

From Community Engagement to Ownership

Tools for the Field with Case Studies of Four Municipal Community-Driven Environmental & Racial Equity Committees

An Urban Sustainability Directors Network Innovation Fund Project conducted by Facilitating Power, Movement Strategy Center, and the National Association of Climate Resilience Planners



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1 • FRAMEWORK

Why Community Engagement to Ownership?

The key to closing equity gaps and resolving climate vulnerability is the direct participation by impacted communities in the development and implementation of solutions and policy decisions that directly impact them. This level of participation unleashes much needed capacity but also requires initial capacity investments across multiple sectors to achieve systems changes and culture shifts needed. Community-based organizations play a critical role in cultivating community capacity to participate in and lead decision-making processes that meet community needs and maximize community strengths. Staff and electeds within local government have essential roles to play in helping to facilitate systems changes to increase community voice and decrease disproportionate harms caused to low-income communities and communities of color. Philanthropic partners have a role to play in partnering with impacted communities to balance uneven power dynamics and ensure adequate resourcing of essential community capacities. Finally, third-party facilitators and evaluators can help cultivate the conditions for collaboration and participation across sectors while assessing and documenting progress towards practice goals and community solutions.

The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership¹

This spectrum can be used by local governments and by non-profit organizations or community groups working to facilitate community participation in solutions development and decision-making. It is designed to:

1. **Acknowledge marginalization as the status quo** practice of current systems historically designed to exclude certain low-income communities, communities of color, women, youth, previously incarcerated people, and queer or gender non-conforming community members. If concerted efforts are not made to address marginalization, then by default, marginalization occurs.
2. **Assert a clear vision** for rebuilding our local democracies, as key to solving today's toughest crises, through inclusion, racial justice, and community ownership
3. **Articulate a developmental process** for rebuilding our local democracies that requires significant investment in the capacity to participate as well as the capacity to break down systemic barriers to community participation
4. **Assess community participation efforts** and progress toward participation goals

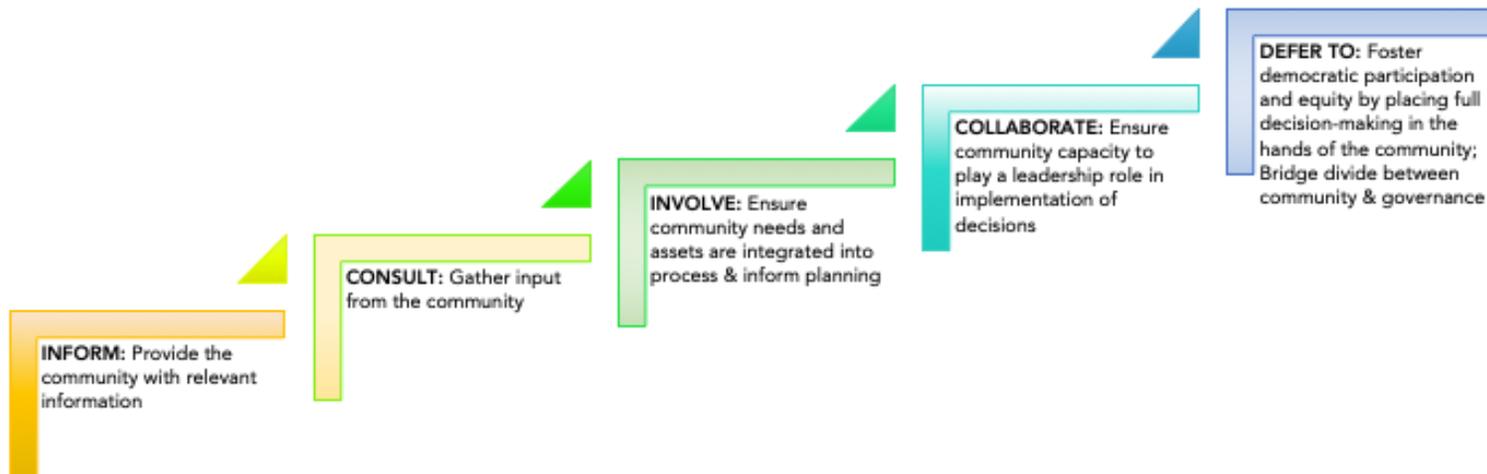
¹ This tool was developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, in collaboration with Movement Strategy Center, in part drawing on content from a number of public participation tools, including Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and the Public Participation Spectrum created by the International Association for Public Participation.

Stance towards community	0 IGNORE	1 INFORM	2 CONSULT	3 INVOLVE	4 COLLABORATE	5 DEFER TO
Impact	<i>Marginalization</i>	<i>Placation</i>	<i>Tokenization</i>	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Delegated Power</i>	<i>Community Ownership</i>
Community Engagement Goals	Deny access to decision-making processes	Provide the community with relevant information	Gather input from the community	Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process and inform planning	Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in implementation of decisions	Foster democratic participation and equity by placing full decision-making in the hands of the community; bridge divide between community and governance
Message to Community	<i>“Your voice, needs, and interests do not matter”</i>	<i>“We will keep you informed”</i>	<i>“We care what you think”</i>	<i>“You are making us think (and therefore act) differently about the issue”</i>	<i>“Your leadership and expertise are critical to how we address the issue”</i>	<i>“It’s time to unlock collective power and capacity for transformative solutions”</i>
Activities	Closed-Door Meetings Misinformation Systematic Disenfranchisement Voter Suppression	Fact Sheets Open Houses Presentations Billboards Videos	Public Comment Focus Groups Community Forums Surveys	Community Organizing & Advocacy House Meetings Interactive Workshops Polling Community Forums	MOUs with Community-Based Organizations Community Organizing Citizen Advisory Committees Open Planning Forums with Citizen Polling	Community-Driven Planning Consensus Building Participatory Action Research Participatory Budgeting Cooperatives

Resource Allocation Ratios	100% systems admin	70-90% to systems admin 10-30% to promotions and publicity	60-80% to systems admin 20-40% to consultation activities	50-60% to systems admin 40-50% to community involvement	20-50% to systems admin 50-70% to community partners	80-100% to community partners and community-driven processes that ideally generate new value and resources that can be invested in solutions
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Why Developmental Stages?

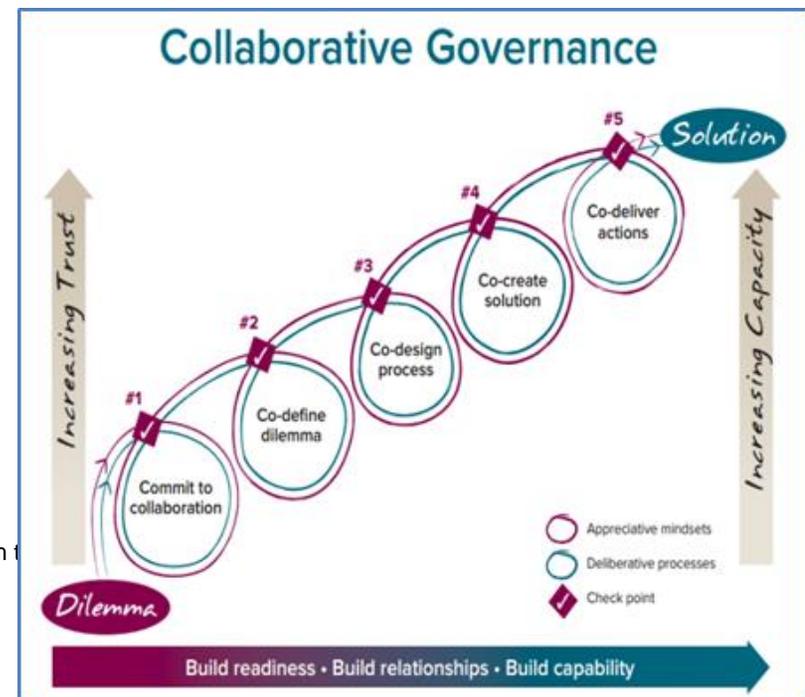
With the exception of marginalization (a zero on the spectrum), each of the steps along the spectrum are essential for building capacity for community collaboration and governance. Communities must be informed, consulted, and involved; but through deeper collaboration, we can unleash unprecedented capacity to develop and implement the solutions to today’s biggest crises in our urban centers. To achieve racial equity and environmental justice, we must build from a culture of collaboration to a culture of whole governance in which decisions are driven by the common good. Whole governance and community ownership are needed to break the cycle of perpetual advocacy for basic needs that many communities find themselves in. Developmental stages allow us to recognize where we are and set goals for where we can go together through conscious and collective practice—so key to transforming systems.



Why Focus on Collaborative Governance²?

Current crises that are both magnified by and contribute to climate impacts, such as economic inequality and displacement, housing and food insecurity, disproportionate energy costs, and burdens of pollution, are calling on all sectors of society to do what's possible to implement solutions now. Collaboration between community-based organizations and local governments can accelerate solutions implementation while increasing the viability of solutions. For this reason, the cities of Portland, Providence, Seattle, and Washington DC. established municipal community-centered committees to develop, assess, and implement racial equity and environmental justice solutions. Members of the

² Much has been written about collaborative governance. The chart included here is from [Co.](#)



community-centered committees and the City staff with whom they partnered and participated in this learning and evaluation effort determined that collaborative governance was the direction in which their work needed to head to achieve success. They also acknowledged the difficulty of this charge given current policies, practices, and power dynamics at the City level as well the current capacity limitations of community-based organizations.

Collaborative Governance is the co-definition of problems and the co-development of solutions among multiple sectors. Solutions benefit from a shared analysis of root causes and from increased capacity for implementation that can be grounded in community strengths and assets.

Collaborative Governance can help to build much needed capacity and infrastructure for community ownership models that could prevent the problems we are currently seeking to address. For example, community control energy can reduce energy costs for low-income communities, and if done right, can generate a surplus that is invested into additional community-driven solutions to prevent negative impacts on lower-income communities and communities of color.

2 • HIGH-IMPACT COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES OF KEY SECTORS³

Purpose

Looking at collaborative governance models across the country (and in Australia!), it is clear that no one place has the perfect model, nor should any one place be expected at this point to have “figured it all out.” Moving from a persistent legacy of systematic marginalization to a conscious practice of collaborative governance among community groups and government agencies is not only difficult, it is an emerging field of practice; the path is literally being made by walking. To support the carving of this critical path forward, we have identified useful, high-impact practices across multiple places and sectors and have attempted to gather them here at a high level. The purpose of this tool is to support new and existing efforts to design or refine their models dedicated to advancing racial and environmental justice solutions.

Sources

³ This tool was developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power with research support from Victoria Benson of Movement Strategy Center and Liz Harding of the City of Seattle.

