



Orange County CoC

Racial Equity Roadmap and
Recommendations for Implementation
and Sustainability

Acknowledgements

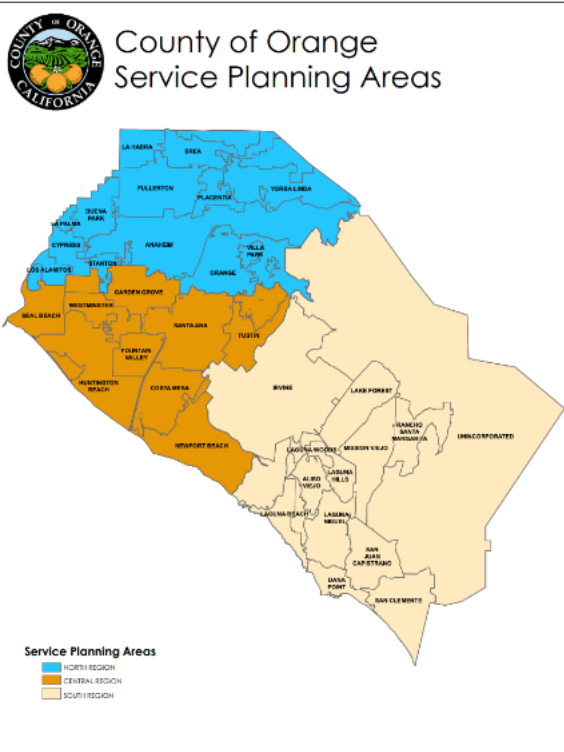
The C4 REDI Team would like to express our sincere appreciation to all those who participated in the Orange County CoC racial equity analysis and roadmap development. The OC Racial Equity Roadmap/Action Plan - Working Draft reflects a shared vision for a more equitable homeless response system across the region, and it provides a path forward that can improve access and outcomes for Black, Indigenous and communities of color who are most disproportionately impacted by homelessness. This brief will highlight particular areas of the plan that need further development and provide recommendations to address technical challenges (e.g., needed resources, additional trainings, evaluation, etc.) as well as adaptive leadership challenges (e.g., shifts in power, more inclusive decision-making, cultural shifts) to ensure successful implementation and sustainability.

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**County of Orange
Service Planning Areas**

The map shows the County of Orange divided into three service planning regions: Northern (blue), Central (orange), and Southern (yellow). Numerous cities and communities are labeled across the map, including La Habra, Brea, Fullerton, Placentia, Villa Park, Orange, Santa Ana, Tustin, Irvine, Newport Beach, Laguna Hills, and San Clemente.

Service Planning Areas

- NORTHERN REGION
- CENTRAL REGION
- SOUTHERN REGION

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Thank
You

Background

The County of Orange partnered with C4 Innovations to engage and support the Orange County CoC to assess its homeless response system, prioritize areas for action, and develop implementation strategies to achieve more racially equitable outcomes.

The C4 Racial Equity Design and Implementation (REDI) Team has developed a framework for racially equitable systems change that starts with acknowledging that every system in this country has been built on the foundation of white supremacy ideology, designed to advantage White individuals, while systematically disadvantaging Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. The long-lasting and intergenerational damage caused by this faulty foundation can be seen in the racial disparities that exist across health, education, employment, justice system, and housing outcomes. The REDI framework has three major pillars that shape our approach. Across all three, we ask, *“How can CoCs de-center whiteness and explicitly center the Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) they aim to serve?”*



1. Culture Shift: There must be a seismic shift away from [White Supremacy Cultural \(WSC\) Characteristics](#) in order to move to a more inclusive and anti-racist culture. The foundation must be examined, torn apart/broken down, and rebuilt based on shared values that promote equitable outcomes for all. The REDI framework creates space for exploration and processing through a series of foundational learning sessions as well as opportunities for continued learning and self-reflection. During this project, network providers and community members attended a series of foundational learning sessions to build a shared language, examine the historical and current conditions that have led to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) experiencing homelessness at higher rates, and disrupt implicit biases. This not only helps to build commitment towards designing a more equitable homeless response system, but it also ensures that any resulting changes can be sustained. As part of this culture shift, it is important to recognize that leadership and decision-making roles cannot continue to be reserved for those in powerful positions. Power must be given back to community, and the people who will be most impacted by policies must be involved in driving and sustaining system change.



2. Centering Lived Experience: To develop community-driven solutions that are sustainable, it is necessary to authentically engage and partner with those who have the best vantage point and most relevant expertise at decision-making tables. The County was provided with coaching and support to convene a Results Academy Team made up of stakeholders who were racially and ethnically representative of those most disproportionately impacted by homelessness and inclusive of partners with lived experience of homelessness, frontline staff, and system leaders. The team met biweekly over the course of the 15-month engagement to analyze quantitative and qualitative data and keep the experiences of people who are using the homeless response system at the center of strategy development. They identified racial inequities, envisioned a desired end result

for regional change, and worked to develop strategies that can impact the policies, mental models, and structures that have led to these disparities.



