Section 3: Racial Equity in Housing and Planning Policy

THIS SECTION INCLUDES principles for equitable policy making, a framework for accounting for race within legal bounds in policy making and planning processes, and examples of housing policy frameworks that center racial equity. Best practices for applying these frameworks are described including racial equity analysis of housing and planning policies, supporting community-identified housing solutions, and using accountability measurement tools.

KEY TERMS

**Race-blind/neutral:** A policy designed to have universal impact though it still may exacerbate a racial disparity, intended or not.

**Race-conscious:** A policy using a race-neutral characteristic or extending benefits or protections to everyone but with a reasonable basis to address a racial disparity while improving outcomes for all.

**Race-based:** A policy designed to be race-specific or race-targeted in its intent and impact to address a racial disparity.

Policy Principles and Frameworks

Jurisdictions can adopt high level housing policy frameworks to address housing solutions comprehensively, ensuring a multifaceted and balanced approach to housing solutions to address multiple intertwined root causes, acknowledging that there is no "silver bullet" that can solve all the causes and consequences at once. Frameworks can give agencies permission to address racial equity head on with a set of principles to guide their actions. Practically, they also provide a blueprint for agencies to develop strategic plans, budgets, and work plans for planning and housing policy projects.
Principles for racially equitable policies

Achieving housing justice requires willful eradication of policies and practices in government that deepen the ongoing harm from the legacies of slavery, genocide, segregation, and other forms of racialized oppression woven into institutions across society. Without an intentional dismantling of systemic racism in housing, a segregated and unequal society is maintained that threatens democracy because it is ultimately divisive and detrimental for all. By incorporating racial equity into all housing policy platforms, a path for multiracial inclusive democracy can be set to realize the nation’s highest ideals and create structures that ensure housing as a public good for all people.

PRINCIPLES FOR RACIALLY EQUITABLE POLICIES

Fix systems; not people

Create racially equitable solutions that benefit all

Ensure that solutions are grounded in and emerge from the experience of communities of color by engaging leaders of color who are accountable to those communities:

Commit to collecting race/ethnicity data and use it to track and target the greatest needs.

Set measurable, results-based equity goals with specific attention to racial impacts.

Jurisdictions are encouraged to consult with their legal counsel to ensure implementation of the five principles are consistent with applicable laws.

Race Forward and eight other national racial justice organizations created the following five principles to help policy makers craft racially equitable policy platforms:

1. Fix systems; not people: Understand that policies and institutions are at the root of the inequities we see across all indicators of success — whether by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Instead of fixing people, which often manifests in policy solutions that criminalize communities of color, fix systems by creating policy that allows us all to live healthy lives.

2. Create racially equitable solutions that benefit all: When housing policies protected low-wage renters of color who are disproportionately
essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic from being evicted — the farmworkers, grocery store clerks, factory workers, deliverers — we protect the country as a whole. When we protect communities of color from abusive subprime loans, those protections benefit white people at risk as well. Ensuring racial equity in all housing policies will benefit everyone.

3. Ensure that solutions are grounded in and emerge from the experience of communities of color by engaging leaders of color who are accountable to those communities: Engaging community and national leaders of color who are working in and accountable to communities most harshly impacted by housing injustices can ensure that policies will have an effective and racially equitable impact. It will also ensure that the wide range of innovative and creative solutions emerging from community efforts are incorporated into the policy platforms.

4. Commit to collecting race/ethnicity data and use it to track and target the greatest needs: All policies should include a commitment to track and disaggregate data with a race explicit, but not race exclusive approach. Data should be collected across lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, and more — with regard to the impacts of that policy. We cannot solve inequities without understanding who is most negatively impacted and why. Tracking and disaggregating data allows us to craft policy solutions that target resources, investments, and programs to the communities that are most impacted by a particular problem.

