



EQUITY IN SUSTAINABILITY

A collaborative initiative by the City of Providence and frontline, communities of color **of Providence** to bring a racial equity lens to the City's sustainability agenda.



Overview

This document captures the process and results of the first year of Providence's Equity in Sustainability initiative. The goal of the work is to develop a process for co-creating an equitable sustainability agenda that can serve as a model for prioritizing equity at all levels of local government. Within the first year, the effort sought to create a framework to begin to address and remedy deep-rooted environmental inequities along racial lines in the city of Providence.

The initiative is the result of a partnership between the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, Groundwork Rhode Island, and the City of Providence's Office of Sustainability.

This project team established the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee (REJC), made up of people of color representing frontline communities in the City. The work began with anti-racism trainings, which presented a racial equity analysis for City and community members. The REJC then assessed the needs and priorities of community members and researched best practices for equitable sustainable community development. The result was the creation of Recommendations for a Just and Racially Equitable Providence, which was adopted by the Office of Sustainability in September 2017 and is now known as the "Just Providence Framework."

The process of creating this Framework was designed to shift decision-making power over environmental justice and sustainability issues to Providence's frontline communities of color. It rejected the typical "input" model of community engagement and created space for frontline communities to be the decision-makers. This approach acknowledges that the experts of racial equity in Providence are those who have been most affected by it--communities of color. There was also significant attention given to removing barriers to participation and an explicit focus on trust-building between these community members and the City. Going forward, the REJC will be identifying and implementing a process for the operationalization of this Framework within the Office of Sustainability.



Providence Office of Sustainability receive 100K from the Rhode Island Foundation and Partners for Places

June 2016

City, EJ League & Groundwork RI awarded 100K grant

Set Project Charter & Roles

Sep 2016

Kickoff

About the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee

The REJC was established to co-create a process that directly integrates voices and concerns of people of color into a city sustainability and resiliency planning process, with the long-term goal of institutionalizing this model into city-wide planning and decision-making processes. The group was tasked with the following:

1. Build bases within their communities to support the work and raise awareness of environmental justice issues.
2. Identify key concerns, issues and needs for communities of color related to environmental sustainability in Providence.
3. Recommend a long-term process and structure for collaboration between communities of color and the Office of Sustainability.

The group included ten community members representing various “seats” within the community, as well as five City representatives. Critical elements that led to the success of the group included:

- Spaces were POC-centered and led
- Undoing Racism Trainings provided a common analysis and language
- RECJ members conducted base building throughout the process to build support for the work and to ensure that it remained rooted in the community
- The City participated, but primarily in a listening role, and conducted its own base-building within City Hall to help other government official engage in racial equity work

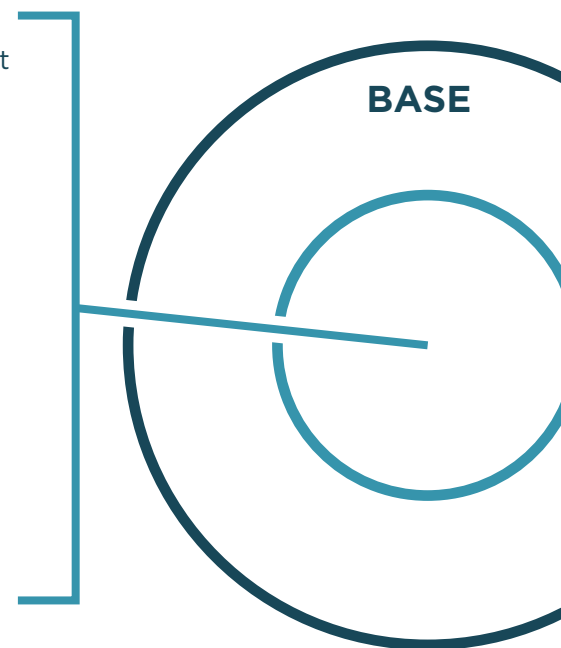
Committee Structure and Members

Community Members

- Chief Sequan Pijaki "AKA George Spring Buffalo"** Indigenous Seat
- Stephanie Moniz** Low-Income Seat
- Monica Huertas** Southside Seat
- Candelaria Danicher/Lucy Rios** Southside Seat
- Mike Araujo** West End Seat
- Jesus Holguin** North End Seat
- Vatic Kumba** Racial Justice Seat
- Seena Chhan** Environmental Justice Seat
- Abraham Henderson/Paul Tavares** Education/Youth Seat
- Sila Nhongvongsouthy** Refugee/ Immigrant Seat

