

# GETTING READY FOR RACIAL EQUITY WORK

Lessons Learned for City Governments  
from the Racial Equity Here Initiative



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# Acknowledgments

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We hope that city governments interested in promoting racial equity will find this publication helpful. The information in this publication is based on findings from the evaluation of the Racial Equity Here (REH) initiative, funded by Living Cities and implemented by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a joint project of the Center of Social Inclusion (now Race Forward) and the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. Five cities—Albuquerque, Austin, Grand Rapids, Louisville, and Philadelphia—received support from Living Cities to participate in this initiative. Provoc collaborated with GARE to provide communications support to the five cities, and Community Science and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development worked with GARE to evaluate the initiative.

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## Provoc

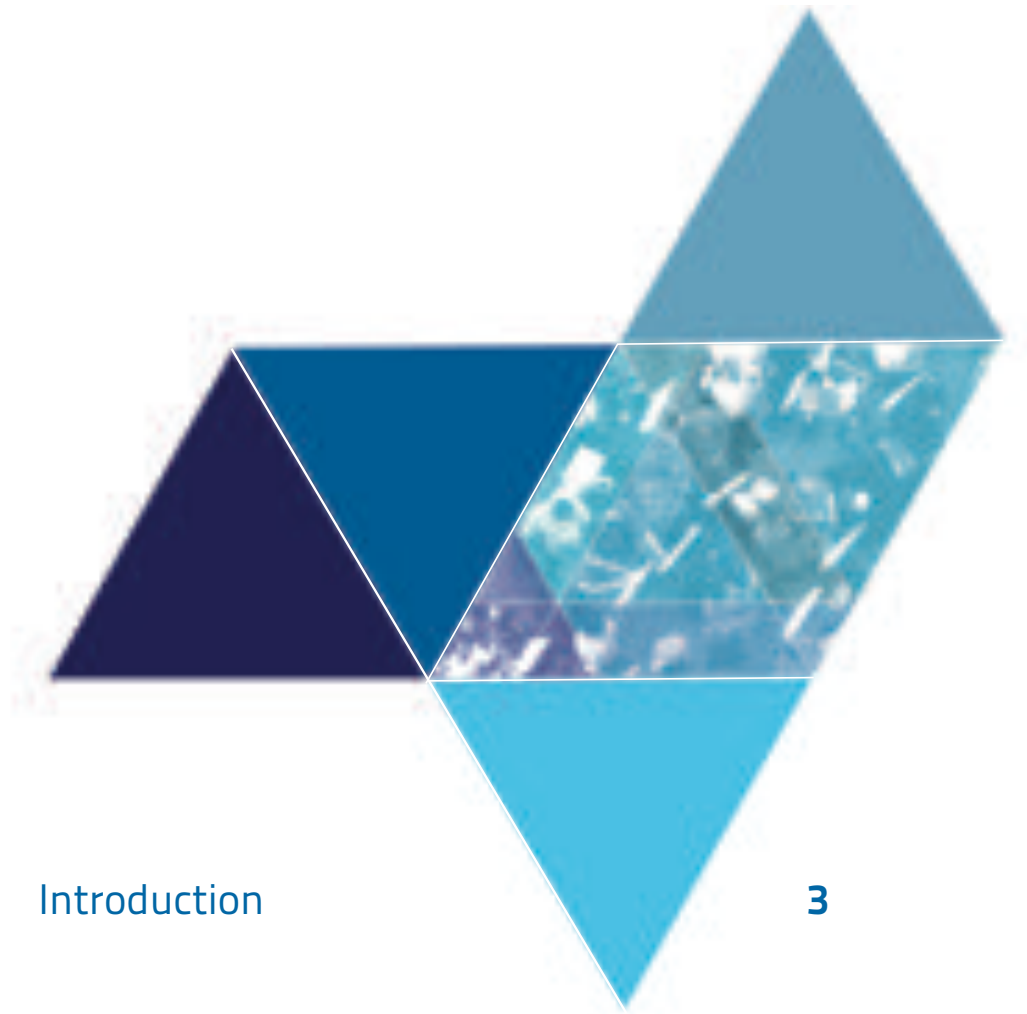
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In May 2016, Living Cities launched Racial Equity Here (REH), an initiative that supported five U.S. cities committed to improving racial equity and advancing opportunity for all. Living Cities engaged the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a joint project of Race Forward and the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, to provide technical support and coaching over the course of 24 months to a cohort of five cities—Albuquerque, Austin, Grand Rapids, Louisville, and Philadelphia—to analyze how their policies and operations impact people of color and devise actionable solutions.<sup>1</sup> GARE is a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. Living Cities’ belief, supported by GARE’s mission, is that local government has played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequity and therefore can also play a role in designing and implementing policies at multiple levels and across multiple sectors to end this inequity.

The information contained in this document is based on the evaluation of REH. The evaluation’s findings have been transformed into insights that serve as recommendations for cities interested in applying a racial equity lens to their policies and operations. The recommendations are organized according to the normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing framework developed by GARE, which illustrates three stages of development and capacities in a local government’s effort to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all.