5. Set measurable, results-based equity goals with specific attention to racial impacts: Each policy area should set measurable equity goals that outline how communities of color most negatively impacted by housing injustice will be better off as a result. This requires always asking how a proposed housing solution will directly impact people of color and other oppressed communities, assessing for unintended consequences, preventing harms, and maximizing equity.

Targeted Universalism for race conscious housing policy

Our country’s civil rights legal framework is structured, in part, to eliminate racial discrimination through private litigation and ensure government policies and programs are race-neutral or blind. However, over time some of these race-neutral policies have been shown to contribute to deepening racial disparities in our society, or at the least to fail to overcome such disparities, as evidenced by ever widening racial segregation and gaps in health and wealth.¹

¹ Rewrite the Racial Rules, Roosevelt Institute, 2016
Planners and housing policy staff have legal mandates for housing justice (see Introduction) but it is important to understand and prepare for a nuanced legal landscape. Both the federal and California state constitutions generally prohibit local governments from taking action based on protected characteristics, such as race, except in limited conditions. Racial equity practitioners managing planning and policy processes need an understanding of these conditions and alternative approaches when conditions are not met in order to meet legal standards. Staff should work with their legal counsel to develop defensible strategies when considering race as part of a planning or policy making process.

This may help increase jurisdiction’s tolerance for perceived legal risk. If legal standards are met, then legal counsels for risk tolerant agencies may take an expansive interpretation of legal standards and develop legal strategies that enable stronger racial equity approaches that utilize the full force of civil rights provisions.

**Targeted Universalism (TU)** is a promising framework designed with the understanding that general policies, practices, or investments that do not consider how people are situated differently will exacerbate inequities even when they achieve positive aggregate results. The proverbial rising tide does not lift all boats in the same way; many current universal policies are colorblind on their face but do not benefit or can even cause harm to communities of color.

The Targeted Universalism approach is “race-conscious” rather than “race-based,” resulting in policy proposals that may be more likely to pass legal muster because they do not classify groups based on race, rather they apply to everyone equally while targeting equitable outcomes. TU may help housing and planning agencies increase their risk tolerance.

This approach to policy design sets universal goals or outcomes that benefit all, then develops targeted strategies for different groups to reach these outcomes. Disparities are measured in relation to desired outcomes, not by comparing different groups.

Five steps to crafting housing solutions with this approach are:

1. Establish a universal goal based upon a broadly shared recognition of a societal problem and collective aspirations.

2. Assess general population performance relative to the universal goal.

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2 The general prohibition of discrimination based on a protected characteristic, such as race, is found in other federal and state laws, such as the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. sec. 3601, et seq.) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. sec. 2000d-1, and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (Cal. Gov. Code sec. 12955).

3. Identify groups and places that are performing differently with respect to the goal. Groups should be disaggregated.

4. Assess and understand the structures 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 including providing support for overcoming any barriers.

As part of a Targeted Universalist approach, some components of the policy development or planning process should explicitly consider race and/or other protected characteristics to clarify where there are (or are not) existing racial disparities. This often includes data analysis and community engagement. For example, in California the requirement to affirmatively further fair housing within the Housing Element requires local staff to evaluate a variety of data points disaggregated by race, and to ensure that community engagement activities are inclusive of members of protected classes such as communities of color. 4

**Housing policy frameworks centering racial equity**

Progressive housing and planning agencies and communities working for housing justice have recently designed (or redesigned) policy frameworks reflecting the principles above. These broad frameworks have informed an array of local policies; from city-wide and neighborhood plans to investment priorities for affordable housing and land acquisition, to protections for renters and homeowners experiencing displacement pressures.

1. **People + Place**

A People + Place framework focuses on both the built environment and social impacts of growth. It functions as an analytical tool to guide local government’s implementation to reduce disparities and achieve equitable outcomes for marginalized populations.

Racial segregation and serial displacement of Communities of Color are the two major root causes of inequitable growth addressed by this framework. The framework builds around a vision of strong communities and great places. GARE’s report “Equitable Development as a Tool to Advance Racial Equity” provides a vision statement for both:

1. **Strong communities and people.** People and communities with stability and resilience in the face of displacement pressures fare better. An intact community in which people have high quality jobs and housing; culturally appropriate institutions; and strong multi-cultural social networks have better outcomes.