City Members

- Lily Gutterman** Mayor's Policy Office
- Leah Bamberger** Director of Sustainability
- Brian Hull** Director of Economic Opportunity
- Lizze Araujo** Deputy Director of Arts, Culture, & Tourism
- Christina Hom** Office of Healthy Communities



Sep 2016

Community Wide Call for
Applicants to REJ Committee

Nov 2016

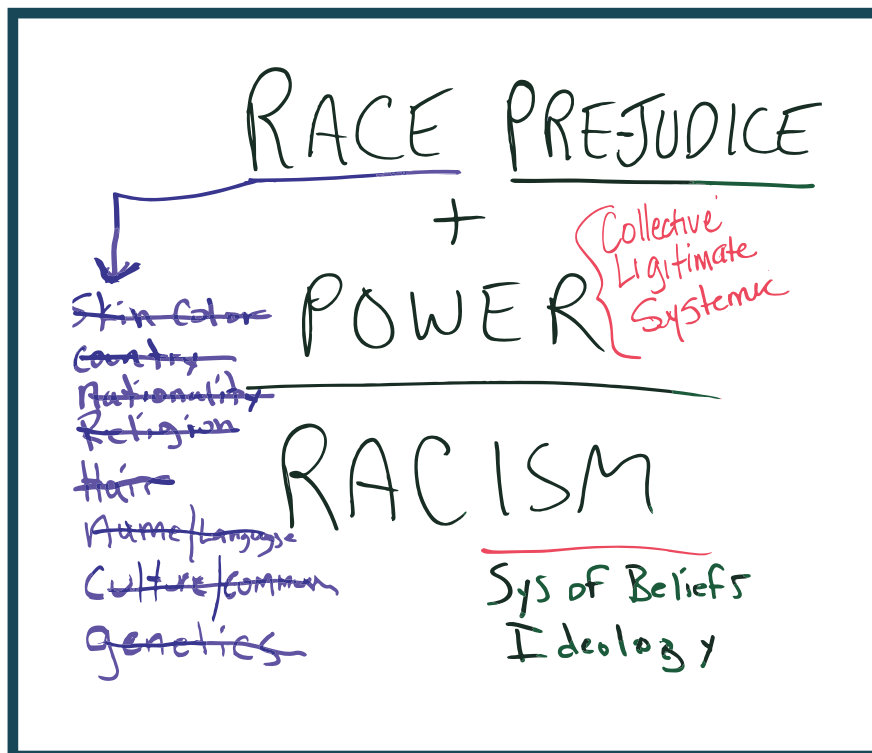
Presentation to Community Members
About the REJ Committee & Process

Racial Equity Trainings



Racial equity trainings were essential to building a standard definition of racism and systems of oppression between City and community members. 100 Providence City staff and community members, including Mayor Jorge Elorza, participated in two-day **Undoing Racism**[®] trainings hosted by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. Two trainings were hosted in December 2016 and January 2017. This educational component was a critical step towards collaboration and helped establish shared goals and a common understanding.

Based on this success, the City is continuing to commit resources to hosting additional trainings. The City is funding two more trainings in 2018 via the Department of Arts, Culture, and Tourism and the Mayor's Office. The REJC also funded a third training in December 2017 with its year two grant funds.



Definition of racism from the Undoing Racism[®] training, provided by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

Dec 2016

Selection of REJ Committee Members

Dec 2016

Undoing Racism[®] Trainings
80+ community members

Community Concerns

Through meetings with the REJC, base meetings and a survey, the REJC identified 12 priorities and concerns for communities of color related to the health of their communities:

Topic 1: Clean Streets

Cleaning up trash on the streets and in public spaces, better trash collection and recycling programs, street sweeping, making better use of vacant lots and foreclosed houses, addressing graffiti and potholes.

Topic 2: Industrial Hazards

Addressing industrial health hazards and toxic sites particularly around Port of Providence, addressing air and water pollution, greater accountability and transparency around pollution issues, lead safety.