<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.livingcities.org/search?q=Racial+equity+here> for more information about Living Cities’ decision to tackle racial equity.

GARE's capacity-building strategy for local government was driven by insights and lessons generated through years of experience, first as part of the Race and Social Justice Initiative in the City of Seattle<sup>2</sup> followed by similar initiatives in King County, Saint Paul, Madison, and Portland and, since then, cities and counties throughout California and the rest of the country. The key drivers of GARE's strategy include the following:

- **Capturing opportunities to intervene through an invitation by local government staff and support from the government's leadership**
- **An intentional set of activities to effect structural and sectoral change to make racial equity a standard practice in local government—and not just to transform individual institutions or change individuals' attitudes and behaviors**
- **Development of the local government's capacity to focus, plan, and implement actions for three stages of the work, all of which build on each other and are interdependent and simultaneously ongoing (see Appendix A for the framework):**
  - *Normalizing or creating an environment where racial equity becomes a natural and habitual way of thinking about and analyzing policies and operations, with a common understanding of key terminology, such as racial equity and inequity; implicit and explicit bias; and individual, institutional, and structural racism*
  - *Organizing or establishing organizational structures and processes to implement, support, and sustain plans and actions to advance racial equity*
  - *Operationalizing or creating and implementing concrete actions, such as use of a Racial Equity Tool, that will result in racial equity*
- **The goal of reaching a certain number of departments within a local government, number of local governments within a region, and number of public sectors across the nation to tip the scale toward making racial equity a norm and standard practice within the public sector broadly**
- **Identification and support of individuals who have the passion, courage, perseverance, knowledge, and skills, combined with the authority and power in local governments, to effect racial equity, otherwise known as “spark plugs” by GARE**
- **A cohort model where participants from different local governments within a region—or nationally, in the REH case—learn through experiential and peer-learning processes**



<sup>2</sup>GARE's leadership worked on the Racial and Social Justice Initiative in Seattle, which began about 10 years ago and showed how local government can strategically affect racial inequity (see <https://www.seattle.gov/rsji>).



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## Based on the drivers, GARE required the five REH cities to perform the following steps:

- **Establish a core team of six people from each city to work closely with GARE**
- **Develop a racial equity mission statement and narrative about the history of racial inequity in their cities during the first three months of the initiative**
- **Develop a racial equity action plan**
- **Organize a site visit by GARE to meet with the city's leadership and hold trainings on racial equity for the city's leadership and department directors and managers**
- **Participate in monthly conference calls to discuss progress, address challenges, and solve problems**
- **Participate in seven cohort convenings where participants hear from experts on different subjects related to racial equity; receive hands-on technical assistance from GARE, Provoc (strategic communications team), Community Science, and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development (evaluation team); and learn from their peers**
- **Apply GARE's Racial Equity Tool and consider implementation of an employee survey on racial equity**

The Racial Equity Tool is designed to help cities proactively seek to eliminate racial inequities and advance equity; identify clear goals, objectives, and measurement outcomes; engage the community in decision-making processes; identify who will benefit from or be burdened by a decision or its unintentional consequences and then develop strategies to mitigate these consequences; and develop mechanisms for successful implementation and evaluation of impact.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>GARE's Racial Equity Tool can be downloaded from [https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial\\_Equity\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf).



## Living Cities had two major goals for the REH evaluation:

- Assess the institutional changes affected by REH in the five participating city governments
- Identify the capacities (i.e., infrastructure, resources, knowledge and skills, communications) needed to expand GARE's model to other cities

### **AUSTIN, TEXAS**

**Population<sup>4</sup>: 950,715 people; White (48.9%), Hispanic/Latino (34.5%), Black/African American (7.6%), Asian (6.8%), Native American/Alaska Native (0.4%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.1%), Two or more races (3.2%)<sup>5</sup>**

**Council-Manager government**

**Mayor Steve Adler began his term in January 2015**

**Approximately 14,000 employees**

An initiative such as REH was unprecedented for Living Cities, as was a systematic inquiry about GARE's model. Thus, the evaluation's intent was to uncover the capacities and support required for an initiative like REH and generate lessons for GARE, funders, and cities. While we attempted to establish what success looked like, all the parties were mindful that the changes most likely to occur in the 24 months were infrastructure and process related and not policies.

The evaluation team worked closely with GARE, Provoc, and Living Cities to design a developmental evaluation approach for REH. We continually assessed the participating city governments' progress toward the desired outcomes and created opportunities to interpret the findings with GARE, Provoc, Living Cities, and the core teams from the five participating cities to inform the evaluation strategy and activities.

Community Science and GARE codeveloped a preliminary logic model and measurement framework for REH to guide the evaluation, with the understanding that the logic model and framework would likely change by the end of the initiative, as GARE had never had its model evaluated before. The city governments' core teams reviewed the logic model and measurement framework; their suggestions for sharpening both documents were minor, mainly because they had never participated in an initiative like REH and did not know what to expect.