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4 See California Department of Housing and Community Development’s “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing: Guidance for All Public Entities and for Housing Elements”
2. Great places with equitable access. A city where all neighborhoods are healthy, safe, and afford their resident access to the key determinants of well-being promotes inclusion.

These frameworks include general principles for equitable development and community level outcomes to aim for. A more detailed description of strategies and associated policies accompany these principles to serve as a roadmap for action.

Community capacity building and government partnership are cornerstones of these frameworks. As such, a community and government governance structure are often established to steward the implementation (See Section 5: Community Partnership).

2. Near-term housing crisis + long-term systems change

Community advocates have responded to the current housing crisis exacerbated by the COVID epidemic with housing policy frameworks that seek to mitigate harm today and transform systems over the long-term. Often, these frameworks start with a vision of housing as a public good and human right, not an investment commodity. They challenge the status quo of deferring to the market to dictate where people can live and how much they will pay. They are informed by an analysis of race and the commodification of housing supported by the housing system’s network of laws and regulations.

Policy solutions may be grouped into two broad strategies to change the legal and regulatory framework that undergirds the housing system so that it centers racial equity.

• Near-term strategies advanced by advocates include preventing renters and homeowners from displacement with a menu of legal rights and protections (e.g., protecting tenants from excessive rent increases and arbitrary evictions) and anti-displacement financial resources. Making housing a human right to address homelessness also falls in this category.

• Long-term strategies advanced by advocates include reparations for historical racist housing and land policies and theft of indigenous land through race-based finance programs, many of which would require an intermediate step of removing existing legal barriers to such programs. Decommodification of housing through social housing and community ownership models as well as stronger anti-speculation regulations on corporate housing investments are other long-term strategies for systems change. Implementing fair housing law to eliminate exclusionary land use laws and full federal funding for subsidized housing to meet the actual need also fall into this category.

The framework’s emphasis on shifting power to those experiencing housing injustices is woven throughout in the form of more community-controlled housing and more democratic decision-making in government-controlled funding. The framework is supported by communications research showing that framing housing as a collective social good rather than individual good
creates even more receptivity to housing solutions. 5 75% of Americans believe that housing is a human right and even more agree housing is a public good. 6

3. The Ps: Protections, Preservation, and Production +

Local jurisdictions in California are familiar with the “3 Ps” framework to protect, preserve and produce enough housing for all residents. This framework focuses on the housing needs and rights of existing and future residents. It is often used to expand many of today’s existing housing solutions within the current housing system which tends to favor new production of affordable housing.

Some racial equity housing advocates have added other “Ps” such as (community) participation and power to focus on more equitable processes and solutions. An emphasis on process includes investing in community capacity building for more democratic decision-making in government processes. This may elevate the importance of solutions prioritized by communities experiencing systemic racism such as anti-displacement protections and community-controlled housing options that tend to be more viable in preservation deals. The emphasis on power encourages an equity analysis and addressing root causes of housing injustice, which can be applied to all the P’s including production of housing types that meet the needs of those experiencing the greatest housing disparities.

Best Practices to Implement these Frameworks

1. Document historical harm done by housing and planning agencies

Documenting the historical harm caused by the actions of local housing and planning agencies has numerous benefits. The research involved often identifies root causes of inequities, enriching analysis of existing conditions required by most planning projects. This is a critical step in collecting evidence of a government’s interest in adopting race-conscious policy solutions. It also begins to build trust with community partners who may be hesitant to collaborate with government, while providing them useful information for their community education work.

Public and private partners such as public archivists, university researchers, and staff from real estate documentation services can help source other evidence. AFFH requirements for Housing Element updates are a useful source of data on current day outcomes and evidence for why targeted policies and programs may be necessary.