We have identified high-impact practices from a number of sources that are cited throughout the tool:

- Municipal Community-Centered Committees for Racial Justice and Environmental Sustainability in the cities of Portland, Providence, Seattle, and Washington DC through the Urban Sustainability Directors Network:
 - [Portland](#) Municipal Community-Center Committee Case Study
 - [Providence](#) REJC (Race and Environmental Justice Committee) Case Study
 - [Seattle](#) Environmental Justice Committee Case Study
 - [Washington DC](#) EAG (Equity Advisory Group) Case Study
- [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity](#) Initiative in Salinas, California and the scaling of that work in the Toward an Equitable Monterey County effort supported by the California Endowment and stewarded by the Building Healthy Communities Initiative
- [Our Power Campaign](#) led by environmental justice groups in Richmond, California and [Richmond's Health in All Policies Effort](#), which was a response to grassroots organizing and represented collaboration between community-based groups and local government
- [The Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#) from the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute
- [The Practices of Transformative Movements](#) from Movement Strategy Center
- [Framework on Community-Driven Climate Resilience Planning](#) from the National Association of Climate Resilience Planners
- [GARE: Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#)
- [Participatory Grantmaking - Has Its Time Come?](#) from the Ford Foundation
- [Principles and Practices of Facilitating Power](#) from Rosa González
- [Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice](#) from National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

Essential Conditions for Collaborative Governance

The high-impact practices are grouped by the following essential conditions:

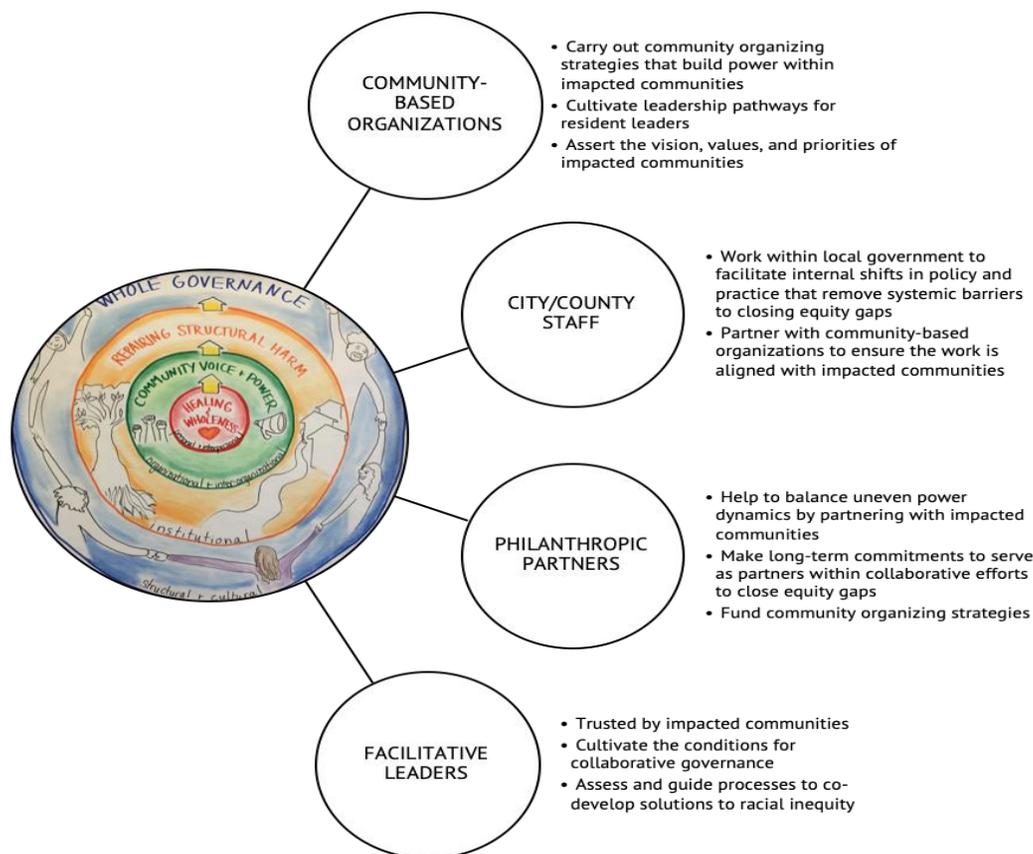
- 1) Commitment to Collaborative Governance Model
- 2) Purpose Clarity
- 3) Community Organizing & Power Building
- 4) Community Resourcing

- 5) City/County Racial Equity Training & Capacity
- 6) City Resourcing
- 7) City/County Capacity & Racial Equity Training
- 8) Power & Influence of Community Groups within City/County
- 9) Trust & Relationship Building
- 10) Principles and Practices to Ensure Equity at Every Step

These essential conditions are also included as core criteria in the [Learning & Evaluation Tool: Assessing the Process from Engagement to Ownership](#) and have been vetted by the Municipal Community-Centered Committees for Racial Justice and Environmental Sustainability at the cities of Portland, Providence, Seattle, and Washington DC.

Key Sectors

The high-impact practices are organized by key sectors (in the gray sections within the table on pages 11-20), including community-based organizations rooted in impacted communities, staff of local governments, third-party facilitators and evaluators, and philanthropic partners, as well as by essential conditions for collaborative governance (in the yellow sections within the table on pages 11-20). This graphic lays out the two primary sectors in any collaborative governance initiative (community-based organizations & City/County staff) as well as two essential supporting sectors (philanthropic partners and facilitative leaders/intermediaries) and their respective roles.



Key to the High-Impact Practices Table

Practices are color coded to indicate *when* they are conducted:

- **Before** a collaborative governance initiative begins (green)
- **During** the initiative (blue)
- **After** the initiative has been carried out (purple)
- **At all times** (black)
- **Bolded practices** indicate those that are central to the work that local government staff and community-based organizations conduct together within collaborative initiatives, often with the support of third-party facilitators. A municipal community-centered committee for racial equity and environmental justice like those in the cities of Portland, Providence, Seattle, and DC would be considered collaborative initiatives.

1 • Commitment to Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance, stage 4 on the [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#), is possible when there is clear commitment among all parties to both build the capacity for collaboration *and* break down existing barriers to equitable participation. Commitment is important because striving beyond the default tendencies of systems designed to exclude given populations takes perseverance. The following section outlines high-impact practices across the four key sectors that reflect a high level of commitment.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage members and constituents in understanding collaborative governance and making a formal decision to endorse the model as part of larger strategy to advance community priorities ● Name and address any hesitations or concerns around collaborating with government⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess internal barriers to and openings for collaborative governance and plan accordingly ● Build a team internally that is committed to trying out a collaborative governance approach and working together to maximize openings. ● Engage an evaluator with a community ownership lens (having a grounding in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are accountable to local frontline communities ● If not local, invest time in learning the local political context of the collaborative governance effort ● Committed to creating the conditions for collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaborate with CBOs and resident leaders to engage participatory grantmaking practices that center frontline communities⁷ ● Conduct internal work to understand the value and impact of collaborative approach that center

⁴ [Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect regularly on what is working and what can be improved; share proactive and honest feedback on a regular basis about what is needed on the community side to have authentic collaboration 	<p>relevant issue area) to facilitate developmental learning & evaluation throughout the process⁵ and integrate feedback into practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Document and share lessons learned via governmental networks to promote the model⁶ 	governance	<p>impacted communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote collaborative practices with other foundations⁸
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2 • Purpose Clarity

Collaborative initiatives can make significant forward momentum on closing equity gaps when members of each sector are clear what their driving motivations and unique roles (purposes) are in relationship to the other players in the collaborative initiative and when they take time to align around a shared purpose. Shared purpose is found at the intersection of the unique purposes of each of the distinct sectors while advancing larger goals only possible through collaboration.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct internal process to clarify organizational purpose—What is our core motivation and unique role in achieving equity in this region?⁹ ● Strive to play unique organizational role in dynamic relationships with other organizations ● Enter collaborative initiatives ready to identify the shared purpose at the intersections of each stakeholder’s vision and purpose—What is the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct internal process to clarify departmental purpose—What is our core motivation and unique role in achieving equity? ● Strive to play unique departmental role in dynamic relationships with other departments and community-based organizations ● Enter collaborative initiatives ready to identify shared purpose at the intersections of each stakeholder’s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain clarity of personal and professional purpose¹¹ ● Support committee members to uncover shared purpose at the intersection of their respective goals ● Check understanding of purpose before communicating out; ensure communications are guided by purpose ● Support stakeholders to reflect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct internal process to clarify foundation’s purpose within racial and environmental equity—What is our core motivation and unique role in achieving equity? ● Strive to play unique organizational role in dynamic relationships with other organizations

⁷ [Participatory Grantmaking: Has It’s Time Come?](#) --Ford Foundation

⁵ [DC EAG Case Study](#)

⁶ From Engagement to Ownership: Municipal Community-Centered Committees[#] for Racial Justice and Environmental Sustainability (USDN Innovation Fund Project)

⁸ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#)

⁹ [Practices of Transformative Movements from Movement Strategy Center](#)

<p>unique role this formation can play in advancing racial and environmental equity solutions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect on and evolve purpose as conditions change¹⁰ 	<p>goals—What is the unique role this initiative can play in advancing racial and environmental equity solutions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect on and evolve purpose as conditions change 	<p>on and evolve purpose as conditions change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect on and evolve purpose as conditions change
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3 • Community Organizing & Power Building

Most commonly, when government agencies (and many non-profits) conduct “community engagement,” what they are actually doing is either informing the community of activities occurring and building buy-in or they are consulting with the community to get their input on existing plans. Without community capacity to organize (building a base of residents with a clear vision, values, and set of priorities they are advocating for), then informational and consultorial “engagement” activities result in placation or tokenization. It is only through genuine community organizing and power building that communities can achieve true voice at decision-making tables. Community organizing is essential for effective participation by residents because through organizing activities, they gain a critical lens and political stance on core issues that affect their neighbors and therefore can effectively represent the interests of their communities. In many cases, it is also critical to putting the pressure on the local government to open up spaces for genuine community involvement.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Form an alliance of community-based institutions dedicated to achieving shared racial and environmental equity goals¹² ● Cultivate representation from each municipal district as well as from each major community that makes up the city’s cultural and ethnic diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaborate with CBOs to cultivate philanthropic partners to invest in community organizing capacity as a comprehensive strategy for closing equity gaps¹⁵ ● Collaborate with CBOs to build committees with representation from each municipal district as well as from each major community that makes up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help to assess community organizing capacity ● Help to translate community priorities into policy and systems change tools and strategies ● Center the voices of impacted residents in learning and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilize metrics that prioritize resident voice and power¹⁶ ● Engage other foundations in making shared strategic investments in community organizing capacity¹⁷ ● Actively partner with community-based

¹¹ [Facilitating Power](#)

¹⁰ [Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#)

¹² [Health in All Policies Case Study • Richmond, CA](#)

¹⁵ [Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#)

¹⁶ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#)

¹⁷ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keep your base informed and engaged throughout the process, using a shared racial equity/EJ framework to guide collective learning and prepare resident leaders to advocate to their respective electeds as needed¹³ ● Be prepared to mobilize as needed when institutional power dynamics are working against the needs and interests of residents ● Inform city staff of upcoming mobilizations so they can play their right roles within local government to leverage protests as outside pressure for policy and systems change ● Engage residents in assessing equity outcomes and publicly sharing their assessments ● Cultivate leadership pathways for residents to move from advocacy to decision-making power; build capacity of residents to implement and manage their own solutions¹⁴ 	<p>the city's cultural and ethnic diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be conscious of and interrupt tendencies to stymie community organizing, advocacy, and healthy conflict coming from CBO partners; establish lines of communication with community-based organizations to avoid being caught off guard by protests ● Leverage protests, mobilizations, and other elements of outside organizing to encourage internal policy and systems changes 	<p>evaluation processes</p>	<p>organizations to balance uneven power dynamics¹⁸</p>
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4 • Equitable Decision-Making Practice

As communities build voice and power within local government, there must be clear and transparent decision-making processes in which they can participate to ensure decisions do not cause additional harm and instead advance solutions to previous harm caused. Equitable decision-making practices cultivate accountability between community and government and limit the unintended consequences of decisions that exclude community voice and power.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
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¹³ [Health in All Policies Case Study • Richmond, CA](#)

¹⁴ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#) (Sanborn House Community-Driven Planning Process)

¹⁸ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage a base of residents in visioning, problem definition, and priority setting based on community assessments¹⁹ ● Cultivate a culture of consensus-building among resident leaders²⁰ ● Identify a base of resident leaders with whom to build consensus around decisions being made in the collaborative initiative²¹ ● Support policy makers in the city to set equity goals and to conduct equity impact assessment before finalizing policy decisions ● Ensure that all parties impacted by decisions are informed of the decision and the impacts²² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess internal barriers to equitable decision-making processes and plan accordingly ● Be transparent about how decisions are made at the departmental and city levels. Inform community partners when and how they can have actual influence ● Partner with CBOs to define the problem and design the solution before starting the policy development process, allowing ample time for collaborative design ● Collaborate with CBOs to set equity goals and conduct equity impact assessments before finalizing decisions ● Ensure that all parties impacted by decisions are informed of the decision and the impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support city staff in assessing internal barriers to equitable decision-making processes ● Use gradients of agreement to build consensus ● Prepare the group to make real-time strategic decisions rooted in shared principles and practices ● Lean into tensions to find multi-stakeholder solutions ● Help to develop participatory equity impact assessments that center the voices, needs, and current realities of impacted communities and inform decision-making within collaborative initiatives²³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prioritize funding for community-driven planning ● Engage in racial equity issue analysis forums with residents and other key stakeholders to ensure funding strategies are rooted in a collaborative analysis ● Support grantees to use participatory evaluation methods that provide impacted residents with the tools and platform to assess and help shape equity strategies
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5 • Community Resourcing