<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (PEP) <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest.html/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

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The evaluation team collected data to continually assess the initiative's implementation and the participating cities' progress through several methods. Data collection methods and sources included the following:

- **Observations by our team during the seven convenings, monthly technical assistance and coaching calls between GARE and each city's core team, and instances when we provided evaluation technical assistance to the cities**
- **Participants' ratings and text responses to questions about the usefulness and quality of the convenings and what they learned**
- **Three rounds of interviews with each city's core team and the inclusion of the city's top leadership, partners, and community leaders in the third round**
- **Two rounds of interviews with GARE staff and one set of interviews with Provoc staff to reflect on their assessments of the cities and lessons learned**
- **Two reflections meetings with Living Cities, GARE, and Provoc**
- **Reviews of the cities' racial equity plans**

The evaluation team analyzed the data for themes and patterns by triangulating data points and sources and following the chain of evidence between the capacity-building activities conducted and the results achieved. The findings were used to inform the agendas and design of convenings, develop short stories of each city's racial equity work—which the cities also used to reflect on their progress and areas they needed to pay more attention to—promote peer learning, and identify areas for additional support from GARE, Provoc, Living Cities, and the evaluation team.





## Getting Started by Normalizing Racial Equity

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The normalizing stage in GARE’s framework cannot be overlooked or compressed because a common language is necessary to help government staff communicate about racial equity among themselves and to the community. People in the government also need time to process and reflect on the concept of racial equity and the role of government in racial equity. Cities must also build the capacity to conduct training incrementally, for a few city departments at a time and eventually for the entire city, to normalize the concept and practice of racial equity.

*People who have not been exposed to the concept of racial equity need time to process and reflect on the concept and related terms before they can communicate the concept to other people and also visualize what racial equity would look like for their cities.*

At the beginning of the REH initiative, core team members were concerned about definitions of racial equity, structural racism, and related concepts and struggled with envisioning what racial equity looked like. By the end of the initiative, they were able to have deeper dialogues about what racial equity looked like for their city and how to achieve it. Participants noted that being a part of the REH initiative helped them to fully understand the difference between concepts such as equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion, and they were able to explain the difference to their colleagues. For example, having equality does not mean there is equity, which requires a different set of strategies to address root causes. Participants also reported greater confidence in talking about these topics because they were equipped with the proper vocabulary and a better understanding of how to frame these terms for different audiences. For instance, equity is a systems issue and not a personal issue.

*When people who work in city governments realize the power of their governments to impact racial equity through policy changes and reallocation of resources, they begin to view their daily operations through a different lens.*

The cities’ core team members deepened their understanding about how racial inequity is perpetuated through public policies

and practices that become the norm for how things work—sometimes inadvertently and sometimes by design—and about the role of their governments in dismantling structural racism. With GARE’s assistance, core team members developed a better understanding of how government has contributed and continues to contribute to racial inequity through public policies and practices and recognized that racial equity will be realized only by changing policies and practices. For example, one participant from Louisville discussed reexamining job requirements and hiring practices to be more inclusive of people who had not previously been eligible to apply. Team members also developed a greater capacity for using a racial equity lens to identify policies, processes, and programs that perpetuate racial inequity. Specifically, they think about how every budget or policy decision they make impacts racial equity and whether they are creating advantages or disadvantages for particular groups of people as a result of the decision.

### **GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN**

*Population: 198,829 people; White (59.5%), Black/African American (19.0%), Hispanic/Latino (15.6%), Asian (2.1%), Native American/Alaska Native (0.4%), Two or more races (4.7%)*

*Commission-Manager government*

*Mayor Rosalynn Bliss began her term in January 2016*

*Approximately 1,600 employees*

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***GARE's normalize, organize, and operationalize framework provides cities with a systematic method for structuring and sequencing their racial equity strategies and actions. Cities should note the sequencing of these stages and their iterative nature; a stage cannot be skipped, and just because cities start the organizing stage does not mean that the normalizing work stops.***

The framework and the three stages of normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing really stuck with participants. The notion of normalizing was especially compelling because it pushed the REH cities' teams to consciously think about the message they wanted to convey about racial equity within their governments. Participants understood how important it was to communicate a clear, unified concept about racial equity that could become part of the city government's lexicon and to institutionalize the goal of working toward racial equity as part of their city government's policies and operations. In short, the idea of making racial equity a norm gave the teams a starting point. For the cities of Austin and Louisville, this message and having the language with which to discuss equity issues empowered other city staff—and in Austin, community leaders—to demand that things be equitable. A few core team members reported that some concepts were missing from their conversations during the convenings, such as white supremacy and white privilege, antiblackness, intersectionality (especially between race and gender), and a vision of what equity would look like if it were achieved. They wished that more time had been set aside during the convenings to go over these additional concepts and to have more opportunities to discuss them among the five cities.