Topic 3: Youth Programs

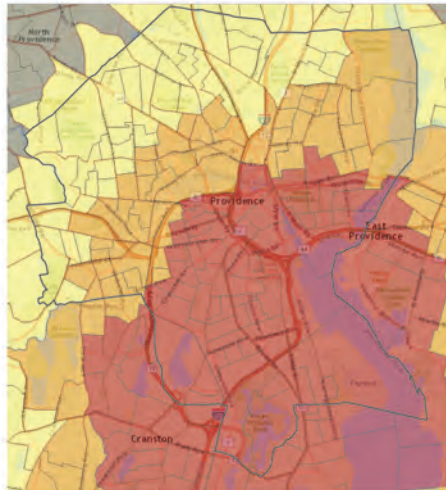
Lack of after school programs for youth, lack of family-friendly community spaces, lack of free public events.

Topic 4: Diverse, Local Jobs

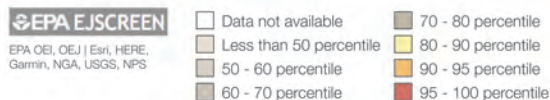
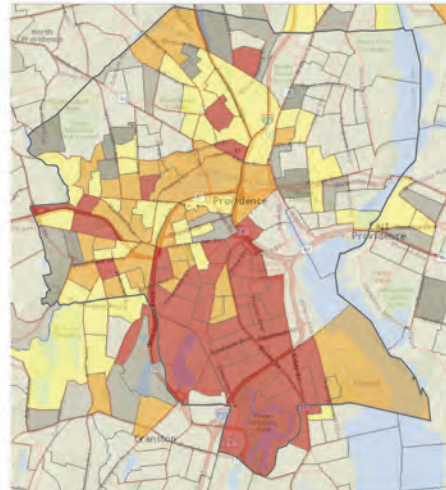
Lack of jobs, particularly jobs that are local, in diverse sectors, and jobs for youth and elders; lack of career options for youth.

Exposure to hazardous waste

Hazardous waste proximity
(facility count / km distance) national percentiles



Environmental justice (EJ) index for hazardous
waste proximity national percentiles



REJC learn about, build on, and commit to the process for the year.

January 7, 2017

1st REJC Meeting

Base members learn about and commit to the process for the year. Learn about the needs of historically marginalized community members. Learn about their vision for the future.

February 2017

1st Base Meeting - Needs and Vision

Topic 5: Affordable Housing & Gentrification

Ensuring access to fair, affordable housing, preventing gentrification and displacement.

Topic 6: Race & Representation

Expanding representation of people of color in government, in decision-making positions, and in the education system.

Topic 7: Government Accountability & Service

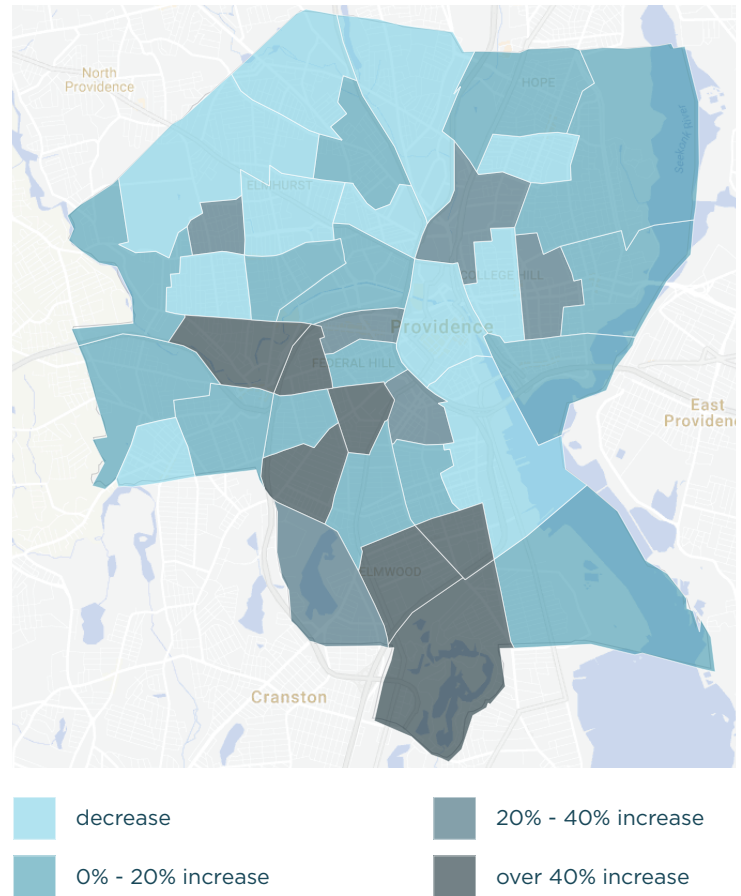
Addressing the experience that government representatives do not understand, listen, or care about issues affecting communities of color; developing ways for government to better address community needs; changing the systems that create a sense of fear, disrespect, and discrimination felt by communities of color when working with government processes.