Community-based organizations rooted in communities most impacted by structural inequities and environmental injustices tend to be under-resourced and spread thin working to meet needs and address the range of complex issues affecting their communities. Core to collaborative governance strategies to close equity gaps is a community resourcing strategy to ensure equitable participation by impacted communities.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop sustainability plans that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide equity stipends to community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support community-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fund regional strategies for

¹⁹ [The National Association of Climate Resilience Planners: Framework on Community Driven Climate Resilience Planning, Racial and Environmental Justice Committee of Providence, RI](#)

²⁰ [Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#)

²¹ [Racial and Environmental Justice Committee of Providence, RI](#)

²² [Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#)

²³ [GARE Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#)

<p>include the acquisition of community-owned assets that can continue to generate resources for community-derived solutions²⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Align resources with capacity needed to carry out community-driven policy and systems change strategies 	<p>leaders who participate as leads in collaborative initiatives and meet other basic needs such as food, translation, child care, and timing of meetings²⁵</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work to ensure city grant guidelines are relevant and applicable to leadership within impacted communities (e.g. focus data collection on storytelling) ● Work to get line items in city budgets to resource the community-driven planning work of collaborating CBOs ● Make public assets, like land and facilities, available at little to no cost to community collaboratives to be used for the public good ● Shift contracting and procurement practices to increasingly hire community-based organizations whenever possible²⁶ 	<p>institutions to develop sustainability plans that include the acquisition of community-owned assets that can continue to generate resources for community-derived solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support participants in collaborative initiatives to establish equitable resourcing guidelines to ensure community participation and access 	<p>racial and environmental justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner with community-based organizations to assess capacity needs and develop resourcing plans that allow for capacity needed to participate in collaborative initiatives from inception to final evaluation
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6 • City/County Capacity & Racial Equity Training

It is critical that local government focus on equitable hiring practices to build the internal capacity needed to partner with communities. In all the cases where strides have been made toward addressing equity issues, a common factor is hiring of staff with an orientation towards equity and the skills to effectively collaborate across departments and with community-based organizations. In addition to hiring, local governments must engage in racial equity training and ongoing internal practices to cultivate the core competencies of collaborative governance.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocate for all municipal departments to receive trainings to understand how 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff the work with leaders who have a system change analysis and lived 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid generic racial equity trainings; customize trainings to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaborate with CBOs to develop plans to engage

²⁴ [Indigenous Governance Toolkit](#)

²⁵ [Seattle EJC Case Study, and DC EAG Case Study](#)

²⁶ [GARE Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#)

<p>structural racism works with local government and how it can be undone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hold local government accountable for implementation of Racial Equity Impact Assessments and to community-driven score cards ● Participate in shared racial equity trainings to have honest dialogues about how structural racism and environmental injustices impact communities and to set equity goals together²⁷ 	<p>experience conducive to collaborating effectively with impacted communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Form a cross-departmental core team dedicated to cultivating the necessary policy and systems changes needed to close equity gaps²⁸ ● If city staff does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the community, ensure that all staff, including white staff, are supported in building authentic relationships with impacted communities so as not to tokenize or overburden staff of color ● Actively communicate about and seek to replicate racial equity practice across departments and management levels²⁹ 	<p>speak to local realities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure racial equity trainings are praxis-based, actively turning learning into actionable plans to close equity gaps 	<p>third-party facilitators to conduct racial equity trainings for City staff and community leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organize racial equity trainings for staff and boards of foundations³⁰ ● Partner with CBOs to help hold local government accountable for implementing racial equity solutions³¹
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7 • City/County Resourcing

A potential pitfall for local governments is putting forward the rhetoric of racial equity and community partnerships without allocating resources to ensure the rhetoric is backed up with concrete solutions. Such a misstep can be significantly damaging to local democracies, as it reinforces public disillusionment with government, stifling participation and thus the political will to advance solutions. Communities have a role to play in demanding resourcing for civic engagement and for solutions to racial inequity and environmental injustice. Champions within local government can help by advocating for equitable budgeting practices.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build capacity of residents to advocate for voice in municipal budgetary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set phased resourcing and hiring goals to ensure that within a given time frame, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support relevant city departments to develop plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fund city initiatives that are endorsed by CBOs from

²⁷ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity, Salinas CA](#)

²⁸ [GARE Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#)

²⁹ [GARE Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#)

³⁰ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#)

³¹ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity Case Study • Salinas CA](#)

<p>decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build alliances that put political pressure on electeds to pass budgets that reflect the necessary resourcing to carry out racial and environmental justice initiatives 	<p>city staff reflects the ethnic diversity of the community it governs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocate for changes in how budgets are developed to be more inclusive and less siloed ● Practice participatory budgeting 	<p>for resourcing implementation of solutions and to apply racial equity assessments to budgets and budgeting practices³²</p>	<p>impacted communities³³</p>
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8 • Power and Influence of Community Groups within City/County

The Offices of Sustainability at the cities of Portland, Providence, Seattle, and Washington DC have piloted municipal community-centered committees to assert more political influence of community groups around issues of racial equity and environmental sustainability. This strategy is only effective if efforts are made to build the political influence of these committees. Otherwise, participating community leaders may become tokenized by city staff, used to sign off on already developed plan and policies. The political voice and power of groups rooted in impacted communities are essential to advancing solutions that actually serve the communities they target and to avoiding the unintended consequences of policies that are meant to solve community challenges.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a clear inside/outside strategy that is based on a power mapping to advance community priorities ● Work with allies within local government to understand how to best navigate systems and leverage opportunities for systems change ● Use equity report cards to conduct regular assessments of progress towards equity goals and share results publically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct a preliminary power mapping to be clear on what it will take to build the kind of political power necessary to achieve racial and environmental justice goals via a collaborative governance model ● Support community leaders to navigate current systems and to identify leverage points for systems change; conduct power mappings with community partners to inform policy and systems changes strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help to facilitate power mapping as needed ● Ensure plans and tools created include realistic implementation plans ● Help those with more positional power see how they will benefit from solutions that support the common good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leverage your positional power and privilege to address power imbalances by aligning with community-based organizations from impacted communities³⁵

³² [GARE Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#)

³³ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity, Salinas CA](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invite electeds to educational opportunities within community³⁴ ● Cultivate a base of residents in each key municipal district to put pressure on electeds as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Track progress towards meeting equity goals and communicate progress (as well as barriers) regularly across departments and to senior management ● Cultivate multiple opportunities for community partners to meet with key decision-makers ● Identify opportunities to break down existing silos between and within government agencies and departments 		
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9 • Trust & Relationship Building

Strengthening our local democracies essentially means healing the divide between government and community. Persistent legacies of exclusion leave impacted communities distrustful of government, particularly when government has been dominated by the interests of developers and industries that cause harm to low-income communities and communities of color. Meanwhile, challenges of politics and power dynamics within local governments can serve as a barrier to forging genuine partnerships with community-based organizations that sometimes must go on the offensive against the actions of government officials. It is worth engaging in the kind of communication that works to overcome these hurdles, given that trusting relationships translate ideas into action and grease the wheels of change. Direct relationships between government officials and impacted communities help to ensure policies and plans adopted by government reflect the needs and assets of those most impacted by them.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on helping key decision-makers solve problems via community-driven solutions ● Acknowledge and/or celebrate city leaders when they do the right thing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Take time to understand the social justice landscape in your city, including the strengths and assets community partners can bring to initiatives ● Focus on the ‘we,’ chipping away at the divide between community and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help to build a culture of multi-directional learning in which community members are receiving key information from city staff about policy and systems and city staff are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make grantmaking processes as transparent as possible ● Practice cultural humility ● Conduct listening tours within

³⁵ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity, Salinas CA](#)

³⁴ [Health in All Policies, Richmond CA](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek to find win-win solutions with relevant city staff and electeds³⁶ ● Keep open lines of communication with city staff and try to avoid unnecessary surprises that could undermine their reputations³⁷ 	<p>government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be as transparent as possible when communicating with community leaders; communicate opportunities as well as barriers to achieving goals; avoid empty equity rhetoric ● Avoid empty promises; keep your word and communicate clearly when it isn't possible to do so ● Seek to find win-win solutions with community groups ● Take full responsibility for mistakes and missteps that negatively affect community leaders³⁸ ● Work to rectify past harms in ways that are relevant and meaningful to those harmed 	<p>receiving key information from community members as to impacts, community strengths/assets, and needs³⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support the collaborative to lean into tensions, identifying the core values within each other's opposing interests and to find win-win solutions⁴⁰ 	<p>impacted communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Publish reports on progress made towards closing equity gaps and make them accessible to impacted communities⁴¹
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10 • Principles and Practices to Balance Power & Ensure Equity at Every Step

Finally, any collaboration across sectors represents an opportunity to engage in equitable practice that supports participation by communities that have regularly been excluded from decision-making tables, either intentionally or by default. Those parties with more positional power and privilege may be unaware of inequitable practices they may be perpetuating, and therefore, it is important for community groups to assert practices needed to support equitable participation. Important considerations include (but are not limited to) language access, child care when meetings are held, who sets the agenda, who facilitates the meetings, which voices are heard and valued, who has direct relationships with decision-makers, how much time is allocated to assessing and exploring the range of solutions, who gathers data, and how welcoming and accessible the meeting space is to impacted communities.

CBOs	City Staff	Third-Party Facilitators	Philanthropic Partners
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³⁶ [Seattle EJC Case Study](#)

³⁷ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity, Salinas CA](#)

³⁸ [DC EAG Case Study](#)

³⁹ [DC EAG Case Study](#)

⁴⁰ [Principles and Practices of Facilitating Power](#)

⁴¹ [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity, Salinas CA](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set clear expectations for equity practices needed for community participation ● Make proactive suggestions to rectify inequities within the process ● Prepare resident leaders to assess community engagement processes and provide critical feedback when inequities are present⁴² ● Increasingly build resident capacity to lead community engagement processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be open to discussing, assessing, and addressing existing power dynamics that limit effective collaboration ● Allow facilitation and agenda setting to be conducted by committee members within community-centered committees⁴³ or by third-party facilitators trusted by community-based organizations ● Allow time and space for consensus building that supports effective solutions design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitator creates a ‘brave space’ to openly discuss, assess, and address existing power dynamics and inequities ● Evaluator works with committee to articulate metrics relevant to the goals of the initiative that aims to assess desired outcomes at every step 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure funding guidelines are relevant and accessible to impacted communities ● Assess and address issues of white supremacy within your foundation; revamp grantmaking practices to reflect racial equity goals⁴⁴
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⁴² [Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity, Salinas CA](#) (Alisal Vibrancy Plan evaluation process)

⁴³ [Seattle EJC Case Study](#)

⁴⁴ [Power Moves: Your essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice](#)

3 • LEARNING & EVALUATION CASE STUDIES

At the start of 2018, the Urban Sustainability Directors Network awarded four municipal community-based committees for racial equity and environmental justice an Innovation Fund Project grant to contract Movement Strategy Center (with Facilitating Power and the National Association of Climate Resilience Planners) to design and facilitate a learning and evaluation process of the work to date. The purpose of the process was to amplify the perspectives of community leaders participating in the committees to support the learning of city staff convening the committees. Victoria Benson and Rosa González conducted comprehensive surveys as well as in-person interviews with about three dozen participating leaders and compiled the data into the following case studies. We also drew on research and knowledge of similar collaborative initiatives to design a [learning and evaluation tool](#) based on the essential conditions for collaborative governance. The tool can be found in the appendix of this document.

At a Glance: Structures & Context of Municipal Committees for Racial & Environmental Justice

Use this table to see the similarities and distinctions across of the core components of the committees at the four different municipalities.