***A strategy and adequate capacity to train as many city employees as possible about racial equity are essential to normalize the concept and practice of racial equity and to moderate people's desire for quick solutions before fully understanding what racial equity means and how to go about achieving it.***

The capacity of a city to instruct its employees on racial equity is dependent on whether it has existing staff adept in adult learning principles, facilitation, training, and coaching. Managing and implementing a training curriculum on racial equity would be difficult without a staff person with these competencies. It would take a person more than a year to develop them. Louisville and Grand Rapids trained instructors

on racial equity and also conducted racial equity trainings for large numbers of employees, while the other three cities did not have sufficient capacities to conduct trainings and also found it overwhelming to train a significant number of their employees. GARE's visits and trainings strengthened the two cities' capacities to continue trainings on their own. Louisville and Grand Rapids trained over 4,000 and 160 employees, respectively, as well as 10 and 17 trainers, respectively, over the course of the REH initiative. Training evaluations indicated that people improved their knowledge about racial equity and GARE; at the same time, the training raised more questions about how to operationalize and achieve racial equity. Participants wished for tangible tools to be able to identify, assess, and address racial equity, but first, they had to take the time to understand racial equity. This tension that participants felt needs to be explicitly discussed in future trainings to moderate people's desire to have quick solutions.





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*Cities must take the time to develop a vision and mission statement because the process helps uncover aspects of local history that contributed to racial inequity and helps the cities envision what a racially equitable city could look like. Also, the process of creating the vision and mission statement—which can take at least three months—ensures the city’s leadership is on the same page about racial equity before it publicly announces its racial equity work and uses the statement to engage partners and the community, especially communities of color.*

The teams from each city were also expected to develop a vision statement and narrative in the first three months. Most teams thought it was a time-intensive exercise and had mixed feelings about its value. Team members from two cities found that developing the city’s narrative was helpful in understanding what happened historically in the city that contributed to racial inequity. Learning about historical policies such as redlining helped some participants understand the institutional practices that marginalized communities of color. In addition, the vision statement was helpful in guiding their thinking about what was possible for their cities and in developing their action plans and racial equity tools. At the same time, team members in another city felt that the exercise was not valuable, considering how much time they spent on it, because they knew the history of their city and whatever knowledge gaps remained could not be easily filled. Other participants stated that the homework was unclear initially and that it took a while to understand what was expected. In the future, GARE should consider emphasizing the process of developing a vision statement and narrative as a way to help the cities’ leadership arrive at a common understanding about their racial equity efforts and to sharpen their language in communicating the importance of racial equity to the public.

## ***PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA***

***Population: 1,580,863 people; Black/African American (41.6%), White (35.3%), Hispanic/Latino (13.8%), Asian (6.9%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.4%), Native American/Alaska Native (0.2%), Two or more races (2.8%)***

***Mayor-Council government***

***Mayor James Kenney began his term in January 2016***

***Approximately 27,000 city employees***



# Getting Organized to Develop a Racial Equity Plan

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The mayor's and other executive leadership's support is necessary, as is an organized team structure that includes a blend of high-level leaders who have the authority to make decisions and staff who can implement the work on a routine basis. A team could be established fairly quickly or could take six months or more to coalesce, depending on a variety of factors—such as the size of the city government, the extent to which the mayor or second-highest-ranking leader in the city wishes to be intimately involved in the racial equity work, and their initial thoughts about how to approach the work.

*A site visit from GARE during the beginning of the city's racial equity effort is very valuable in helping the city's leadership understand the concept of racial equity and bringing credibility, as a national organization, to the issue of racial equity and the role of local government in advancing racial equity.*

GARE's initial site visits to all the cities between the first three to six months of the initiative were essential to the following accomplishments:

- **Helping the city's leadership understand racial equity and GARE's model for the work**
- **Encouraging the leadership to (a) establish a core team structure that provided the team with the authority to make decisions and affect departments and initiatives across the government, and (b) develop an accountability system**

During the visit, GARE also trained the city's leadership, including the mayor, people in the mayor's office, and department directors and managers on the GARE model. The site visit and trainings served the following purposes, based on participants' feedback:

- **Brought credibility to the issue of racial equity and role of local governments as a national expert organization, supported by a network of funders through Living Cities**
- **Ensured the concept and practice of racial equity were explained in an accurate and compelling manner that the cities' core teams could then pick up and do on their own**

- **Made the city leadership's commitment to racial equity known to the city's top and middle levels of leadership and management**

*Cities' racial equity core teams must comprise a blend of high-level leaders who have the authority to make decisions and staff who can implement the work on a daily basis.*

The cities' teams recognized the importance and benefit of including high-level leaders because of their power to influence, authority to make decisions, and roles in institutionalizing the work. They also noted the value of having representation from middle management and frontline staff, who offered a different perspective from leadership and were critical for implementing the vision and direction of the racial equity work. They were, in essence, the doers. Also, typically one or two members of the teams served as liaisons between the city's leadership and the rest of the core team. These liaisons were from the equity or diversity office or were people who worked closely with the mayor, city manager, or chief of staff. The key positions instrumental in moving racial equity forward were the mayor (or someone in the mayor's office), city manager, director of human resources, city council members or city commissioners, and directors of departments that were ready to take on racial equity. As mentioned earlier, someone from the city's communications department should also be part of the core team.