Topic 8: Policing Practices

Addressing police discrimination, racial profiling, and lack of police accountability; addressing fear of the police and the feeling that the police is not a community resource; shifting away from “supervision and surveillance” towards protection.

GENTRIFICATION

Percent change in number of white people over five year period (between 2006-2010 and 2011-2015). (Data from American Community Survey [ACS] databases.) Portions of southwest Providence (such as in the West End, Olneyville, and South Elmwood neighborhoods in particular) have seen an increase in the number of white people by over 40%.



Share information from base meetings with the REJC. Research about potential models for racial equity in Providence presented.

March 11, 2017

2nd REJ Committee Meeting – Connecting the dots

Community members receive information from REJC process on community priorities and needs. They further prioritize, add and clarify, and begin to work on solutions.

April 9, 2017

2nd Base Meeting – Connecting the dots

Topic 9: Community Safety

Creating greater safety on buses and streets, better lighting, more safe places to play; addressing youth violence, gang and gun prevalence.

Topic 10: Expanded Public Transit

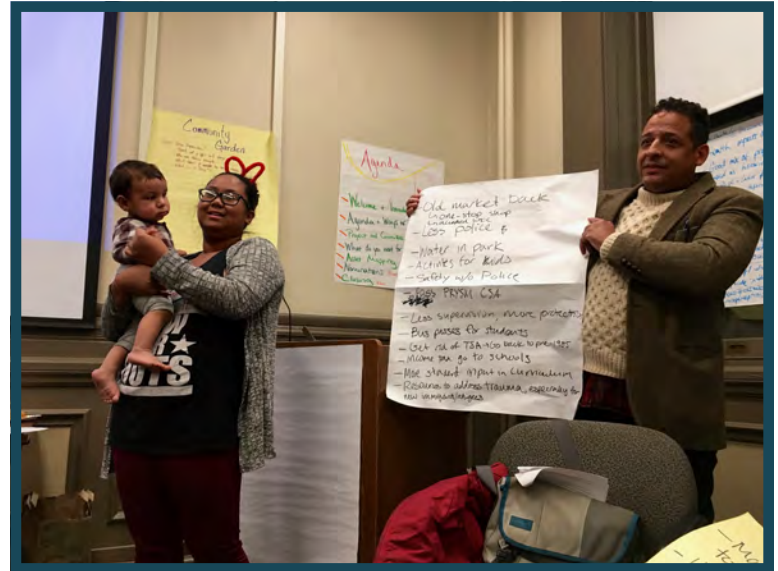
Expanding public transit routes, greater accessibility, adjusting the system to better meet community needs.

Topic 11: Mental Health Resources

Expanding access to better affordable mental health resources; encouraging mental health care that addresses from a holistic, spiritual, and emotional standpoint; ensuring access to providers that are LGBTQ friendly, deferent to cultural differences, and practice cultural humility.

Topic 12: Education

Adopting curricula that better incorporates ethnic studies and histories of people of color; culturally appropriate teaching styles; use of other languages and better access to ESOL; changing curricula to better prepare students for post-secondary education; incorporating lessons that better relate to the real world including civic engagement, financial literacy, etc.



Finalize document representing the principles and values of communities of color of Providence.