	Portland <i>Equity Working Group</i>	Providence <i>Racial & Environmental Justice Committee</i>	Seattle <i>Environmental Justice Committee</i>	Washington DC <i>Equity Advisory Group for Ward 7</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	To integrate equity into the 2015 Climate Action Plan; to develop plan for inclusive accountable, implementation; and to build capacity and momentum for having new community leadership at the table to inform climate policy	To center racial equity in City Hall by removing structural racism in bureaucratic structures and practices; to build equitable policies and practices through The Office of Sustainability as a model from which to build and replicate	To inform and guide the implementation of the Equity & the Environment Agenda, ensuring community leadership and power in the process	To provide recommendations for implementing the Climate Ready D.C. Plan and the Clean Energy Plan in Ward 7
<i>City Department & Program</i>	Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability (BPS) and Multnomah County	Interdepartmental across five departments, sponsored and stewarded by the Office of Sustainability	Office of Sustainability & Environment, Equity & Environment Initiative	Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE)
<i>Constituency</i>	Working group of representatives	Committee of ten residents of color	Committee of representatives	Multi-generational focus group

<i>of Committee, Advisory, or Focus Group</i>	from six community-based organizations representing low-income residents and/or communities of color that were currently working on or interested in climate and environmental justice issues	and/or low-income residents from different neighborhoods impacted by environmental justice issues	from community-based organizations that work in communities of color impacted by environmental justice issues	of 14 community members in Ward 7 representing a wide array of affiliations (some residents, some staff at community-based organizations)
<i>Roles within Committee</i>	Horizontal structure with no delineated roles among community members	Three committee members make up the Project Team and are responsible for carrying out projects collectively identified by the REJC	Two committee members serve as co-chairs, set agendas, and facilitate meetings	Horizontal structure with no delineated roles among community members
<i>Roles of City/County Staff</i>	Equity Program Manager: Co-coordinating and leading facilitation process Multnomah County Staff Member: Co-coordinating	Director of Office of Sustainability: Primary convenor and bridge between community and city	Equity & Environment Program Manager: Primary convenor and bridge between community and city	Program Analyst: Member recruitment and primary bridge between community and city Chief of Equity and Sustainability Branch: Coordination and facilitation support, presenting technical content
<i>Third Parties</i>	N/A	Lead facilitator with supporting facilitator	N/A	Project management and support by local university Process evaluator
<i>Core Issues</i>	Affordable Housing & Gentrification, Government Accountability & Service, Public Transit (including bikeability and walkability), Workforce Development	Affordable Housing & Gentrification, Clean Streets, Community Safety, Diverse & Local Jobs, Education, Government Accountability & Service, Industrial Hazards, Mental Health Services, Policing Practices, Public Transit, Race & Representation, Youth Development	Affordable Housing & Gentrification, Climate Justice, Energy, Food Justice, Public Space, Resilience, Transportation, Water	Resilience Hubs, Workforce Development, Youth Development
<i>Foundation Funding or</i>	Foundation funding distributed by BPS and additional support	Foundation funding	Funded by city general fund with some limited project support from	Foundation funding

Budget Allocation	from Multnomah County		foundations	
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Snapshot of Findings: Municipal Community-Centered Committees for Racial Equity & Environmental Justice

This chart captures an assessment of where each of the committees’ current practices and development currently fall along the spectrum towards collaborative governance and ideally towards community-driven governance models. The assessment is based on data collected from surveys and interviews with committee members and collaborating city staff measured against the [Learning & Evaluation Tool: Assessing the Process from Community Engagement to Ownership](#), which can be found in the Appendix of this document.

It is not surprising that at this early stage [most of the committees have existed for less than two years], most of the indicators land at a level 2 on the spectrum (CONSULT). Consultation with community is the most common form of community engagement and therefore what local governments tend to have the capacity and political will to carry out. Some of the committees, however, have been able to make strides towards a level 3 on the spectrum (COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT). This is the result of community organizing and advocacy on the part of community-based organizations as well as the resulting efforts of local government to increase internal capacity to involve the community in initiatives, primarily through thoughtful hiring practices and the staffing of more participatory initiatives.

None of the four municipal efforts we evaluated had advanced to a level 4 on the spectrum (COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE), but they are all currently making plans to move in that direction. For a more nuanced understanding of the work of each municipal committee, refer to their respective case studies in the sections that follow this snapshot.

INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
Commitment to Model	When EWG was active, the commitment was to lead an “intentional community engagement process” via a working group structure that supported collaboration with community members, city staff, and county staff to integrate equity into the 2015 Climate	Strong commitment from community leaders and city staff stewarding the REJC. Actively working together and in parallel to experiment with the best model that builds community influence and decision-making power over policies and systems change that support racial and environmental	High level of commitment to collaborative governance among committee members and city staff supporting the committee, although some doubt on the community side as to how it would be possible given current power dynamics and lack of awareness and investment on the	Sincere interest in meeting community priorities through a focus group structure. Commitment from city staff for an inclusive process where community members to feel heard, respected, and productive. The community was appreciative of the model as a significant shift

	<p>Action Plan.</p> <p>Currently, the city is interested in reforming a similar group that would be more like a sustained committee. Community members have hesitation and questions about purpose and structure.</p>	justice.	part of other city departments.	from marginalization and placation, yet is still skeptical of how it will lead to results.
INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
Equitable Decision-Making	<p>There are mixed feelings on the effectiveness and how equitable decision-making was within the EWG and between the EWG and other entities, such as the Steering Committee and BPS more broadly. Community members felt power was held with some stakeholders over others. They also felt there was a lack of transparency on how decisions were made and who had power to both influence decisions and make them. Within the the committee, some city staff viewed decisions were made by consensus. Ultimate decisions were held outside of community members and staff on the EWG, though EWG staff “leveraged integrity of the process to advance equity within the system” and communities could advocate outside of the system.</p>	<p>Within the REJC, the decision-making system was developed through practicing deep democracy to build consensus within the REJC. To build accountability and informed representation among impacted communities, each community committee member regularly connects with and identifies priorities and builds consensus with community members in their neighborhood. Yet, the decision-making power outside of the REJC is formally held with the city. Thus, the REJC is exploring strategies to establish more decision-making power to shape city policies, practices, and procedures.</p>	<p>The committee is in the process of developing an equitable decision-making process. They have developed a process for prioritizing their own capacity to address the numerous requests for consultation that come to them via city staff.</p> <p>Committee members believe they were “handpicked” by the city to serve on the committee, and therefore decision-making is not directly accountable to communities (although most members do practice accountability), and there is not full representation of impacted communities.</p> <p>Committee members submitted applications to participate in the Environmental Justice Committee. These were reviewed by a team of city staff, and a final list was presented to the Mayor’s office for confirmation.</p>	<p>The two plans were already developed before the EAG was formed, thus decisions affecting the community had already been made. Through deep discussions, DOEE staff and the EAG reframed the focus to have the EAG inform the implementation of the plans, prioritizing community needs, regardless of where they fall on traditional notions of climate and clean energy issue areas.</p>

INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
Community Capacity + Organizing	<p>At the time of the EWG, community organizing, specifically around Environmental and Climate Justice, was just budding. The the EWG process helped some organizations “increase capacity around environmental issues.” It also built a deeper understanding of the city’s planning processes and helped build relationships across organizations to collaborate on campaigns.</p> <p>Now, many organizations formerly on the EWG have robust and sophisticated plans and strategies for Environmental and Climate Justice. However, their engagement with the city to build collaboration on systems change is not as active with the ending of the EWG several years ago.</p>	<p>As named above, REJC community members build power by meeting with a base of at least ten people on a regular basis to build knowledge, community priorities, and consensus. More support for base building is needed, and REJC members have named a desire for support from the city on these efforts. Multiple racial equity trainings have been held over the past three years to build shared language and analysis of the crises among community and city staff.</p>	<p>Grassroots organizations in Seattle have made significant gains in community organizing capacity, which contributed to the development of this committee, the Equity & Environment agenda, and numerous campaign victories.</p> <p>There is currently a lack of community capacity to engage the city at the level needed to achieve systems changes that would support genuine collaboration to close actual equity gaps.</p>	<p>The EAG created a space for community learning and multi-directional learning between EAG and city staff, which built capacity. There was limited support for discussions on structural racism and how the EAG process would work to address it. EAG members learned of climate impacts threatening their community and learned how the two plans will impact Ward 7. Many EAG members attend other community meetings to gain insights on what community priorities are. EAG is organizing a public meeting to share their learnings and recommendations. A potential opportunity for advocacy training is on the horizon.</p>
INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
Community Resourcing	<p>Stipends were named as essential in bringing community to the table to sustain the process. However, funding was not sufficient in bringing as many community partners into the process as desired (six organizations), and funding ended before the process was</p>	<p>Stipends are necessary for resourcing the sustained participation of committee members, but limited resources for community leaders continues to result in limited bandwidth to make a collaborative governance model successful. Grant responsibilities are typically held</p>	<p>Stipends are helpful for resourcing the participation of committee members, but limited resources for CBOs continues to result in limited bandwidth to achieve sustained influence throughout the city and to make a collaborative governance model successful. The grants that are</p>	<p>Stipends for EAG members to participate in meetings with supports like food and childcare were essential to creating this six-month period to build community capacity. The EAG and the Project Team voiced a need for more time to build the EAG’s recommendations and DOEE and</p>

	<p>complete, requiring community leaders to volunteer their time to finish the equity considerations.</p> <p>However, key community-based organizations were involved in the funding development process and in participant selection, demonstrating a direct connection between community and resources.</p>	<p>by the city, which sometimes creates a rub as confined grant requirements may not align with evolution of REJC priorities/activities.</p> <p>City staff and community REJC members are in discussion on how to shift power while maintaining appropriate roles/responsibilities.</p>	<p>available to community groups carry reporting requirements that are not culturally relevant or conducive to most grassroots entities.</p> <p>City staff and community members have worked together to create an Environmental Justice Fund, which launched in 2018, to fund community-identified projects led by communities most impacted by environmental challenges.</p>	<p>EAG capacity to ensure a real impact, yet currently no resources from DOEE or philanthropy have been allocated. Local philanthropy is interested in supporting certain activities (advocacy training) that could support EAG. These conversations occurred between local funders and DOEE, not directly with EAG members.</p>
INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
City Capacity & Equity Training	<p>At the time of the EWG, a key systems change champion in the BPS led the way in articulating/shaping the role of local government in shifting culture towards more equitable practices. Additionally, integrating equity into the CAP was named as a priority by the BPS.</p> <p>Currently, BPS has been working internally to increase capacity via race, power, and privilege trainings. POC BPS staff catalyzed racial identity caucuses, and some BPS staff are participating in a 9-month training program to build capacity for developing racial equity metrics.</p> <p>Some city staff are partnering with community groups (e.g.</p>	<p>At least four anti-oppression workshops have been held with city staff and community in attendance, including the mayor. Some city staff on the REJC named their commitment to principles articulated by the REJC, and the Sustainability Department adopted these principles. Yet multiple city staff are not clear on the role they (and the government) should play. REJC community members are concerned, as the learnings are not being translated into actual shifts in city policies and practices. They are thus advocating for structural shifts. Some REJC city staff make efforts to use their institutional positions to push city departments to actualize the learnings from trainings.</p>	<p>Stipends are helpful for resourcing the participation of committee members, but limited resources for CBOs continues to result in limited bandwidth to achieve sustained influence throughout the city and to make a collaborative governance model successful. The grants that are available to community groups carry reporting requirements that are not culturally relevant or conducive to most grassroots entities.</p> <p>One of the biggest obstacles is patterns and practices of white supremacist culture that are hidden behind the language of equity.</p>	<p>There are a few staff within DOEE with varying expertise levels who are championing racial equity as a priority. These staff members are building their capacity through some trainings and exploring meaningful ways to engage community via the EAG. These staff strengthened their capacity through thoughtful relationship building and power-sharing with the EAG. However, there are currently no structural shifts for wider agency or city-wide shifts to foster systems change needed to create real impact.</p>

	Afro-ecology dialogues) on building community connections and power to elevate community voices and priorities.			
INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
City Resourcing	<p>At the time of the EWG, key BPS POC staff played an instrumental role in navigating the system to find resources and allocated staff time to integrate equity into its practices and plans. Middle-upper leadership is dedicated to creating space for exploration and supported the creation of equity-focused roles in the Bureau.</p> <p>Recently a new staff position formed to connect directly with communities on EJ and CJ issues. Post EWG, there have also been other one-off projects funded by philanthropy to build collaboration among CBOs to begin shifting towards more equitable planning efforts/practices. There are no structural commitments to long-term funding of collaborative community projects, but there is interest in finding ways to do that, even if through philanthropic funding streams.</p>	<p>The Office of Sustainability is supported in dedicating time to fundraise to sustain the REJC, and city leaders have named their support for staff dedicating time to work with community to shape sustainability policies.</p> <p>But expectations on other work plan priorities create tensions for city staff as they juggle competing priorities that impact the actual amount of time needed to effectively move REJC priorities. Some staff feel they've been given a task without the supports to succeed.</p>	<p>While the city has made strides in establishing staff positions to lead this effort, committee members are highly concerned that limited, semi-sustained investment results in an overburdened staff of color charged with doing more than humanly possible to address issues of racial and environmental equity that can only be achieved through wider systemic shifts enforced and upheld from city leadership at the top.</p> <p>Limited capacity makes it even more difficult to move processes from consultation to community voice.</p>	<p>Through a one-time grant, DOEE staff were able to bring in supports from Georgetown Climate Center and Skeo Solutions to administer and facilitate the EAG for a limited time. It was an effective developmental step to build city capacity. Yet, readjustments were required along the way to calibrate roles and responsibilities to ensure that the city was more directly engaged with community members as initial limited engagement may have inadvertently reified the separation between community leaders and certain city staff. Several staff are deeply committed to moving community recommendations post funding, yet there are questions about future capacity without support from external partners and competing city priorities.</p>
INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC

<p>Power & Influence of Committee to Achieve Policy & Systems Change</p>	<p>Survey responses show that the EWG had real influence over EJ policies through their equity considerations. Even though the EWG sunsetted, the connections, knowledge, and power that were built sparked a larger EJ movement that is very active today (including leading a Portland Clean Energy Fund).</p> <p>However, limited communication and/or transparency from the city on how community recommendations are implemented has led to lack of clarity on the sustained influence the EWG had, which frustrates some community groups.</p> <p>Additionally, support for equity efforts varies among bureaus, and there has been no cohesive systems change within bureaus that could create protection for equity practices being cultivated should new leadership take over BPS.</p>	<p>REJC demonstrated power and influence by organizing with community members to inform the plastic bag ban policy, noting its current form would disproportionately impact communities of color. Though City Council passed it, the REJC was able to influence the mayor to veto the bill. Power and influence are attached to the current elected. Structural power (e.g. decision-making power) does not exist. Community members also have concerns about lack of engagement and transparency from city staff on REJC, signifying limited influence of REJC in those departments.</p>	<p>A round table with the mayor was a step in the right direction towards amplifying the visibility and influence of the committee, but some members question whether it will influence the mayor's priorities and are doubtful that other city departments will know of them, much less apply their recommendations.</p>	<p>The EAG was formed after the two plans were completed, which undermines the integrity of the community engagement process and exemplifies where power is held. The accountability and expectations the EAG articulated in exchange for their engagement with the city and the earnest dedication of the DOEE staff to apologize for mistakes, actively listen, and prioritize the implementation recommendations identified by the EAG is promising. There is potential for some power-sharing between the EAG and city. How each stakeholder moves forward will determine where power is truly held.</p>
<p>INDICATOR</p>	<p>Portland</p>	<p>Providence</p>	<p>Seattle</p>	<p>Washington DC</p>
<p>Trust & Relationship Building</p>	<p>During EWG, key city staff cultivated strong relationships and trust during the process (primarily possible because the staff lead had long standing relationships with POC communities). EWG also build</p>	<p>Among REJC community members, trust and relationships are strong due to intentional practices to foster shared principles and values over a several-year period. High levels of distrust, concerns of lack of</p>	<p>Trust is a big issue, particularly for POC leaders in a city with a long history of redlining, which is rapidly displacing communities of color. Trust is actively being built between committee members and with the city staff supporting the</p>	<p>City staff took active responsibility for mistakes made early on and worked hard to make sure that committee members' needs were met, which helped to cultivate trust and effective working relationships.</p>

	<p>strong relationships amongst themselves, leading to collaboration post EWG.</p> <p>Lack of communication and/or follow-through on updates from BPS to former EWG members on how their efforts are being implemented has created a notable rift in trust built. Additionally, trust was held with certain staff who are no longer BPS staff. BPS staff are dedicated to re-establishing relationships and reconciliation of harm done.</p>	<p>transparency, and historical and current missteps from the city led to contention between community and city REJC members. Yet open dialogue of these challenges and efforts for mediation signal commitment to building the relationship with the purpose of achieving racial and environmental justice in Providence.</p>	<p>committee, though there is notable distrust of other departments as to their commitment to equity and to collaboration.</p> <p>Fear of conflict/threats to positional power can limit community power building.</p>	<p>Among EAG members, there was a deep synergy and chemistry that laid the foundation for the work they did together.</p>
INDICATOR	Portland	Providence	Seattle	Washington DC
Principles & Practices to Ensure Equity at Every Step	<p>Formation of the EWG started with collaboration from both community leaders and the city, which centers collaboration from the start. EWG gave feedback on structural shifts needed to facilitate equitable participation, and city staff responded (both by shifting process structure and working with other city staff to increase their capacity to partner with community leaders). Resourcing (though ultimately insufficient) the EWG for their expertise, articulating appropriate roles between stakeholders, and adopting equity components of the CAP being infused in subsequent climate policy indicates a commitment to</p>	<p>Through consistent feedback and tense dynamics, great gains have been made towards structuring the REJC and communication processes to be more reflective of community members' needs. The REJC has established deep capacity to self-govern with support from a local facilitator and the Office of Sustainability. The REJC also practices deep democracy with their bases, has a Project Team that leads REJC shared priorities, and is resourced for their expertise.</p> <p>Yet currently, REJC feels isolated from what's happening in the city and is demanding to be more integrated. Those with institutional power are at a choice point where real equitable practices and</p>	<p>In its short time in existence, the committee has made notable gains in terms of internal practices that support equity: 1) establishing the co-chair model to ensure agendas are being developed by members; 2) stipends for members to compensate for their time; 3) priority setting process to contain committee time spent on request from city; 4) process of co-developing an equitable decision-making process (still in progress); 5) encouraging leadership opportunities for members to share skills and knowledge with the committee members to inform the work; and 6) creating accountability structures for committee members to consistently be checking their</p>	<p>EAG members asserted their power through direct dialogue when signs of inequity showed up, threatening to withdraw from participating and naming historical and current harms. The project team took steps to create the conditions for a more equitable practice to support the full participation of EAG members. The process reflected true shifts, yet the ultimate accountability mechanisms needed within DOEE (or the district more broadly) to realize community priorities have not been set up.</p>

	<p>equity at every step.</p> <p>However, maintaining relationships and communication, and articulating a clear accountability structure for promised activities, like the Equity Implementation Guide and Equity Metrics, create challenges in showing true power and systems shifts.</p>	<p>principles could be mandated/adopted more widely across departments. Both REJC community members and key REJC city staff are committed to putting pressure on the city to achieve this goal. This would shift them to the “voice” stage.</p>	<p>roles as representatives.</p>	
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Case Study: Portland Municipal Community-Based Committee for Environmental Equity

This case study was written with data gathered from interviews with committee members conducted in the summer of 2018 and from a comprehensive survey conducted with committee members and city staff prior to the interviews.

A • WHERE ARE WE NOW?.....

Vision & Purpose

“[This work is about] moving from what we know to what we believe. We know that we want to create benefits and alleviate burdens for the most marginalized, but we need to get to the point where we believe it, and in that belief, you also move from what you do to what you become. You move from what you feel to what you’re committed to.” - City Staff Member

The City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) partnered with key community-based organizations, in particular Verde, to shift the way community engagement in planning processes happen. In doing so, they formed an Equity Working Group (EWG) to inform the 2015 Climate Action Plan (CAP). This endeavor was funded by a Bullitt Foundation and Partners for Places grant. The purpose of the EWG was two-fold: 1) to integrate equity into the 2015 CAP and develop a “plan for inclusive accountable implementation”⁴⁵ guided by the expertise of grassroots leaders, and 2) to utilize the funding structure to build capacity and momentum to have new community leadership at the table to inform climate policy. The EWG formal commitment came to a close when the funding period ended in February of 2014. However, the EWG agreed to advise on the content of the CAP at key moments up until the 2015 CAP was adopted in June 2015.

Upon embarking on the 2015 CAP process, Portland and Multnomah County articulated a 2050 vision where “everyone has access to walkable and bikeable neighborhoods; employment and small business opportunities are led by and employing underserved and underrepresented communities; and communities of color and low-income populations are involved in the development and implementation of climate-related programs, policies, and actions.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Climate Action Through Equity: The Integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. July 12, 2016. P. 6.

⁴⁶ Climate Action Through Equity: The Integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. July 12, 2016. P. 7

Through their own processes, community leaders in Portland have also articulated a vision with a “Seventh Generation perspective that builds sustainable policies to increasingly benefit future generations.” The vision is grounded in “principles of environmental justice that recognize the intersectionality of people and our Earth, right to self-determination, just public policy, authentic and meaningful community engagement and workers’ rights; holds a “relational worldview model, [which is an] Indigenous view of balance between Mind, Body, Spirit and Social Context”; and views “social cohesion as interdependence of governments, communities, neighborhoods and families.”⁴⁷

Over the past few years since the EWG process, communities have continued to increase their climate justice capacities by articulating the significant negative impacts of climate change in their lives and by developing and advocating for holistic solutions to meet community priorities. Grassroots organizations created their own Climate Justice Plan with funding from the Kresge Foundation, which was “developed by and for communities of color” to more fully reflect real community needs, strengths, and solutions. This capacity building work has poised grassroots leaders to build out policies to move forward the vision of climate justice for their communities. Given the leadership of grassroots organizations over the years since the EWG, city staff now note that they “need to figure out how to support what [grassroots groups] are leading in because [community leaders] have accomplished so much that [the city] could not.” They are asking themselves “What does it mean to shift roles from leading [in the 2015 CAP process] to following [in upcoming efforts]?”

Accomplishments to Date

The accomplishments of the EWG are multifaceted across the stakeholders involved. EWG members expressed that the city began to shift its practices to more equitably engage community-based organizations in the CAP update process. Their purpose was to develop a more equitable plan that better meets the needs of communities of color and low-income residents. To that end, the EWG provided feedback that evolved into nine equity considerations that were used to assess and update every action of the CAP. The city staff also developed an accompanying Equity Implementation Guide. Since the adoption of the CAP, “the equity components of the CAP have been used and cited to strengthen subsequent climate policy on behalf of the community,” such as the equity components of Portland’s 100% Renewable Resolution, recently passed in 2017.

At that time, grassroots groups had identified increased interest from their members to engage in environmental and climate issues facing their communities, and yet limited resourcing was available for them to get involved. The EWG process created an opportunity for them to elevate their communities’ concerns and questions about climate action. It increased knowledge and capacity to inform climate and environmental policies, deepened capacity to navigate

⁴⁷ [ReDefine: Coalition of Communities of Color’s Initiative for Climate and Environmental Justice](#). 2016. P. 1

bureaucratic systems, and supported building their own leadership on climate justice issues. One former EWG member stated that:

It definitely opened doors, and since then, it has become a bigger and bigger part of our organizing and work. It's also in our strategic plan to do that type of work. [We now have a] a full-time manager working on climate type issues. That little investment turned into a large part of what we do as an organization. I think that for us, it was a catalyst for the type of issues we work on as an organization. We had an intern sit on the EWG, and so we were able to build new leadership and bring our perspectives as immigrants and youth.

They also built relationships across stakeholders, including other community-based organizations, the city, and Multnomah County. Some of these working relationships established through this partnership continued beyond the project period, resulting in the catalysis of further work. This included work in collaboration with the city and across other grassroots organizations and communities.

For the city and county, the EWG process and development of solutions increased staff capacity to meaningfully engage with and learn from the expertise of community leaders. This required a steep learning curve to be able to translate a complex document (the CAP), solicit feedback, understand the nuances and complexities of the feedback, and incorporate that into actionable steps. It also led to a lot of internal work to build capacity to center equity in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS).

Former Structure

The Equity Working Group (EWG) came together in a collective process to create a joint work product and “was not regarded as an advisory process, but rather a panel of paid community experts working in partnership with government staff on a project.”⁴⁸ The EWG included grassroots leaders from six organizations representing the priorities of low-income residents and communities of color as well as staff from the BPS and Multnomah County Health Department. It also included members from the Climate Action Plan Steering Committee.⁴⁹ This overlap of membership was meant to “facilitat[e] cross-over communication between the two groups and facilitate the advocacy of policy ideas from a non-

⁴⁸ Climate Action Through Equity: The Integration of equity in the Portland/Multnomah County 2015 Climate Action Plan. July 12, 2016. P. 18.