The goal is to identify a causal connection between the actions of the government and the disparate outcomes experienced by different racial groups today. One common first step is to conduct an historical audit of planning and housing practices. Examples include:

5  Housing Justice Narrative Project, PolicyLink, Community Change, and Race Forward, 2020
6  Ibid
• City of Louisville’s Confronting Racism in Zoning
• City of Evanston’s Local Reparations website
• City of Portland’s Historical Context of Racist Planning

Local staff are advised to work with their legal counsel to understand any potential legal ramifications of the research. Local staff may also wish to work with policymakers and/or agency leadership to ensure that there is a clear path to adjust and/or implement appropriate programs that will eliminate any causal connection between ongoing efforts of the agency and the disparate outcomes.

2. Collaborate with community housing justice initiatives

When communities most impacted by housing injustices identify solutions, they are more likely to address root causes and have racially equitable outcomes even if the solutions are not race-based. A scan of community-led housing justice initiatives conducted by Partners for Dignity and Human Rights for this toolbox provides racial equity practitioners interested in supporting community solutions insight into how these initiatives operate. Some key characteristics observed include:

• **Housing justice narratives** that are crafted around housing as a human right and public good rather than a commodity for speculation and profit.

• **Equitable process principles** that include a commitment to racial equity, inclusive engagement, and accountability to name a few.

• **Democratic decision-making structures and practices** that ensure accountability to communities most impacted by housing injustices. Structures include representation of impacted communities on an initiative’s own decision-making bodies and government-convened ones. Practices include grassroots organizing and community-wide events for an initiative’s leadership to report back to their base of supporters and receive guidance from them.

• **Community capacity building strategies** to build community leadership through education and outreach.

• **Broad coalitions of organizations** networked across housing and non-housing fields including labor, academia, and faith-based institutions.

• **Transformative policy solutions** that challenge the legal and financial status quo and shift power to households and communities such as tenant rights, progressive taxes, and community-controlled land and housing.
See the "Framework for Long-term Community and Government Relationships" in Section 5: Community Partnership for practices government staff can use to form long-term relationships with communities.

3. Racial equity tools

Using new tools to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in housing and planning policy processes is an opportunity to set new standards of practice for the field. These tools require racial equity practitioners to use new types of information, form accountable relationships with communities, and answer a different set of questions from traditional policy analysis.

These tools can have a significant impact on staff. By making the invisible visible, asking the right questions can change behaviors and beliefs in a permanent way. One can fail to see but one cannot unsee what has been seen. The impact is also felt at the agency level. Once racially inequitable consequences are predicted as a probable result of a decision, the agency must choose whether to continue forward, be complicit in the harm done, or change direction.

Policy tools

GARE’s Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) lays out a process and set of practices designed to:

- Direct government decisions toward achieving racial equity goals.
- Change the government’s relationship with those most impacted, shift power, and change the information informing decisions.
- Use data to identify current racial disparities and those most impacted.
- Identify inequitable consequences or burdens on communities most impacted.
- Identify racial equity strategies and the commitment needed to change the status quo.
- Identify how progress will be tracked over time, and how to report back.

The toolkit’s worksheet can be adapted for use throughout the housing and planning policy development process. The worksheet’s six steps outlined below can be completed using the tools found in this toolbox such as Results Based Accountability for setting results. The RET is most effective during an agency’s visioning or priority setting process or used by project managers when first scoping projects and allocating budgets. It can also be used later by program managers during implementation and evaluation to redesign a policy or program to better address issues of racial equity. The toolkit helps equity practitioners answer simple questions:
Desired Results
What are the desired results and outcomes of the decision?

Analysis of Data
What’s the data? What does the data tell us?

Community Engagement
How have communities been engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement?

Strategies
Who will benefit from or be burdened by the decision? What are your strategies for advancing racial equity or mitigating unintended consequences?

Implementation Plan
What is the plan for implementation? How are impacted people of color centered in leading the change and implementing the policy?