June 10, 2017

4th Base Meeting- Community Values and Principles

The Principles and Values go before the Environmental Sustainability Task Force for adoption

September 2017

Adoption by Office of Sustainability



SUSTAINPVD

CITY OF PROVIDENCE | MAYOR JORGE O. ELORZA



MAYOR JORGE O. ELORZA
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

FRAMEWORK FOR A RACIALLY EQUITABLE AND JUST PROVIDENCE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee and our base members, agree that to move forward with racial equity* and justice we must acknowledge the past and current realities of Providence, including the following:

- People of color have been harmed by Providence’s history;
- Providence Plantations was built on stolen Native-Aboriginal-Indigenous land, specifically Pokanoket, Nipmuk, and Narraganset;
- Providence’s foundational industry was based on the enslavement of Black people;
- People of color have not been represented and continue to be disproportionately harmed by City laws and policies;
- There is a dominant culture* that invisibilizes people of color and asks that they assimilate to it;

The City has processes that are difficult to access and navigate.

We, the frontline communities of color of Providence* invite the City of Providence to join us in building new systems that are good for all people, and not just a few. A racially equitable & just Providence must actively work against and transform current and historic social inequities based on race, class, gender, immigrant status, and other forms of oppression. A racially equitable and just Providence puts capital and resources where these inequities are greatest.

We invite the Sustainability Office of the City of Providence to adopt the following Principles and Values so that Providence can move forward in achieving racial equity. These principles and values are based on the Just Transition* model.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

1) A racially equitable & just Providence moves us toward el Buen Vivir*

Frontline communities of color* have a fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education, transportation, safety, and housing. We must have just relationships with each other and with the natural world, of which we are a part. Buen vivir* for Providence includes:

- Ensuring that frontline communities of color* enjoy their fundamental right to quality of life* and live free from discrimination and oppression;
- Prioritizing the well-being of our children, youth, and elders;
- Centers conversations about the future of Providence on the communities most affected by inequities.

2) A racially equitable and just Providence supports safe spaces for frontline communities of color*

For Providence this means:

- Politically and financially supporting physical and psychological safe spaces built by and for frontline communities of color* where we can heal and lead. Safe spaces include: Homes, schools, public institutions, community centers, non-profits and our streets; and places that provide mental health and other resources for and by frontline communities of color*;
- Supporting existing organizations that provide safe spaces for and by people of color;
- Supporting people of color*s* need to care for ourselves, our families, and our communities without taking away the resources of future generations;
- Acknowledging gentrification and committing to stopping the displacement of people of color, especially by developers and universities;
- An end to police brutality and murder of people of color, specifically focusing on Black people;
- An end to mass incarceration of frontline communities of color*, especially focusing on Black communities;
- An end to surveillance of frontline communities of color that creates a culture of fear and repression.
- Reduce the barriers to reentry for formerly incarcerated people

3) A racially equitable and just Providence knows people are sacred and respects their cultures and traditions. For Providence this means the City:

- Acknowledges and respects that there is more than just the dominant culture* in Providence; Values and honors the abundant cultures and traditions of the peoples of Providence;
- Learns about the full range of perspective, cultures, and knowledge in the community, including Indigenous communities’ self-determination*, healing practices and cultures;
- Protects, restores, and preserves cultural, historic, and sacred sites of Native-Aboriginal- Indigenous people and captured Black people;
- Respects and honors Indigenous peoples’ inherent rights and dynamic cultures, deeply and richly interwoven in lands, languages, spiritual traditions, religions and healing beliefs and ceremonies and artistic expression, rooted in self-determination* and self-governance.



DEFINITIONS

Buen Vivir: Living well without living better at the expense of others. The fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education, transportation, safety, and housing. Just relationships with each other and with the natural world, of which we are a part.

Deep Democracy: A form of governance including direct and ongoing participation of community members in civic institutions and organizations, including equitable problem solving and capacity- building for citizens and City workers

Dominant Culture: One that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving within a political or social entity (a city, example) in which multiple cultures are present. In the United States, the dominant culture is that of White people, referred to as White supremacy.

Frontline Communities of Color: Communities of color most impacted by the crises of ecology, economy and democracy, including the Indigenous, African-American, Black, Latino and Southeast Asian communities. There is particular emphasis on people of color who are refugees and immigrants, people with records, speakers of languages other than English, and LGBTQ.