⁴⁹ The Steering Committee and EWG were two separate processes and the Steering Committee had a longer timeline and a more general focus in informing and shaping the 2015 CAP.

staff perspective.”⁵⁰ Everyone’s voice at the table was intended to be equal. There were no co-chairs or special leads nor any formal decision-making processes as things developed organically and loosely by consensus.

That said, responsibilities within the EWG did differ. “Staff developed [their respective responsibilities] with input from community members and were tasked with the logistical ends of managing the process, [which] was facilitated by city staff.” Due to leadership from community members and the staff’s ability to adapt, the structure of the EWG process evolved to focus on having the EWG community members identify issues and priorities in their communities on a particular topic area and the city staff focusing on identifying how the feedback informs the climate actions.

One former city staff member described the roles and structure as follows:

“We worked together with the Equity Work Group participants to develop an equity lens. We realized however, that our job was to be the one to implement it both through the development of the plan and in all things following its adoption. I would say that we did co-deliver actions related to engagement, but the implementation portion was the BPS staff[s] responsibility, and we had not built the EWG to last longer than the grant period...In my mind [it was] a partnership opportunity to impact decision-making. Neither the community nor staff were in the final decision-making roles, but staff were able to leverage the integrity of the process to advance equity within the system. Community members were able to leverage the knowledge gained in the process to both advocate for their interests at the point of adoption and to further their work within the community.”

B • WHERE ARE WE GOING?.....

Opportunities on the Horizon

Since the EWG and 2015 CAP process, community leaders have built a deep climate justice movement. This movement culminated in the passing of a campaign for the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Initiative in November 2018. Community leaders worked intensively on this initiative, which will levy a 1% tax on large businesses (that make over \$1 billion in gross revenues nationally and \$500,000 locally) and put about \$30 million a year towards the Climate Action Plan with resources specifically for low-income communities and communities of color for renewable energy projects.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* P. 10

⁵¹ [Portland Could Make Big Businesses Pay to Protect Communities of Color from Climate Change, Fast Company.](#)

The City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning & Sustainability is preparing for the 2020 CAP. The community and BPS are poised to embark upon a collaborative governance process where communities are co-identifying the problems and the solutions with city staff. This is in light of the communities’ increased capacity in climate justice, evident by their recent victory for resourcing clean energy initiatives. At the same time, the BPS city staff have built capacity regarding understanding of racial equity and their intention to become an anti-racist institution. BPS is also working towards shifting from a “hero” model that tokenizes staff and communities of color to a model that recognizes and honors the expertise and unique contributions of people of color.

The Bureau is working to reconnect with community leaders by elevating and supporting community-driven initiatives with resources, staff time, and political will. This is a delicate dance, as there is work to do to re-establish relationships and trust as community leaders have not consistently felt supported by government staff since EWG. The city and Multnomah County are also developing climate equity metrics with support of a 9 month training program that builds capacity for measuring and delivering on commitments.

Goals for Strengthening Practice & Deepening Impact

At the Engagement to Ownership Convening, a small team of Portland City staff identified several goals to move towards deeper impact:

- Identifying alternative funding priorities, processes, and mechanisms to shift resources to community
- Building the staff capacity and professional competency and shifting expectations to drive towards collaborative governance and centering community wants and needs
- Using third-party facilitators and evaluators with formal working agreements that enable the community to hold the city accountable for planning processes and outcomes
- Building a clear roadmap to connect community priorities with climate sustainability work with the goal of changing what cities think of as “sustainability work”

C • WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET THERE?.....

“We are used to the idea that we get these little pieces of the pie and this is what we fight over and for, and we create equity out of this small piece. Instead, we need to go back to and fight for this larger structure—the whole—because real equity is not chitlins, the scraps that are offered after prime parts have been taken it’s everything.” - City Staff Member

This section discusses both the opportunities and success to build on and the tensions to address for breakthrough during the EWG 2015 CAP process as well as some highlights based on the current landscape, 4.5 years later, to articulate some key elements to bring into the work ahead.

Building on What is Working

The EWG process established some useful practices and strategies from which to build for future collaborations across community leaders and local government in Portland, including systems change and equity champions in the city, adaptability and responsiveness across all stakeholders, and actively building racial equity capacity within the city and Multnomah County.

Staff Champions of Equity & Systems Change

A key factor in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability being able to effectively partner with community leaders was a systems change champion staff member. This individual, a woman of color, worked to balance uneven power dynamics in the process and had built deep relationships with well-connected grassroots leaders. Former EWG members who participated in this evaluation and learning process unanimously expressed her role and capabilities to successfully facilitate the process as essential. Her racial justice analysis, skills in translating across stakeholders, ability to navigate bureaucratic systems, and leverage openings to transform the way the Bureau engages with communities all contributed to the positive outcomes of the EWG process and product. This individual's leadership bridged the gap and disconnect between city staff and community leaders. This created a process where community members were able to contribute in meaningful ways, and it supported capacity building among other city staff to partner with community leaders to create more systems change champions.

This systems change champion has since transitioned out of local government but has laid the groundwork that has catalyzed culture shifting in the BPS. There is now another city staff member and systems change champion in her role who lead the Afroecology Project. The BPS also created another position focused on building authentic community partnerships. One city staff member who oversaw the process and was formerly in upper-middle management recently received a promotion and is committed to “figuring out the role of government that doesn't co-opt the leadership and capacity [grassroots leaders have build since the EWG]...They've done so much and are ahead of us in so many ways...I want to follow and not lead.” She can use her positionality to cultivate a collaborative governance approach with frontline communities. This demonstrates incremental steps in increasing allocated staff time to deepen equity work. At the same time, other local government staff note the success and also the need to move beyond an “internal hero

model” to shift to durable and public commitments to equity. There is much more to do to allocate resources and time to truly shift bureaucratic systems in the city in order to center frontline community priorities and implement effective solutions.

Adaptability & Responsiveness

To engage in the EWG process in the first place showed a great ability of community leaders, many of whom were new to this work, to adapt to a bureaucratic context that historically (and presently) was not built for them. Community leaders on the EWG used their power to shift aspects of the initial EWG structure and context (e.g. the plan already being in existence) to re-shape it so that it better met their needs. For example, when the initial meeting structure did not support them in being able to meaningfully offer their expertise, they “would stop the meetings and say ‘This is not working for us.’” They then leveraged their relationship with the city staffer who “had the capacity and power to move resources in a way that was responsive. [This led to] the dynamic changing from community leaders being asked technical questions about trees to a space of listening and understanding.” Following the guidance and leadership of the systems change champion, the government staff on the EWG also showed adaptability and responsiveness to the needs of community partners. They shifted how they engaged in conversations, the meeting structure, what questions they asked, and what roles and responsibilities they took on.

Community members also leveraged this opportunity to explore climate issues that they had been interested in, yet had not had the opportunity nor capacity to engage in previously. The EWG created an opportunity for community leaders to build connectivity across grassroots organizations, and it built momentum that ultimately resulted in the development of a Climate Justice Plan led by and for frontline communities of color as well as successful campaign efforts to garner funds for environmental and climate justice solutions in communities of color. Local government staff and former EWG community members have all noted the sophistication that grassroots organizations and the communities they represent have built around climate concerns since the EWG process. They have harnessed power that can be used to delegitimize a planning process if it’s not rooted in justice-oriented processes and outcomes. Using an inside-outside strategy, community leaders and local government staff are positioned well to cultivate and implement solutions that meet real needs of communities most impacted by climate disruption.

Building Racial Equity Capacity

At the time of the EWG, from the city side, the systems change champion led the way in terms of racial equity analysis for the 2015 CAP and EWG process. This individual, along with a few other staff of color, were instrumental in catalyzing racial equity analysis capacity building in the BPS more broadly over the past few years. While much of the weight of

these efforts was carried on the shoulders of staff of color, through their hard work, the weight is beginning to be held by others. “The dismantling racism training was transformative for Bureau staff...[since then], similar to how community has built capacity around climate justice issues, so have staff around equity and race, so next time we do this [work together], we will be capable of a much more sophisticated conversation on racial equity.”

Key city staff members have continued to build capacity for racial equity within BPS. They initiated and maintained white and people of color BPS staff caucuses to hold space for critical and hard conversations for staff to take responsibility over their growth areas and the harm that they have been a part of as a result of working for an institution built on systems and practices of oppression. They are also organizing to influence who will become the next BPS Bureau Director, applying the learnings from their trainings and caucuses to articulate the principles, skills, and values. They are organizing internally to build momentum for an actual culture and systems change shift that holds equity and racial justice at the center. Furthermore, Multnomah County is also deepening its racial justice analysis and commitment.

Useful Tensions to Address for Breakthrough

Addressing challenges head on can unlock potential to advance climate and equity solutions. Portland’s EWG process grappled with several tensions and has identified some inroads to address them. These tensions are discussed below and include: setting appropriate pacing for capacity building, accountability via planning for governance and implementation, and addressing relationship tensions and trust building beyond the systems change champion staff members.

Pacing for Capacity Building

One key challenge was that this was a process already initiated by the city on a pre-set timeline, therefore the EWG community members did not play a role in identifying the priorities, purpose, or pacing of the process of the 2015 CAP. While the initiation of the EWG quickly became a partnered process with Verde, a grassroots organization that informed the EWG plan and that received the grants to participate in the EWG, this established uneven power dynamics and priorities at the onset of the process as one former EWG member felt that the “context was already so far from ideal” for community members. The EWG met over a 7- to 8-month period (and volunteered to review materials after funding ended) with the expectation that they would develop equity recommendations of the draft 2015 CAP. This was a significant lift, given the time needed for the EWG to orient to each other and the process, the high volume of actions in the 2015 CAP, and the content knowledge needed to effectively provide expertise and consultation on the issues at hand. Multiple stakeholders felt the time period for the EWG needed to start earlier and be extended.

One former EWG member remembered that because the content was so dense, they “went through 3-4 meetings that felt like a waste of time because the content was over [their] head...there was not a lot of access to typical assistance like data. We need to know what we’re looking at, we need access to those things and someone providing an accessible process of learning” that is made relevant to community concerns and priorities. This would allow for more informed and relevant feedback. One former EWG community member described the process as the city:

“bringing in experts on these things, and we’re supposed to absorb that information and create meaningful feedback round that. City staff tried to do their best, and we did too. But that’s the problem with this type of work. When doing transit planning or climate planning, there’s a lot of technical elements, and you’re working with different level of expertise on information...I felt we were reliant on a lot of staff recommendations on data points because there was nowhere else to get data and expertise.”

Addressing the differences of knowledge on the onset to build capacity is something both city staff and community leaders have identified as essential. A community member articulated their consideration for whether or not they’d be involved as being based on if the city properly “spends time on capacity building [on content]. Don’t bring us to the table if you aren’t going to invest in capacity building before [the next iteration]. There should be a period with the groups that are going to participate and learn about the technical elements we need to know and learn about the metrics from the past plan.” Moving forward, key city staff intend to take a step back for the community to lead and are in inquiry around “what information sharing and capacity building support would look like as a follower.”

While the resources were put to good use, many stakeholders have called for increased resourcing to support the degree of expertise community leaders provided as well as to support a more sustained structure to maintain the EWG beyond the CAP planning process to create more accountability feedback loops. This would allow for “ongoing support and capacity building for [grassroots] organizations to engage on plan updates. There are models for this...and the Climate Action Plan is one of many plans that exists, there are many other plans communities could engage in.” For many community members, providing more resourcing from the city and starting with community priorities would be a demonstration of a deeper commitment to authentically partner with community leaders and offer continuity and accountability for implementation.

Several city staff members have also acknowledged this, stating that, “I think we are committed on paper [to building collaborative governance with communities] and shifting that commitment to be manifested in more measurable ways,

including resources...and ongoing commitment to communities of color and low-income communities.” The structure of a sustained committee was one idea that was articulated, and also, city staff have said that they intend to take the lead from community leaders to identify what future partnerships will look like.

Aligning pacing with all stakeholders would also create more space for a holistic approach to developing climate solutions. Both community leaders and city staff members identified a need for bridging the physical with the social needs, starting with community priorities. A former EWG community member expressed that “I can’t tell you how many trees to plant but can tell you where there aren’t trees and who should get knowledge on how to care for a tree...Why not talk about what community is concerned about, like housing, transportation, jobs, or a green economy and then ask ‘how is this a climate issue?’ to breakdown silos?” City staff members realize this too. “Community priorities are as important as whether the pavement will buckle due to heatwaves and we’re trying to figure out how to bridge that. This will come up a lot with update of climate action plan.”