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*The configuration and composition of teams to normalize the goal of working toward racial equity, to organize and get buy-in, and to operationalize racial equity depend on the size of the city government, the extent to which the mayor and next-highest decision maker (e.g., city manager, managing director) wish to be intimately involved, existence of an equity office or officer, and how decisions are made in the city.*

The following configurations emerged among the five cities in the REH initiative:

- **A small team was extensively involved in implementing Austin’s and Louisville’s racial equity plans, and a larger group of representatives from different departments and levels of management helped extend the plan across the city. In Austin, the group also included community leaders. This configuration not only allowed for more engagement of other people but also helped to more efficiently diffuse the racial equity work across the city.**
- **A small team was extensively involved in implementing Albuquerque’s and Philadelphia’s racial equity plans, and an executive committee of high-level leadership was informed of the progress. This configuration allowed a large city like Philadelphia to involve its highest level of leadership (i.e., mayor and managing director) in making decisions about racial equity strategies without them having to spend time on operationalizing work.**
- **A small team made up of both high-level leadership and staff was created in Grand Rapids that both authorized and implemented the racial equity work, without any additional committees or teams. This configuration worked mainly because the mayor and city manager decided to be heavily involved with the team and attended all the convenings organized by GARE.**

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Across all the teams, directors of departments that were responsible for human resources, procurement, and diversity and inclusion were consistently involved. Departments responsible for workforce development, community development, parks and recreation, and health were variably involved across the five cities, depending on whether these departments considered themselves to be early adopters of the racial equity lens. The core teams also wished they had included a legislative person, a trained facilitator, and a communications person. Core teams also have to think ahead and consider who on their teams might be retiring or replaced as the result of a new administration appointing new employees. This will help with any anticipated transitions on the teams.

***The rate at which cities establish and stabilize their racial equity teams depends on the size of the city government, where the current administration is in its term (newly elected mayor or a year from the next mayoral elections), and the city leadership’s initial thoughts about how to approach the racial equity work.***

These three factors affected how quickly each team from the five cities was established and stabilized. The teams from Philadelphia, Albuquerque, and Austin changed over the course of the first six months as the mayor or city manager began to understand GARE’s approach and the strategies that made most sense for their cities, which in turn determined who needed to be on the team. For instance, Philadelphia’s leadership recognized that their city government was big (about 27,000 employees) and the most feasible way for them to apply a racial equity lens was through initiatives. As a result, the managers of three initiatives deemed most ready for the lens joined and stayed with the team for almost the entire performance period for REH.

In contrast, the mayor of Grand Rapids—a small city compared to Philadelphia—decided immediately after the receiving the grant that her team would be composed of the city’s top leadership, and thus the team’s membership stayed the same throughout the REH initiative. Albuquerque’s Mayor Berry was approximately one year away from the end of his term when this city joined REH. The composition of this city’s team, coordinated by the Office of Diversity and Human Rights, was driven by where the opportunity for quick wins and sustainability existed to ensure that any changes they made could not be easily reversed by the next administration. When Mayor Tim Keller began his term, he consolidated several offices under an Office of Equity and Inclusion to lead the city’s racial equity work. This office was more intentional and explicit about the city’s racial equity goal, reaching out immediately to communities of color and reexamining existing policies and practices to identify opportunities for breaking down systemic barriers that serve to maintain racial inequity. As a result, the directors of departments that were ready to address racial equity quickly became part of the team. The cities of Louisville and Austin established an office of equity and hired a director during REH’s performance period (the decision in Austin was approved by city council even before REH). The two directors became a stable driving force behind their cities’ teams.





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*The person from the city government's communications or public relations department needs to be part of the core team to address racial equity and must work to develop a media strategy to communicate the city's racial equity effort so that the public understands the importance of racial equity, the role of government in racial equity, and the city's vision and mission statement about racial equity.*

A handful of people were pleased with the communications assistance received from Provoc. Most of the core team members reported that the communications piece was difficult to understand and implement and that they were unsure of how to use the communication techniques for their efforts. At the same time, some core members noted that the technical assistance they received from GARE and Provoc to develop press releases immediately after the REH launch, as well as other tailored assistance, was very helpful. The mixed reactions to the communications technical assistance were in large part due to the cities' lack of a formal process or infrastructure to develop and institutionalize the capacity to communicate externally about racial equity. The person responsible for communications in the city government was never included in any of the core teams, and in hindsight, this has to be a consideration for city governments that wish to adopt the GARE framework or work on racial equity. This communications representative must be on board early on to understand and become familiar with the concept of racial equity and to be able to help shape the messages related to racial equity.