Communications and accountability
How will you ensure accountability, communicate, and evaluate results?

Data and mapping tools
Data is a powerful way to understand and communicate issues of housing justice. A growing set of data tools are helping housing and planning agencies identify population-specific racial disparities in housing over time, geography, and policy area. These make data more publicly accessible and increase the capacity of governments and their community partners to use data to advance policy solutions.

The National Equity Atlas and accompanying Bay Area Equity Atlas are comprehensive data support systems tracking the state of equity across the region. The power of this data lies in the staff’s ability to surface important characteristics to inform policy and planning processes and the solutions themselves.

- **Disaggregation.** Data disaggregated by race and other characteristics will identify which populations and neighborhoods are experiencing the greatest harm. This can inform where to focus community engagement resources. It can also inform policies developed to ensure these populations benefit from proposed solutions.

- **Root causes.** Data tracked over long periods of time can inform a root cause analysis of which government actions (or inactions) established the conditions causing current day disparities.

- **Benefits and burdens.** Disaggregated data can also identify who benefits from the current housing system. Data can then inform policy solutions to equitably distribute future benefits as well as any burdens going forward.

- **Community values.** Qualitative data, storytelling, and community-based research using quantitative data are sources of community-driven data that provide a more comprehensive picture of housing justice than traditional data sources alone. However, traditional sources can validate and supplement community data and be designed for ease of use by community-led housing justice initiatives.
Mapping tools can now help visualize major housing disparities spatially. Below are four tools to visualize residential displacement risk, segregation, and housing affordability in neighborhoods that impact quality-of-life outcomes.

- **ESRI’s GIS Racial Equity Hub** is an expanding resource hub of data layers, maps, training resources, articles, and examples of applying a racial equity lens to geospatial analysis. ESRI’s new Social Equity Analysis Tool can analyze community conditions, evaluate asset gaps, and generate an equity analysis index to identify areas in greatest need of resources.

- Urban Displacement Project’s **Gentrification and Displacement Risk Map** combine Bay Area data housing market activity and household characteristics to explore and present displacement, gentrification, and neighborhood exclusivity by census tract.

- The UC Berkley Othering and Belonging Institute’s **Measuring Segregation** tool maps six different measures of racial segregation by census tract.

- The **National Equity Atlas mapping analysis** of neighborhoods shows there is an overall shortage of affordable rental homes and that they are rarely located in neighborhoods that have high-quality schools, safe streets, clean air, parks, reliable transit, and proximity to jobs, retail, and services. Instead, they are concentrated in disinvested neighborhoods with polluted air, failing infrastructure, and excessive police surveillance.

**Root Cause Analysis**

After collecting key data sets showing racial disparities in housing, it is important to uncover the root causes behind the data patterns and trends. Analysts can start to identify root causes by facilitating a conversation with their team by first asking, “why does the trend look like this?” For each answer, ask “why” three to five more times to move past superficial understandings of inequity and get to the underlying causes. This exercise oftentimes requires at least 3-4 hours and can be enhanced by using a flip chart or board to draw the connections between the answers leading to a root cause.

Strong facilitation is important to avoid conjecture and reinforce racialized stereotypes. Some participants may state assumptions about people’s behavior that presume that all people, when they make choices, start on an even playing field. Be prepared to react to views that focus exclusively on individual responsibility and ensure adequate focus on the institutions and systems that underpin structural racism.

For example, when looking at housing cost burden data by population and neighborhoods in their city or town a person might say “these disparities exist because too many people select housing in higher income neighborhoods that are too expensive for their incomes.” If the process ended there, it would not get at the root causes of the issue and would also reinforce the assumptions.
some people make about the “choices” people make. For example, the “higher income” neighborhood may have been historically low-income but has gentrified in the past decade. Instead, the facilitator would ask the group, “But why?” and someone might say, “because market rate housing is the only option,” to which the facilitator might ask “so why are there only few and relatively expensive housing options for people with little income?” This might prompt the group to talk about the lack of subsidized affordable housing overall and where it is located. Or lead to a discussion of why neighborhoods gentrify and who benefits and who is burdened by this process. A final “why?” might bring the group to identify historical, structural racism in the context of housing development finance and land use policies.