Accountability: Planning for Governance & Implementation

Establishing structures, clear roles, and practices for governance are foundational for creating effective structures of implementation and accountability. A common tension point identified across stakeholders was the role of the EWG in relationship to the CAP Steering Committee. A few members on the steering committee were also on the EWG with a general sense that this would support alignment between the two, but “it wasn’t always clear how these two separate groups would work together and if/how EWG ideas that weren’t politically popular would be integrated,” according to a government staff member. Another community member stated that how their recommendations were incorporated:

“was a convoluted path and required trust in the staff to do the right thing. We are lucky that staff in this jurisdiction would be dedicated. I don’t know if it would have worked with other staff...To the staff’s credit, that’s why we participated in this, because they care about equity. If the staff didn’t care about it, the EWG would have been siloed off, and they were trying to figure out how to mesh the two—the Steering Committee and EWG.”

This convoluted pathway led to different perceptions of the role and influence of each entity across stakeholders and limited potential for developing healthy governance structures. Internally within BPS, city staff were working to balance power dynamics by using separate processes for the EWG and Steering Committee with the intention to prevent the EWG’s recommendations from being lost in the larger context of the Steering Committee. This was not necessarily communicated to or felt by the EWG. One former EWG member expressed, “I think that the structure was

fundamentally flawed...it felt like, here is the *real* group [steering committee] that makes decisions, and here are the people of color who are limited to this one aspect of the CAP. In the future, both groups must be connected, and organizations representing frontline communities should be leading.” A government EWG participant shared that “in order to support community-based organizations in effectively participating in high-complexity planning, it requires organizing the committees differently next time.” To address confusion of who has power to influence decisions and support healthy governance, many former EWG participants across community and local governments expressed a need for more transparency in decision-making and reporting back to the community to track progress and decision-making pathways.

Ultimately, neither the EWG nor the Steering Committee had decision-making power, the City Council and county commission did. Therefore, several stakeholders identified a need to have decision-makers involved earlier in the process, hearing directly from community leaders at key points. Their “presence into the work creates more durability and sustainability to continue the work with the political context” and supports staff in being able to follow through on the commitments built with community partners. This could be especially impactful, given that once plans are developed in the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, they go to other departments for implementation, where BPS staff have less control in the current structure and equity may or may not be prioritized. This threatens the integrity of the plans and equity values through how they are actually implemented. One local government staff expressed that shifting towards true collaborative governance will take:

“Standing up for what is right, even if it’s not politically easy. It takes recognizing that there are other institutions involved in what policies move forward...and the city puts significant amounts of money into certain departments, and therefore those departments have a pretty big voice in those decisions...We’ll have to figure out how utilizing political and public pressure and working with other agencies at the table can set up a structure to follow through with commitments based on what values and priorities are coming from community partners.”

Upon reflecting on the process several years out, both community members and local government staff noted that updating community members on progress of implementation of the plans and equity metrics has been limited. One former EWG member shared that:

“We asked for metrics, and I don’t know if they were ever developed...When a contract stops, that doesn’t mean the obligation to the community ends. Knowing that City Council [members] and mayors change, all I have is that document. If I want to hold you accountable and there’s no metric or accountability, this document doesn’t mean anything.”

City staff at the BPS also acknowledged and identified a need to better track, evaluate, and communicate what they accomplish to community members and for community members to have a feedback loop to communicate to the city. One city staffer expressed that many of the plans “are being developed in relationship to each other in an arc that centers equity, but the systems change to ensure equity is at the center in terms of process and implementation in a way that will outlast leadership changes is still unclear.” Currently, the BPS and Multnomah County are working at increasing their capacity to do this with trainings on how to develop metrics that include equity metrics. Another way to shift towards accountability named by community leaders is to have more transparency on utilized resources, such as “knowing where budget and staff time are going and a breakdown on what projects are going towards upper-income versus low-income communities and communities of color.”

In order to truly plan for governance, it is also important to create accountability structures for community leaders to ensure that they are able to truly represent community priorities and needs. One former EWG member expressed that “there was no mechanism or resources for me or anyone to talk to people actually impacted” by the issues raised in the 2015 CAP. They further expressed limitations with the public comment period because it is accessible to certain people, and often not those on the frontlines of climate change. Additionally, how and to what extent public comments actually impact the arc of plans is typically not communicated (and if it is, it is not accessible to all). This was mentioned among other former EWG members as they consider what accountability and planning for governance means for them and their constituencies as well. Having resources and a timeline that accounts for that labor is essential to truly practicing equitable climate resilience planning.

Relationship Tensions & Trust Building

Despite the equity challenge in bringing in community leaders late into the 2015 CAP process rather than at the CAP planning process onset, BPS’s efforts to adapt to the needs of EWG community members and commitment to identifying equitable roles initiated trust building. The staff member facilitating the EWG had developed deep relationships with community leaders prior to the process, which was named as essential for some EWG community members to agree to commit their limited time and resources to the process. While trust had been established during the process, EWG community members have varying relationships with the city depending on the department, the specific staff member, and who the electeds are.

Several community leaders expressed that the absence of communication, feedback, and ultimately an accountability structure has caused harm and deteriorated the trust built with the BPS. Having committed their time and not seeing results threatens trust. One local government staff member shared that Multnomah County and the City of Portland (BPS):

“Have been working on equity metrics for the climate action plan. There’s a lot of staff who have been working on this for a while. Some of the questions we’re coming up with in my work group are values-based questions...Basically, do community-based organizations or organizations led by people of color trust that staff reflect their values? Do they trust that they will have agency and will be heard and that the government will be responsive to them? ...If it’s not a clear yes, then there’s something fundamentally wrong with the dynamics at play and the structure that’s been defined.”

Other city staff members are challenged with how to build clarity with communities on steps to move forward, and other staff and community leaders expressed how deep the harm is and that it takes time to repair when “folks have been ignored for so long and are facing displacement while seeing new people come in and get all kinds of amenities in their neighborhoods.” One opportunity for breakthrough is to take the time to repair the harm through healing processes while also building on systems change, such as the metric work articulated above and supporting community initiatives and efforts. Additionally, BPS is forging relationships and projects with community leaders, such as the Afroecology dialogues, that they intend to use as a model moving forward as it “leverages staff time and resources to do what communities want to do—it’s been powerful and profound having staff sit back and take leadership from communities to practice shifting power and building trust with the community.”⁵² Starting with relationships and centering the humanity in this work is essential for true culture shifts and a key ingredient for developing and implementing holistic, effective solutions to climate change.

Closing

For Portland grassroots organizations and the City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, the EWG 2015 CAP process and product acted as one spark in a larger context of changing dynamics and issues, and each of the stakeholders involved have evolved and increased capacity for collaborative governance. Now is the opportunity for them to come back together with new roles and responsibilities and a joint commitment for advancing racial and climate justice for Portland’s frontline communities.

⁵² Interview from Portland City staff member in June 2018.

Case Study: Providence REJC (Race and Environmental Justice Committee)

This case study was written with data gathered from interviews with committee members conducted in the summer of 2018 and from a comprehensive survey conducted with committee members and city staff prior to the interviews. A longer version of the case was shared with committee members for feedback. This condensed version is for the purposes of observing cities to learn from existing efforts to establish formal collaboration with community-based organizations and leaders to advance solutions to racial and environmental inequities.

A • WHERE ARE WE NOW?.....

Vision and Purpose

In January, 2017, Providence, Rhode Island leaders of color and the City of Providence formed the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee (REJC). The initial goal was 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.”⁵³ The Environmental Justice League, Groundwork Rhode Island, and the City of Providence’s Office of Sustainability laid the foundation to the REJC’s inception beginning in 2016.

Community members have a powerful vision for environmental, racial, and social justice in Providence:

My vision is that the port is cleaned up. We can have access to the waterfront. I want my kids and neighbors’ kids to have that. So we can fish and go back to our ways. It’s a human right for us to have indigenous lands to hunt and to fish. It’s all restricted access right now. We have nothing around the port...It would be all of us [working together]. We can throw down when or if a Black man is getting killed, and I want the same type of throwing down because we are killing the environment too. Youth cannot be healthy in a polluted environment. - Committee Member

I want to create a better place for my son to live and grow. I’ve always cared about the environment too, and I wanted to be around people who look like me. The vision I have is a place where people can be their whole self without fear...Families are able to provide safety for your children and not be worried that they will be assaulted, mistreated, or misgendered. I want

⁵³ Summary Report, 2017 : [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.](#)

to create a world where none of this [oppression] exists. How do we lessen this harm? I think it's through connection...- Committee Member

To build principles and a vision for a just Providence, REJC members, their base, and facilitators from One Square World engaged in a series of questions like “How do you live now? How do you want to live? How do you communicate with the city and how would you like to communicate with the city?” This helped to uncover “the gaps people needed to be filled and [to] identify the principles...” Through that process, the REJC collectively developed principles and values articulating a vision for a “racially equitable and just Providence toward el buen vivir.”⁵⁴ Key priorities included addressing industrial hazards, affordable housing & gentrification, government accountability & services, public transit, community safety, policing practices, and youth programs, to name a few.

Building on the bold vision, principles, and priorities, in June 2018, the REJC articulated its purpose as working to center racial equity in City Hall by removing structural racism in its policies, decision-making processes, and existing bureaucratic structures so that all residents of Providence can thrive. The Office of Sustainability is a key focus for building out policies and practices that can be a model on which to build and replicate. Simultaneously, the REJC seeks to work with communities of color as a vehicle for information-sharing about how the city creates policies. It also seeks to build knowledge on racial and environmental justice to strengthen community power for decision-making. Currently, the REJC is the primary portal where people of color build decision-making strategies at the city level and the REJC envisions more community-based organizations engaging in inside-outside strategies. An REJC member voiced that this work “gets [them] excited of the possibilities of having that direct connection to the city and policy change.” One stakeholder expressed how powerful the multi-directional learning among stakeholders has been, saying, “people have learned so much as a result of having this relationship [between the city and community]. Community members are like, ‘oh, this is how government works’ and the city being like ‘oh, this is how community-based organizations are doing their work.’ This effort is having ripple effects.”

Transforming power within deeply ingrained and normalized white supremacist policies and practices to a more inclusive, equitable, and just ways of knowing, being, and operating is no small feat. One member expressed “not want[ing] to be tokenized as the ‘go to’ people of color group to extract community information” without any accountability from the city. Another stakeholder recalled roadblocks staffers experienced as connectors between community and City Hall: “One thing we heard was city leads saying was, ‘I can’t do anything because my department isn’t interested in doing anything.’” The evolution of the REJC’s purpose is a response to the struggle to shift power

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* “El 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.”

dynamics and seeks to cultivate an accountability structure with key questions for the city to assess progress towards more racially and environmentally equitable policies and practices. This adjustment also demonstrates a mutual commitment to building a working relationship among the city and community leaders.

Accomplishments to Date

The REJC intentionally built its governance and priorities in slow, iterative steps, practicing deep democracy, which lays the foundation and fortitude for the long work ahead.⁵⁵ They have built an intersectional approach to their environmental justice work. Cultivating a holistic understanding of how climate and environmental crises are connected to youth development, LGBTQIA+, and economic development is not only the most effective strategy for developing holistic solutions, it is also essential to building the people power to truly meet the task humanity is called upon to respond to the crises on the horizon.

Since its inception, the REJC funded and catalyzed a handful of racial justice trainings, developed the Just Providence Framework (Recommendations for a Just and Racially Equitable Providence) with principles and values, successfully advocated for the adoption of the Framework in the Office of Sustainability in 2017, and stopped the passing of a plastic bag ban ordinance, which, as drafted, would have disproportionately negatively impacted low-income communities of color.⁵⁶ Even though City Council passed it, the mayor vetoed it as a result of the REJC's efforts. The REJC is now building on that momentum to move their racial and environmental justice systems change agenda. These outcomes are huge wins and indicate both alignment of purpose for systems change in the city and a building of momentum and influence over decision-making.

Current Structure

⁵⁵ 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." Summary Report, 2017: [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.](#)

⁵⁶ One committee member shared that plastic bags have multiple uses for families. For example, in his community, some children use plastic bags as makeshift rain boots because they're more affordable than traditional rain boots. Charging a fee on plastic bags or removing them from low-income communities of color without other supports would put undue burden on them.

