

# Foundations for Equity-Focused Strategic Planning

## Developing a Shared Commitment to Advancing Racial Equity

### Introduction

While racial disparities have long been apparent in rates of housing instability and homelessness, the exacerbating impacts of COVID-19 and increased attention on the issue by state and federal funders and policymakers has led homeless systems of care to address the issue with renewed urgency.

As communities engage in strategic planning processes to strengthen the local response to end homelessness, an equity lens is crucial to ensuring that the community's strategies are tailored to strengthen systems and programs that equitably end homelessness for all residents. Doing so requires diverse community members to engage in challenging conversations about race and inequality in their communities.

### Planning Committee

Most effective strategic planning processes involve a Strategic Planning Steering Committee, comprised of diverse participants from across the community. To advance equitable impact and outcomes the committee should include individuals with diverse lived experiences and identities, Continuum of Care (CoC) and provider leadership, and identity-based community-based organizations (CBOs). Such committees also often include representatives from local government or city/county staff, affordable housing, public housing authorities, behavioral health agencies, law enforcement, and other implementation partners.

### Kickoff Retreat

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The Planning Committee may wish to begin its work together with a partial or full day retreat to establish norms and an effective working relationship. This can be particularly critical for advancing racial equity goals and creating a candid, solutions-oriented environment for impactful collaboration, and it provides an opportunity to undertake the level setting described in the section below.

A sample retreat agenda may include:

- Welcome and introductions that may include discussion of personal commitment and goals for the process, and clarify the goals, roles, and process for the retreat
- Value-based norms exercises to create a safe and proactive environment for the retreat
- Processes to establish a shared statement of vision for the strategic planning process

- Planning-focused activities that can build connection while beginning to identify shared goals and overarching principles, including review of existing local plans or assessments
- Agenda items that focus on in-depth discussions of power, racial equity, and the decision-making processes
- Debrief and reflection

While such processes require significant investment of time at the outset of the strategic planning process, they can lead to deeper buy-in, more proactive and engaged participation in the process, and cultivation of champions that can guide a more effective roll out of the plan to the greater community after the plan is developed.

## Level Setting around Racial Equity

Even in communities that have invested heavily in advancing racial equity in their homelessness systems of care, it is likely that community leaders and other collaborative planning participants will have a diverse array of understanding and experience. Foundational conversations to establish a common language and shared baseline is critical to success in the processes to follow.

The following process can help community partners establish a shared baseline, including:

- Engaging participating parties in exploring racial equity terms
- Understanding participants' level of knowledge on racial equity terms
- Understanding participants' level of comfort in publicly discussing these terms
- Creating an environment where participants feel comfortable talking about racial equity in their community

### 1. Develop a list of racial equity terms

We develop a list of relevant terms and narrow this down through feedback from local contacts to a list of 7-10 terms that are most relevant to the community.<sup>1</sup>

Examples include:

- |                     |                   |                              |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| • Microaggression   | • Anti-Blackness  | • White Supremacy            |
| • Implicit Bias     | • White Fragility | • Structural/Systemic Racism |
| • Intersectionality | • White Privilege |                              |

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary> for a list of terms.

## **2. Introduce terms and assess familiarity and level of comfort with terms**

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After introducing the terms and their definitions, we ask participants to indicate their level of familiarity with each term. Using a platform like [Mentimeter](#) (which provides tools for free account holders) allows participants to provide input anonymously, which may help to capture more accurate information and allows participants to see the aggregated responses of others in the room.

Participants respond to two questions:

1. What is your level of knowledge of this term?
2. How comfortable are you discussing this term in a public meeting (e.g., committee meeting, gathering with colleagues, public forum, etc.)

## **3. Allow for Discussion**

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Encouraging discussion during this process helps ensure understanding and creates a culture of engagement. Discussion prompts include:

- Reflections on the group's responses
- Reflections on the terms
- Thoughts about the term's relationship to the community and planning process
- Other insights from the exercise

## **4. Revisit Terms**

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Throughout the planning process, the Planning Committee may wish to revisit terms and definitions as they arise, as well as provide support to the community at large to understand these terms. It may be helpful to distribute a list of terms and definitions with meeting agendas or display these in view during meetings and public presentations and include the definitions in the final plan.

## **5. Foster Shared Understanding of the Local Landscape**

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To ensure authentic commitment to racial equity, it can help to provide background on the local context. Data on local racial disparities in system performance measures (e.g. length of time homeless, returns to homelessness), coordinated entry system outcomes, and total numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness, unsheltered homelessness, and chronic homelessness can support issues of racial equity to move away from abstraction.

Additionally, communities commonly benefit from discussion of the greater historical factors at play, such as local histories of redlining, discrimination, and violence – understanding of

the landscape that is important to understanding the aspects of local homelessness and its causes.

Together, these conversations result in all participants having at least an introductory awareness of racial equity terms and concepts and a foundation of shared language from which to base future planning discussions.

Beyond this, the process can provide an opportunity for planning bodies to break ground on initial conversations about where their community is on its path toward racial equity, and where they need to go. It also provides community leaders and facilitators with insights into where the community is in its understanding of racial equity concepts and whether further discussion and education is necessary.

*For additional support or questions on how to approach racial equity work within your community or organization, please contact Homebase's Racial Equity Action and Coordination Team (REACT) at [react@homebaseccc.org](mailto:react@homebaseccc.org).*