**Accountability measurement tools**

Designing or redesigning an agency’s tools to measure their performance and the conditions in the community can focus attention and grow awareness of the agencies’ housing justice work. Tools can take many forms such as online data dashboards, public facing progress reports, or externally conducted audits. Agency-specific tools are important because they reflect the unique mission of the agency and give equity practitioners within the agency and their community partners something relevant to organize around.

Several jurisdictions have set up monitoring, evaluation, and data systems to increase transparency and accountability. A couple include:

- **Seattle’s Equitable Development Monitoring Program** collects data on development and growth-related indicators used to identify disparities (displacement and exclusion) and inform City Council budget decisions.

- **Austin’s Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool’s** goals and policy parameters are used to measure investments for their alignment with community goals. There is an accompanying map tool and dashboard.

The **Results Based Accountability** framework is useful for designing externally facing accountability mechanisms that measure and communicate an agency’s progress in improving results in communities experiencing housing injustice. The graphic below illustrates how this approach begins with a focus on the desired end conditions in the community (vision/results) and then works backwards through community indicators (data), what you aim to achieve (outcomes), and performance measures (data) to identify the government actions toward improving those conditions. Data is used for accountability at both levels to measure improvements in a population and the government’s performance.

- **Population Accountability.** Community level conditions agencies are aiming to improve. Indicators of these conditions are quantifiable and desegregated by race. Goals are set and a baseline is established from which to measure results over time.
• **Performance Accountability.** A quantifiable measure of how well a specific housing program or policy is working. Different types of measures include:

  • Quantity—How much was done?
  • Quality—How well was it done?
  • Impact—Is anyone better off?

Accountability tools will have little impact on an agency’s behavior unless they are tied to meaningful budget, policy, and/or legal levers such as adopting accountability measures within an ordinance rather than non-binding resolution. They should be designed with these levers in mind.

Tools should be designed with community engagement and formatted to be easily accessible to the public. ESRI’s [Racial Equity Community Outreach](#) tools can help agencies visualize progress on housing justice initiatives or programs, gauge public sentiment, and share data about housing disparities with the community.

Another effective technique enhancing the relevance of these tools is to work with communities of color impacted by an agency’s actions to evaluate progress made with data collected through community-based research.
Using this Toolbox

Experienced racial equity practitioners can start using racial equity tools immediately to begin asking the right questions and disaggregating data. There is no “perfect time” to begin reframing your approach to analysis and policy design. Your skills will grow with practice and time. Additional resources and support will follow as your agency’s organizational capacity grows. Tools for policy analysis, development, and implementation described in this section are also listed in the Resource Library.

Start by convening a project team to identify an opportunity to apply a tool. You can organize other staff interested in using a tool on their similar projects to form a cohort to support each other. Perhaps your project is developing an existing conditions report and has collected some initial data. Take the opportunity to disaggregate the data by race, income and other relevant demographics while also looking for any community collected data relevant to the project. Then go deeper with your colleagues to facilitate a root cause analysis of the data. If the root cause analysis unearths causes your agency was or is still responsible for then it may be a good opportunity to spin off a project documenting the historical harms caused by the actions (or inactions) of your agency.

Try engaging agency leadership in using these tools. GARE’s Racial Equity Toolkit is useful during an agency’s long-term priority setting processes such as developing an annual work plan and budget. You can also encourage your leadership to use some key questions for “quick turnaround” decisions often required of high-level decision makers:

- What are the racial equity impacts of this decision?
- Who will benefit from or be burdened by the decision?
- Are there strategies to mitigate the unintended consequences or enhance racially equitable outcomes?
- Are there opportunities to engage communities of color impacted by this decision?