**The focus is on institutional change in support of racial equity, and two shifts in local government are crucial for this change to occur: (1) shifting government communications' emphasis from public relations and racism-related crisis management to community and partnership engagement in service of racial equity, and (2) shifting the government's engagement with communities of color from informing the community about the government's decisions to asking the community for ideas and solutions. Engaging communities of color and potential partners should begin as soon as the city has a clear vision and mission statement that demonstrates its commitment to racial equity and not after it has a final racial equity action plan.**





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***Cities have to think about their communications strategy not just for the purpose of public relations or crisis response about racism or related issues but also to support community and partner engagement in their racial equity efforts.***

Most cities' communications strategies and capacities focus on managing public relations and not on using communications to support community and partner engagement and, most certainly, not to elevate the importance of racial equity. In the REH initiative, all the cities except the City of Austin hesitated to communicate their racial equity work externally until there was clarity internally about what they were doing and how they planned to evaluate the outcomes. Almost all the teams expressed the desire to have all their "ducks in a row" before informing the public about their ideas, plans, and actions. Some of the team members reported that, in retrospect, they wished they had decided otherwise because the communications would have helped with community and partnership engagement and certainly with holding the city government accountable. Consequently, the communications function remained separate from the core team's racial equity work and efforts to engage the community and partners. The separation was exacerbated by the lexicon used—"branding" and "messaging"—which the core teams did not perceive as related to their community and partner engagement work and therefore not within their skill set. Core team members noted that the following would have been helpful in developing their capacity to communicate externally about racial equity:

- **The partner website designed by Provoc being operational at the beginning of REH**
- **Skills to communicate with potential early adopters of GARE's Racial Equity Tool**
- **Skills to communicate their strategy and plan**



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***Cities' capacity for community and partnership engagement and for communicating about racial equity are not separate concepts that have different purposes and should not be developed separately because, in reality, they are interrelated and interdependent.***

All the REH cities except Austin hesitated to engage the community for fear of disappointing their residents, inviting too much criticism, or bringing attention to anything negative. In addition, the cities were concerned that they would not be able to meet their communities' demands for action and change. Community leaders in Austin had already been demanding action by the city council even before REH and were involved in the selection of the city's equity officer. Austin's equity officer continued to keep the community engaged through a task force of nongovernment participants that was considered part of the implementation structure. This was why, as mentioned before, cities need a communication strategy early on to convey their goals and plans for racial equity and to explain why they need residents, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to be part of the effort. However, the participating cities thought about their strategic communications as a public relations or independent activity rather than as an activity in service of community and partnership engagement for racial equity. The REH cities reported that, in hindsight, they should have required their racial equity core teams to include a staff person responsible for community communications and public relations, as mentioned before.

***Cities alone cannot achieve racial equity; they need to identify allies who are not the usual partners or already committed to racial equity but who can nevertheless influence policies and practices that affect racial equity.***

The teams from each city understood that they alone could not advance racial equity, and this point was repeatedly emphasized by GARE. They frequently engaged organizations with which they had relationships and did not reach deeper into communities to identify new partners. The core teams wished that Provoc had built the partner website earlier to support this task. The number and types of partnerships developed by each team varied. Most of the teams noted leveraging existing or ongoing partnerships that their city government had with community-based organizations; neighborhood or business associations; commissions; colleges, universities, and public school systems; the United Way; and the Urban League, among

others. They collaborated with organizations already in racial equity work by inviting them to racial equity trainings by GARE and by discussing new ways to partner around efforts to address racial equity. The City of Grand Rapids invited leaders of large businesses to be partners in achieving racial equity. The City of Austin partnered with the local university to analyze and synthesize its departments' racial equity assessments. Staff from two cities wished they had faith-based partners. While partnership building was essential because city governments alone cannot dismantle structural racism, it was not the same as engaging the community.



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***Engagement of communities, especially communities of color, early on in a city's racial equity effort helps hold the city accountable to the change it envisions and articulates.***

Austin engaged the community even before REH because the community played a key role in demanding action by the mayor to address the growing disparities in the city and in interviewing and selecting the director for the city's Office of Equity. The infrastructure for conducting the racial equity work included an equity action team composed of over 100 community members who worked closely with the equity officer to codevelop a racial equity assessment tool. Most recently, Austin's Office of Equity successfully encouraged the Austin Police Department to work with a panel of residents to complete the racial equity assessment tool. This approach, different from that taken by other departments, not only embodied the office's value of community engagement, but it was also fitting for confronting the growing tension between law enforcement and residents. Grand Rapids and Louisville engaged the community in specific matters, unlike Austin, whose community leaders were involved in the design of the racial equity assessment tool and selection of the equity officer. Grand Rapids held meetings with community members outside of city hall about strengthening community and police relations and established a task force that included community residents to review the police department's policies and procedures. Louisville established a youth council to assist the government in developing its policy agenda. Philadelphia and Albuquerque did not engage the community or partners until the last couple of months of REH. Philadelphia invited about 60 nonprofit organizations to a training on the Racial Equity Tool, and this training event served as the starting point for identifying partners for its racial equity work in the month before REH concluded. Albuquerque did not embark on any community engagement activity until the new mayor was elected six months before REH concluded. The new mayor instituted an Office of Equity and Inclusion, and during the first several months after being appointed, the director reached out and began building relationships with community leaders, especially leaders from the Asian community and young African American leaders.