3. Implementation of Anti-Racist Practices, Policies, Tools, and Frameworks:

Undoing racist structures requires that communities move from awareness of inequities to action. The foundation must be rebuilt, brick by brick, to ensure an equitable homeless response system. This is a long-term commitment that requires intentionality, action, and shared accountability. The REDI framework supports community members to operationalize what they have learned and apply their knowledge in ways that will lead to improved outcomes for those most disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Participants build the capacity and skills to interrogate every part of the homeless response system and integrate racial equity into processes such as reviewing policies and procedures with a racial equity lens and embedding cultural humility into services. Throughout the course of the project, Results Academy team members began to move away from “business as usual,” engaging community members in the planning and decision-making process who, historically, have been excluded and strengthening commitments from system leaders to ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of the racial equity action plan.

Technical and Adaptive Leadership Challenges and Recommendations

Authentic Engagement of Partners with Lived Experience:

In the initial phase of the project, the County of Orange recruited members for the Results Academy team. Great efforts were made to engage people with lived experience, from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and varied positions within the homeless service system. There was a clear commitment to compensating partners with lived experience for their time and knowledge. However, the County had little flexibility in how the payments could be made. Compensating persons with lived experience is not one size fits all. It is important that individuals have the ability to choose how they are compensated. This could include checks, gift cards, cash, or electronic cash transfers.

Recommendation:

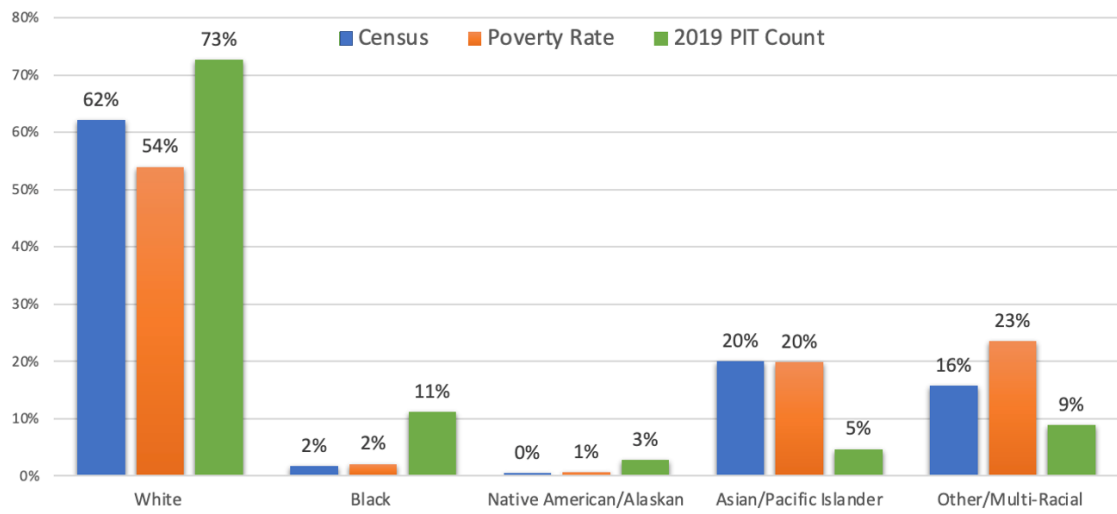
Identify a nonprofit or philanthropic partner that can compensate partners with lived experience in various ways that best meet their needs.

It is also important to ensure there is a supportive infrastructure that enables partners with lived experience to *lead* the work of system change. Inviting them to the table is only the beginning. The CoC must ensure that partners with lived experience are building their skills and capacity and given opportunities to facilitate meetings and trainings, set the agenda, sit in positions of leadership, and make impactful decisions about the system (e.g., resource allocation, policy change, program design, etc.).

Shared Power and Decision-Making with Black/African American Stakeholders:

Quantitative data analysis reveals that across the Orange County CoC, Black and/or African American households are the most overrepresented demographic group experiencing homelessness when comparing the racial and ethnic population distributions in Census data to Point-in-Time (PIT) count data from 2019.

Table 1 - Census, Poverty, and PIT Count Data by Race



Although the Results Academy team members were diverse in many ways, (gender, age, race, ethnicity, etc.), only one individual identified as Black/African American. This was also the case across other planning bodies.

Recommendation:

Increase representation of Black/African American stakeholders in every part of the process to advance racial equity. They understand what works best for their communities and should share decision-making power in developing the strategies to address inequities, as well as in the implementation and monitoring/evaluation phases of the racial equity action plan.

Multiple Equity Initiatives:

In Orange County, there are several collaboratives working in different spaces to promote and advance equity in the healthcare and homeless service systems. These systems often operate independently from each other, their policies and practices solely reflecting their own bodies of knowledge, producing and reinforcing fragmentation.