Just Transition: A framework that has been developed by the trade union movement to include a range of social interventions needed to secure workers’ jobs and livelihoods and shift to sustainable production, including avoiding climate change, protecting biodiversity, among other challenges.

Quality of Life: General well-being of individuals and societies including access to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education, transportation, safety, and housing.

Racial Equity: When a person’s outcome is not predicted by the color of their skin.

Self-Determination: Freedom of a people to determine the way in which they shall be governed and whether or not they shall be self-governed.

Solidarity: Mutual respect for and responsibility to support one another’s human rights.

4) A racially equitable & just Providence upholds self-determination*. Frontline communities of color* are autonomous and have the right to craft decisions that impact their lives and their communities.

Frontline communities of color* have the resilience and expertise to be our own leaders. It is only in the dignity of our self-determination* that we can thrive as a community.

5) A racially equitable and just Providence co-creates and co-leads governance with frontline communities of color* and the City of Providence to protect the space for communities’ self-determination*, and ensure equitable access to resources, information, and power. These systems should allow for deep democracy* with meaningful and ongoing processes of governance that are transparent and allow for equal power and ability to influence Providence decisions. For the City of Providence this means:

- All community members have access to participate in decisions about the City. Access includes: compensation so that people without the resources of money or time can afford to participate without sacrificing their well-being and that of their families; information sent out in video, paper, online and offline formats; translated into Providence’s languages; and using language that all residents can understand;
- Respecting and valuing the lived experience of Providence frontline community members of color as an essential source of expertise and wisdom;
- Addressing the inequity in power and resources that frontline communities of color* hold in Providence; and Being accountable to frontline communities of color*.

6) A racially equitable and just Providence values education for our children and youth. Education is a fundamental right for our children and youth. The City of Providence should:

- Support education that embraces diverse teaching and learning methods and roots us in our communities’ culture and traditions;
- Provide accessible and equitable academic resources and pathways that take our children and youth where they desire to go in their career and life; Implement restorative justice practices in our school systems and end criminalization of our children and youth of color;
- Ensure educators and administration reflect the ethnic and racial makeup of the student body; and
- End the school to prison pipeline.

7) A racially equitable & just Providence practices local, regional, national and international solidarity.* This means the City of Providence should:

- Work across cities, states and countries to support racial equity* and justice; and
- Fight for the rights of frontline community members as they are their own.

8) A racially equitable and just Providence must create meaningful work. Meaningful work entails full employment for all frontline communities of color* in Providence. For the City of Providence this means:

- Openly encouraging the formation of worker’s democratic structures;
- Supporting collective bargaining for retaining working communities and building a life of dignity and inclusion;
- Ending the exploitation of black and brown bodies, in prison, and in providing work for little or no pay;
- Supporting work that lifts up and centers the beauty and intellectual brilliance of our communities
- Ending employment discrimination and nepotism in municipal employment; and
- Creating work that does not harm our people or the earth.

9) A racially equitable & just Providence requires building a sustainable local economy now, one in which we produce and consume to live well without living better at the expense of others. For Providence this means we move towards:

- Zero Waste
- Clean and Efficient Public Transportation
- Clean Community Energy
- Regional Food & Water Systems
- Efficient, Affordable, Durable Housing
- Ecosystem Restoration & Stewardship

10) A Racially Equitable & Just Providence Respects Community rights to Land, Water, and Food Sovereignty. For Providence this means:

- Supporting land ownership by people of color; and
- Supporting education for people of color about their rights to land, water and food.

11) A Racially Equitable and Just Providence works to end the extractive economy. For Providence this means: For Providence this means:

- Eliminate fossil fuel dependence and wasteful use of scarce metals and minerals;
- Eliminate production of plastics, toxic chemicals, synthetic substances and our dependency on them;
- Reduce waste and eliminate wasteful practices that hurt our environment and ecosystems; and
- Eliminate destruction of nature and invasion of natural spaces (e.g., land, water, wildlife, forests, soil, and ecosystems).

SHORT-TERM NEXT STEPS

The Office of Sustainability officially adopted this document in September 2017. In the next year, the REJC will develop:

- Ongoing training for City and communities about anti- racism;
- Establish deep democracy* structure for community members to continually set and weigh in on long-term goals and solutions.