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***A city begins to draft its racial equity action plan when it starts to shift from normalizing to organizing, recognizing that the normalizing work continues even as it begins activities in the organizing stage and that it can take up to one year or more to finalize the plan. This does not mean, however, that a city should wait until then to engage the community and partners; on the contrary, this engagement should begin as soon as the city has a clear vision and mission statement that demonstrates its commitment to racial equity.***

As mentioned before, four of the five REH cities were hesitant to publicly announce their racial equity efforts and engage the community and partners until they had a clear plan. We learned, however, that the plan took up to one year or more to finalize as the cities continued to identify the “right” people to be on the teams—a decision that related to their racial equity strategies, which in turn could not be determined until they understood what racial equity meant. It is a city’s inclination to develop a plan first for any volatile or sensitive topic before it informs the public, but for an issue as critical and sensitive as racial equity, waiting can also send a message that conveys the dismissal of people of color’s perspectives and further reinforces their experiences of being historically left out. Austin demonstrated that it was advantageous to engage communities of color in refining its racial equity strategies even before a plan was developed because their engagement helped hold the city accountable to its residents.

***A city’s racial equity core team has to continually identify spark plugs, or people who are fierce advocates of racial equity to constantly build its internal capacity to normalize, organize, and operationalize racial equity work.***

REH demonstrated the necessary role of spark plugs, or people who are fierce advocates of racial equity and are therefore essential for promoting and advancing racial equity in local government. These individuals are prime candidates for participating in train-the-trainer programs and department advocacy and for being early adopters of any racial equity work. These individuals are compassionate, patient, trustworthy, courageous, and naturally inclusive of people who are different from them; understand how local government works and how to navigate its bureaucracy and break down barriers; know how to build relationships with decision makers and other people within the government who have to adopt a racial equity lens; know how to build relationships in the community with influential leaders who can help advance the city’s racial equity agenda; and can communicate to a variety of audiences without being aggressive or judgmental and can instead create a safe environment for people to talk openly about how their work can influence racial equity.





# Getting Operational About Racial Equity

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The racial equity planning process can catalyze policy and practice changes even before cities finalize and implement their plans. Nevertheless, cities will not be prepared to apply GARE's Racial Equity Tool or know how to apply it until they can conduct a systematic inquiry process about the racial and ethnic disparities they wish to impact. As part of the tool's application, the city must be able to clearly articulate the link between its performance measures and the racial equity outcomes desired for the city's population to ensure that its strategies and actions will lead to racial equity in the long term. The goal is to ensure that all employees in the city—and not just the city's equity officer or staff—become adept at applying a racial equity analysis to their work.

*It took between six months and one year for the cities to fully grasp GARE's Racial Equity Tool and how to apply it because the tool reflects an iterative process of asking questions, seeking and reflecting on the answers that will surface more questions, and engaging communities of color to home in on the right answers and root causes of the disparate outcomes they experience. The tool's application resembles peeling the layers of an onion to get to the root causes. Cities will need more direction and support about the tool and its use in the beginning. They should expect to be clear about its application only after they understand the concept of racial equity and their role in achieving racial equity.*

The participant cities found GARE's Racial Equity Tool helpful in making people aware about the specific departmental policies and practices that unintentionally contribute to racial inequity. Some core teams understood the tool and how to use it; others required several presentations and working sessions with GARE to understand how to apply the tool. The tool illustrates a way of thinking about the use and interpretation of data and is not a set of worksheets or exercises, as the REH cities initially

anticipated. A few individuals commented that additional training on the Racial Equity Tool for department staff would have been helpful and that the training should be tailored to help them apply the tool to their city's challenges. The tool was used in the following ways by three cities:

- **Grand Rapids used the Racial Equity Tool in its budget process for FY 2018.**
- **Austin did not use GARE's Racial Equity Tool but co-created a racial equity assessment tool with community leaders. The tool has been applied by 12 departments, which represented more than half of the city's departments, to date.**
- **Philadelphia applied GARE's Racial Equity Tool to its workforce strategy.**





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*Cities' processes of developing action plans and reviewing the Racial Equity Tool during the normalizing and organizing phases can catalyze immediate consideration of changes in policies and practices even before they begin to implement their action plans.*

Three of the five cities considered changing existing policies and practices even as they were developing their racial equity action plan. They seized an existing opportunity to stop a practice that was obviously creating disparities or to respond to an emerging situation. The City of Albuquerque implemented a policy to no longer ask about criminal convictions on the initial application for employment and modified its W-9 form (which individuals have to complete when they register a business), asking if a business is local, minority owned, or women owned, to collect information about the types of businesses with which the city government contracts. The City of Grand Rapids earmarked \$1 million annually for the next five years to strengthen community and police relations. Finally, the City of Louisville integrated racial equity indicators into the LouieStat measurement and performance system and changed the bidding practices for small contracts by requiring that a bid be received from at least one certified vendor owned by a racial or ethnic minority, a female, or a person with a disability. Louisville also considered changing its process for selling vacant or abandoned properties to make it easier for neighborhood residents to obtain the properties rather than outsiders who have the resources but may not be as interested in maintaining the character of the surrounding community.