Recommendation:

Align the Orange County CoC Racial Equity Roadmap/Action Plan with the objectives of other racial equity initiatives. Specifically, ensure the plan is aligned with California Advancing and Innovating Medical (CalAIM's) racial equity strategies, the CA Racial Equity Action Lab (facilitated by TAC), Equity in OC, and the equity objectives of the CoC Leadership Vision. Develop a shared vision for what equitable housing and healthcare looks like in Orange County and shared

measures of progress. This will ensure that systems are working together to address the holistic concerns of community members, especially those that have been most marginalized.

Building Buy-In:

To achieve successful implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan, there must be involvement from the entire network of CoC members. The Results Academy team are not meant to be solely responsible for the plan. Currently, the plan still has many recommended action steps without any responsible parties identified to lead the work. It is important that partners take ownership of areas where they may have the most influence/impact.

There is also concern that many partners may lack capacity to take on some of the work. However, there will never be a better time than now to engage in the work of racial equity. There will always be competing priorities. Therefore, it is important to consider how partners can build capacity and skills to do this work and engage in ways that they are able to now.

Network providers should have opportunities, and be provided with any information necessary, to define their priorities within the plan.

Recommendation:

Share the plan with stakeholders across the CoC and partners from adjacent systems in a dynamic and engaging way that builds commitment and collaboration. Plan an Equity Summit/Convening for the Homeless Response System to map out everybody's roles in the plan and get partners to take ownership (early in the year, maybe in February).

Participants can engage in a "Gallery Walk" with the Racial Equity Roadmap displayed on the walls, allowing community members to leave comments on each part of the plan where there is already progress or where they see themselves taking on some of the work.

Additionally, the County can survey agencies to determine how they are currently working on advancing racial equity to leverage work that is already happening and conduct a focused listening session with some of the providers to determine their priorities.

Culture Shift:

Several CoC Board members have been involved in system analysis and action planning to develop the Racial Equity Roadmap/Action Plan. The CoC has embedded equity objectives into their leadership vision and are committed to advancing racial equity. However, they have expressed that making time and space to create more inclusive spaces for authentic partnering with people with lived experience and Black, Indigenous, people of color has been difficult. The Board meetings are governed by processes that can perpetuate exclusion, and packed agendas leave little time to orient new members or ensure everyone's voice is heard.

The culture of the CoC also shapes the experiences of frontline staff. The goal is to ensure that all providers can be racial equity practitioners who are working to achieve equitable access and outcomes for all. It is extremely important to consider the current demands on homeless

service staff and receive their input prior to mandating a series of new trainings. Most frontline staff in homeless service systems across the country are overworked and underpaid.

Recommendation:

Continue to strengthen Board engagement and educate Board members around racial equity objectives. The CoC Board has to be intentional about making space to discuss and implement racial equity principles and disrupt existing White supremacy cultural characteristics.

The Board may benefit from coaching sessions around the CoC governance structure to determine how racial equity principles and practices can be embedded in different committees, roles, etc. Initially, an ad hoc committee that is primarily focused on racial equity may be beneficial.

Additional trainings for service providers and Board members can also support the continued application of racial equity principles and practices. This may require contracting with a subject matter expert who can provide a series of knowledge and skill building sessions.

The CoC will need to find resources to support some of these cultural shifts (e.g., increased pay for frontline staff, flexible service dollars, the hiring of peers, trainings, etc.). Examine all federal funding streams to identify available service dollars, and partner with additional funders to explore additional funding that may be more flexible.

Accountability Structure:

It is important that the community feels a shared sense of accountability for reaching benchmarks related to racial equity. There have to be identified champions who lead the work as well as a way to incentivize partners to participate.

Recommendation:

If the CoC sets expectations (e.g., equity will be established as a part of the scoring/ranking process), it will be important to provide support to ensure they can meet those expectations.

Facilitate an Equity Retreat/Implementation Working Session for the CoC Board. Start the year by taking the time to embed racial equity principles into existing processes and orient new board members to the priorities within the Racial Equity Roadmap/Action Plan.

Create accountability pathways. In every meeting CoC Board members can check themselves on indicators that they set for themselves that are public (e.g., making space to respond thoughtfully to public comment). Accountability pathways can also be integrated into other committee structures.

Set benchmarks and utilize the Racial Equity Dashboard to hold each other accountable to affecting real change. Identify system performance measures specific to racial equity and share data in ways that lead to greater accountability and impact. Continually ask, “Who will implement

changes for the larger system? How is data being used? What policies/practices have changed? etc.”

Empower the Results Academy Team as a subcommittee under Vision Ad Hoc Committee or under Policies, Procedures, and Standards Committee.

After collecting feedback from the community, work to frame some of the strategies under each committee (e.g., Lived Experience Committee) and continue to share updates to the plan with all partners.

Summary

Orange County CoC has developed shared foundational knowledge across the community, built an infrastructure to move the work forward, and committed time and resources to addressing racial disparities. Working towards racial equity is a long-term commitment, and at times, the work may need to pause or even take a few steps back before it can move forward again.

Implementation to achieve maximum impact will require:

- Public accountability and community-wide ownership
- A process to collect ongoing feedback and work through challenges/barriers
- Full integration of people with lived experience
- Acknowledging that there will be a need for ongoing evaluation of impact and course correction