more nimbly and is well positioned to fund movement-building and community organizing activities that provide community partners autonomy.

3. Cultivate relationships with housing justice organizations

Staff can initiate dialogue with local, state, and national organizations working on housing justice issues to understand their priorities, but also to better appreciate the perspective, expertise, and assets they can bring to an agency's work. For example, send staff to racial equity focused conferences such as the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's membership meeting (typically open only to member jurisdictions), Race Forward's Facing Race, PolicyLink's Equity Summit, and the Othering & Belonging Conference held by the University of California at Berkeley's Othering & Belonging Institute. Agencies can also collect information on organizations' capacity and expertise for future contracting opportunities while keeping in mind the importance of those organizations' accountability to communities experiencing systemic racism.

TOOLBOX

Advancing Racial Equity in Housing, Land, and Development

A Toolbox For
Racial Equity
Practitioners In
Government

Community-based organizations (CBOs) bring a unique ability to educate, organize, and directly engage impacted communities to identify and propose solutions that meet their needs. Staff should provide administrative support for smaller CBOs less familiar with government procurement processes to reduce barriers to receive funding - including developing a pre-approved bench of CBOs, as developed by the [Metropolitan Transportation Commission](#), that can be selected on an as-needed basis to work with staff on equity-related issues.

National intermediary organizations bring expertise in using equity tools for data and policy analysis, providing technical assistance and capacity-building support to government agencies and CBOs, and cultivating relationships with philanthropy, academia, and politicians. These organizations are likely more familiar with government processes but still require active outreach to cultivate relationships, such as solicitations for information or contracting for services.

Community Engagement Tools

The Kirwan Institute describes community (or civic) engagement as “more than a collection of meetings, techniques, and tools. It takes place in an environment made up of diverse people, practices, conditions, and values.” At its core, community engagement is our democracy at work and should serve to redistribute power so that local governments are effective at being of, for and by the people. Below are some tools to help agencies fold engagement into their decision-making, expand whom they listen to, and increase the participation and power of those who have been excluded, marginalized, and harmed.

1. Design equitable community engagement processes

Rosa Gonzalez and Facilitating Power’s [“Spectrum of Community Engagement to Empowerment”](#) is a tool to help stakeholders define the purpose of engagement and role of community. The graphic below illustrates the spectrum’s categorization of the different stances that the government can take toward a community. The full tool names the messages different stances can send to the community and their impact. It provides inspiration and activities staff can use to align a process and resources with the needs of impacted communities. It also describes the costs, benefits, and activities of engagement at different phases of a policy or plan development process.

TOOLBOX

Advancing Racial Equity in Housing, Land, and Development

A Toolbox For Racial Equity Practitioners In Government

Spectrum of Community Engagement



Based on the public participation spectrum created by the International Association for Public Participation and on graphics in *Spectrum Community Engagement to Ownership* by Rosa González of Facilitating Power

The process or method of engagement should match the purpose. For example, town halls and listening tours work for consultation, but not collaboration; community or stakeholder advisory boards can inform but not make government decisions; participatory needs assessments or co-design workshops can help co-create solutions; and funding or assisting community-led networks can enable more permanent partnerships to guide government decisions. When engagement takes the form of collaboration and community leadership, it enhances the effectiveness of housing solutions. This is because the people directly impacted by housing injustice have a better understanding of the problems and often also have better ideas for solutions. Housing initiatives taking on adaptive challenges that require transformative solutions should always strive for community collaboration and ownership.

The City of Oakland's "[Inclusive Public Engagement Guide](#)" uses this framework to guide staff through a step-by-step process to design their engagement strategies.

2. Co-create principles for equitable engagement with impacted communities

Processes with more involvement and collaboration should include principles of engagement to guide how staff will operate to build relationships, foster mutual accountability, and strive for understanding among communities and with the government. Principles should be developed with the communities involved. The Kirwan Institute developed [The Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Guide to Transformative Change](#) as a starting point for crafting a set of principles. While essential for more in depth engagement processes these six principles can also be used to shape any engagement process.

TOOLBOX

Advancing Racial Equity in Housing, Land, and Development

A Toolbox For Racial Equity Practitioners In Government

- 1 Embracing the Gifts of Diversity
- 2 Realizing the role of Race, Power, and Injustice
- 3 Radical Hospitality: Invitation and Listening
- 4 Radical Hospitality: Invitation and Listening
- 5 Honoring Dissent and Embracing Protest
- 6 Adaptability to Community Change

Credit: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

3. Map power dynamics for equitable relationships

Equitable power dynamics are the foundation of any engagement process. Here, power is defined as the ability to influence and shape outcomes. At the institutional level, it is the capacity or formal authority to decide what housing solutions are best for society and who will have access to housing resources. At the community level, it is the capacity to organize a large network of communities impacted by housing injustice.

Power mapping is a process to identify which groups have more or less influence to define which changes are most desired, and which groups are more or less impacted by the desired changes. The results will show which groups have high amounts of influence and vested interests in the status quo. It will also show which communities are most impacted but have less influence. These results can help equity practitioners prioritize resources and attention for the latter, as well as prepare for resistance from the former. The Minnesota Campus Compact's [facilitation guide for power mapping](#) is a resource for racial equity practitioners to adapt and use.

TOOLBOX

Advancing Racial Equity in Housing, Land, and Development

A Toolbox For
Racial Equity
Practitioners In
Government

Using the Toolbox

Use the frameworks and tools in this section as resources to facilitate conversations with others in your agency and field. These resources and more are in the [Resource Library](#). Invite community engagement specialists and those with knowledge of your government's decision-making processes. Here are some agenda topics and discussion questions to get you started.

Community Engagement

1. How does your agency or project define communities most impacted by housing injustice?
2. In which category does your agency or project fall along the engagement spectrum? Answer the [additional questions in the guide](#) for the individual category.
3. What does the spectrum tell you about the implications of your agency or project's stance toward communities impacted by housing injustice? Do you deploy different approaches depending on the context?
4. Reflect on your individual role engaging communities:
 - How can you improve your agencies stance toward community?
 - What commitments are you willing to make to shift power?
 - Who is needed to hold you accountable to your commitments?

Power mapping

Try adapting and using a power mapping facilitation guide with your project team. It is important to identify where staff, management, and leadership fall in this mapping, as well as outside groups. Answering these questions about your local government's institutional power can help you map the internal power dynamics and make use of the findings.

1. What types of power does your institution have? (e.g., political power, economic power, relational power, legal power)? Who holds that power?
2. What are you trying to transform?
3. How does your institution benefit from the status quo?
4. Who is your institution seeking to build power with or transfer power to? What support does your institution need to make this shift?

TOOLBOX

Advancing Racial Equity in Housing, Land, and Development

A Toolbox For
Racial Equity
Practitioners In
Government