## ***ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO***

***Population: 558,545 people; Hispanic/Latino (47.9%), White (40.6%), Native American/Alaska Native (4.4%), Black/African American (3.3%), Asian (2.6%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.1%), Two or more races (4.4%)<sup>6</sup>***

***Mayor-Council government***

***Mayor Richard Berry served from December 2009–November 2017***

***Mayor Tim Keller began his term in December 2017***

***Approximately 6,500 employees***

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***Cities can establish an equity office to drive the racial equity work, and they must ensure the office has the authority and sufficient personnel and funds to organize, operationalize, and implement the racial equity action plan.***

The REH evaluation showed that the designation of a person or an office that can hold, drive, and implement the vision for a racially equitable city was essential. This does not mean, however, that the city's racial equity work should be conducted by this office or person only. On the contrary, every person in the city must be responsible for applying a racial equity lens to his or her work—hence, normalizing racial equity—but the vision for the work can be driven by the equity office or officer. It was clear that the racial equity efforts in Austin and Philadelphia advanced expeditiously when an equity office was established and a staff person within the equity office was dedicated to racial equity work, respectively. In the other three cities, the person who became the racial equity officer or manager had other job responsibilities and could dedicate only a certain percentage of his or her time to racial equity work. Nevertheless, in Austin, core team members and nonprofit and community leaders reported that their city's equity office remained underfunded and understaffed and was not placed in a position of authority in the government's organizational structure. At the end of the initiative, the city allocated \$75,000 to the office, which was helpful but still insufficient to carry out the racial equity plan.

## ***LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY***

***Population: 621,349 people; White (67.1%), Black/African American (22.5%), Hispanic/Latino (4.9%), Asian (2.4%), Native American/Alaska Native (0.1%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.1%), Two or more races (3.1%)***

***Mayor-Council government***

***Mayor Greg Fischer began his term in November 2010***

***Approximately 6,000 employees***



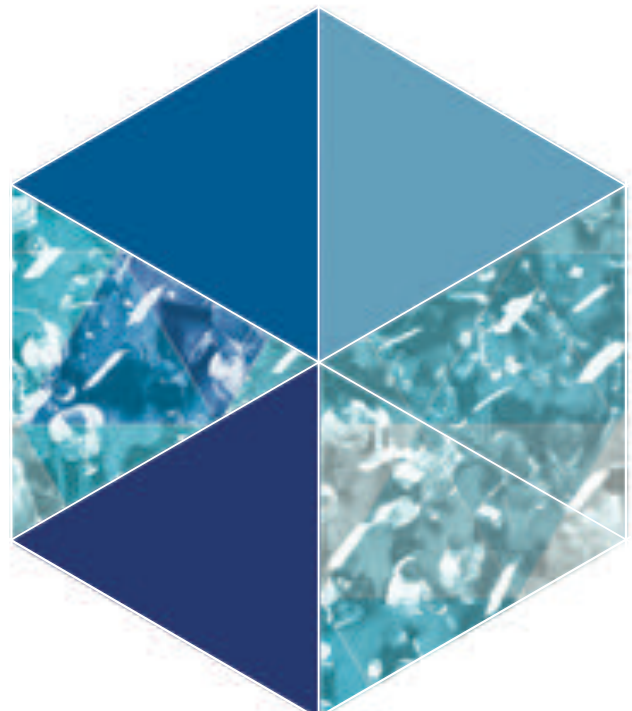


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Living Cities' REH initiative demonstrated the possibility and the potential of moving local government toward achieving racial equity. It also showed that there is no shortcut or silver bullet in creating the path to change for cities working toward racial equity, and it takes time to lay the groundwork to establish a common understanding and analysis of racial equity and the role of government in pursuing such an initiative.

While the GARE model did not expect every employee to buy in to the importance of racial equity, the early adopters of the concept needed to build a set of skills and a strong foundation to counter and transform some of their peers' resistance to the concept and effort. City employees who were inclined—or even mandated—to participate in and support the city's racial equity work had to develop basic knowledge about racial equity and how it is different from diversity and inclusion; understand that it is within the city's power to develop, revise, and implement policies and practices that intentionally support the achievement of racial equity; and take the time to be deliberate in their actions. More important, the city's leadership must view racial equity as a priority to truly make progress toward shaping a city characterized by equitable access to opportunities and resources for all its residents.

Living Cities' REH initiative also demonstrated that certain competencies in local government have to be in place to be able to effectively address racial equity. Besides establishing a strong foundational knowledge about racial equity, cities also need to develop core competencies in the following areas: engaging communities of color, collaborating with organizations that share their commitment to racial equity, engaging organizations that may not share the same commitment but are essential for achieving racial equity, training city employees to normalize racial equity and to apply a racial equity tool to their departments' routine operations and policies, and conducting an analysis of the root causes of racial inequity and linking the root causes to actions and performance measures for the city.





# A Local Government's Pathway toward Racial Equity



### EXAMPLES OF KEY CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**NORMALIZE**

- Existing reports and publications about racial and ethnic disparities in a city, county, or region
- Current policies and practices that hinder racial equity (e.g., anti-affirmative action policies, decisions about how resources are distributed)
- Leadership's public call for for racial equity

**ORGANIZE**

- Internal training capacity in local government
- Mayor or County Executive's strategic plan or budget that includes racial equity as a priority
- Involvement of community in past or current efforts to address racial equity

**OPERATIONALIZE**

- Existing racial equity-related initiatives