Currently, the REJC has 10 community members representing communities of color and low-income communities from different neighborhoods in Providence. Four of the seats are neighborhood-based, five are topical, and one is held for a representative of the one of the tribes that originally inhabited the territory that Providence occupies. Additionally, five city staff representing five departments—Office of Sustainability, Office of Economic Opportunity, Office of Arts, Culture & Tourism, Mayor’s Policy Office, and the Office of Healthy Communities—sit on the committee. Community leaders on the REJC lead the work and purpose of the REJC, and the city staff members primarily play a “listening role and conduct [their] own base-building within City Hall to help other government officials engage in racial equity work.”⁵⁷ Staff from the Office of Sustainability play a leading role in stewarding the REJC as much of the focus of the REJC’s work has been on centering racial equity in sustainability policy. The REJC is facilitated by One Square World, which guides the community-powered development process, supports project management, and writes grants with input from other consultants.

Each REJC community member has a base of at least ten neighbors and/or community members to whom they report to ensure that their efforts are grounded in and represent community priorities and to build people power to move the work of the REJC. The REJC meets bi-monthly, and on the off months they meet with their respective bases. “We have our base meetings, and that is one of the main ways we get our information out and get the feedback. All of us [on the REJC] are community members, and then we go to at least ten people or more every other month and say, ‘Hey look, this is happening (like plastic bag ban), what do you think about it?’ ...We practice deep democracy that way. We want to talk to everyone, even though it’s also tedious.” The priorities, reflections, and questions of their base act as the north star of their work. In reflecting on how the structure supports the function of the REJC, one stakeholder noted that:

About the strategy of the bi-monthly meetings and our use of the deep democracy model—it takes time to do this...We’ll meet with REJC, and each member will have had conversations they bring back [from base meetings to the REJC meetings], and that was really critical. It was not an echo chamber, and we’re walking the talk...there are limitations—it needs to be bigger and be more comprehensive, but that allows this level of accountability. All of the community members felt like, ‘Hey, I’m accountable to my folks. They want this and I’m telling you what they want.’

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

Three community leaders on the REJC make up the project team, which meets on a weekly basis. All community members on the REJC receive stipends reflective of their role. Resourcing community leaders for their expertise and time has been crucial for sustaining the work, and also it demonstrates a deeper valuing of community priorities from the city. Resourcing individuals as opposed to community-based organizations was a strategic choice the REJC made to support building local knowledge that lives outside of the non-profit industrial complex. Funding currently is through yearly grants, as there currently is not a dedicated line item on the city’s budget. One community member said: “Having funding helps a lot. I have four kids, and I do this because I want to do it and because I have passion, but also I’m getting a stipend. It allows me to be here for 2-3 hours a week without having to worry about having to do this other job.” Grant writing is typically supported by the Office of Sustainability and One Square World. The REJC feels they have sufficient resourcing now but is in discussion about the best structure for fundraising, asking questions like “which entity should ultimately hold responsibility of the grants, given where funds are held has implications for power and priority setting?”

B • WHERE ARE WE GOING?.....

Opportunities on the Horizon

The REJC has been actively identifying strategies to dismantle institutional racism and build more momentum for city departments to implement changes that support racial and environmental equity, and the REJC just received a grant to support their work ahead. Key city staff, particularly within the Office of Sustainability, used their relative institutional power to connect the REJC with the mayor, who has agreed to use his power to set expectations that 10 departments actively seek to achieve the goals of the REJC. This will create a “change team”⁵⁸ with the REJC city staff members, giving them more institutional power within their respective departments to champion the priorities identified by the REJC community leaders and its base.

As a part of that effort, the REJC facilitator team and one lead from the REJC project team are working with those 10 departments to train them in community engagement and equity and create work plans that embed equity within them. The REJC also intends to do more trainings with community members and philanthropy to garner more resources for

⁵⁸ [Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative](#) is structured with a change team, which includes staff members from across departments that help their departments in making instructional shifts to dismantle structural racism. They provide trainings, technical assistance, and other supports within their departments.

community capacity building, such as policy-making, joining and restructuring boards on mainstream environmental organizations, building a family-centered education space, healing from harm, and fostering leadership development of more people of color to attain City Hall roles.

REJC members have also begun to work on a carbon neutrality plan for the city and with the city, leading on the community engagement strategy. All recommendations will be community driven through a community-based decision making process, and it will be up to the city to follow through to implement them.

Goals for Strengthening Practice & Deepening Impact

At the Engagement to Ownership Convening, a small team made up of city staff members, the REJC project team and the REJC facilitator identified goals to move towards deeper impact:

- Equitable decision-making process
- Coalition building/base building
- Gathering of the base all together (across neighborhoods and communities)
- Clarifying city staff roles in the inside/outside strategies
- De-siloing the work in City Hall
- Formalizing structure of the REJC so the city can have a more intentional relationship with the REJC
- Creating pathways through grant funding for community members to do this work
- Having the REJC hold two seats on the Environmental Sustainability Task Force held by the city

C • WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET THERE?.....

The multi-stakeholder work of the REJC has cultivated some effective strategies they can leverage in order to take their efforts to the next level. At the same time, challenges in this work are inevitable, and identifying pathways to address them can unlock opportunities to deepen multi-stakeholder commitments to more effectively implement equity solutions.

Building on What Is Working

Central to the success of the REJC is the dedication and passion of its members in fighting for their communities and for a better future for everyone by centering the priorities and needs of those most impacted—Black, Brown, and indigenous peoples. Several practices and strategies have been key for the REJC, including planning for governance,

base building, integrating an intersectional racial analysis at the onset of REJC formation, and building influence with decision-makers.

Planning for Governance

The REJC has focused on deep democracy practices that give everyone in the REJC community a say, modeling the type of governance the REJC is trying to cultivate in the city. One stakeholder says that central to this work has been establishing “a really good set of ways of being for each meeting that set the tone...[and] one key thing we did was take the whole year to develop our principles, and then we could really come back to those principles. And now I feel like we can strongly connect to them now.” Another interviewee said, “The structure of the meetings allowed for lots of discussion, so we get to hear from people’s different perspectives. It helps you understand where people are coming from and appreciate what they bring.” Thus, the REJC has developed a purpose that does not just sit on paper; it has come to life as REJC members embody their shared core principles and values.

This is foundational to building the capacities for governance and sustainability of the REJC. The structure articulated above is essential to moving the work forward, and the trust and respect between the larger committee, Project Team, and facilitators is vital for healthy governance and moving towards their purpose. One interviewee expressed that “the consultant has to also understand the dynamic [between the city, the communities, and community-based organizations] and has to not take over the whole process while stepping in enough to make relationships with people. At the same time, they need to be very clear that they are on the side of the community.”

As the REJC evolves, they are still experimenting with the right structure as it relates to identifying priorities and/or activities in which it will engage given the sheer volume of issues at hand. Taking on issues that the city brings to them, such as the plastic bag ban ordinance, rather than what they have set in their work plan, creates a tension of the agency the REJC has over its activities and to what extent its strategy is reactionary versus proactive. By building on the deep sense of purpose and direction, the REJC can set the conditions to reveal the right balance and strategy for navigating the many issues on which they could focus.

Base Building

The people power the REJC is building through their base has been a central strategy. This is both essential to building power and in identifying community priorities. It also builds community for people of color in a primarily white city. In reflecting on their motivation for being in the REJC, one member said, “I don’t get to really work with people who look like me, who care about the same things I care about...I wanted to be in deeper connection in my community where I was living.”

City staff also see the necessity for a robust inside *and* outside strategy, noting that this is an “incredible group of individuals committed to solving problems with a more holistic approach on top of a commitment to check back with committee members through a process of deep democracy.” They also expressed: “I can’t be a gatekeeper or [single] messenger, and while I’m a champion, I can’t just be the only champion. There still needs to be [continued] base building work and coalition building...” What is the role of government in supporting that outside strategy? This member noted that the City has a role in this work by supporting:

leadership development, such as assisting with base building and [supporting the] facilitation of more skills training with base members. If the committee feels stretched (the base meetings are long), and if the same people keep showing up, we aren’t doing a good job at democratizing the process...We should have a more assembly-style structure to make it more of a mass collaborative...People are going to be skeptical about anything that has the city brand on it, and how we and the city invite people and how they participate has to be thoughtful.

With such deep commitment and energy and so much to do, the REJC continues to explore the role of all stakeholders in the base building work.

Critical Analysis of Race and Intersectionality

From the start, the REJC was clear on naming both the root causes of the inequities in their community and the interconnections between the inequities. They also see that because the problems are connected, so must be the solutions. As articulated above, being clear about addressing structural racism was another key foundational step the REJC took upon its formation. Lived experiences have shaped how committee members understand the problems and engage: “I really have to fight to push my way into this [environmental space] as an Afro-Indigenous woman. A lot of the inequalities that I live with I’ve seen a lot [of people] in this movement also experience...I didn’t have the language or structure to help me. I didn’t have other people of color to help me combat that.” The REJC has created a home for this work.

Other members also had a holistic analysis of the issues. “Intersectionality has been a great product of the REJC where we’ve got so many people doing different things and we’re learning from each other...*and* we have the capacity to be in

the room with each other because everyone is getting paid to be in the room.” This speaks to the importance of both the varying perspectives and the reality that expertise and community planning should be compensated, which is a form of practicing racial equity in and of itself.

Influence of Decision-Makers

One important toe-hold for moving towards impact is building influence of decision-makers. Achievements like the mayor and many city staff participating in ‘undoing racism’ trainings, the Office of Sustainability adopting the Just Providence Framework, and the mayor vetoing the plastic bag ban ordinance in response to the REJC demonstrate their increasing influence with decision-makers.

The REJC continues to build pathways to develop decision-makers into champions of their priorities. This, in combination with building alliances with other organizations, can foster power to make the structural changes that will last regardless of who is holding office. The REJC continues to work closely with the Office of Sustainability, a systems change champion that “has opened the door...especially around the values and...setting up the principles. The door is open, [they] are a willing partner...And [we notice more city staff] being less afraid of the political issues related to talking about race. [The Mayor] was pretty open to it, given the typical limited comfort of local government in talking about race.”

Building on the multidisciplinary expertise of the committee members, the city staff, and the consultants supporting the work and their strategy to influence decision-makers, the REJC is poised to transform how governing happens for a racially and environmentally just Providence.

Useful Tensions to Address for Breakthrough

The REJC is poised to make deeper structural change in Providence, and this potential could be unlocked through addressing some key tensions, including relationship tensions and trust building between community members and city staff; building a shared purpose for action; and cultivating and communicating clear roles and responsibilities for stakeholders.

Relationship Tensions and Trust Building

Working with the city—it's a blessing and a curse at the same time because sometimes I feel they are not here for us...The system has kept Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in the status quo...But I'm being a bridge to my community and the city. I want to bring equal access to people, [and] we are building those connections...At end of the day, the city is a partner in this. - Community REJC Member

This work is critical, and we're building the plane as we're flying it, without a rule or guide book for how to do it. And it should be that way to an extent, because it's different everywhere based on history and personalities. It's super complex and dynamic...Whether you're organizing or governing, we're trying to create space in the middle, which is foreign in many ways, and that hasn't happened in Providence, especially because we're used to being at odds...There's discomfort in approaching a new way of working together - City Staff REJC Member

These comments begin to surface the commitment and the complexity of the work of the REJC, which REJC members feel is important in order to transform the current systems and practices in Providence for racial and environmental justice. The complexity is rooted in a history of policies and practices that are opaque and exclusionary by design and perpetuate a dynamic of dependency and vulnerability from marginalized communities. The REJC is working to transform those systems through a power-sharing process across community leaders and city staff, and several city staff on the REJC have expressed their support. This has been a learning edge for all, as building trust, transparency, power sharing and mutual acknowledgment of efforts across stakeholders has been challenging, and REJC community and city staff members are in open dialogue about these tensions. As one committee member said, “We have said that city departments have to engage in anti-racist trainings before coming into the conversation...And [they should] have ongoing conversations inside their offices...Having an honest conversation about how power works has to be a part of the discussion...it would be accepting redefining power.”

By digging into this with curiosity and deep awareness of each stakeholder's positionality, the REJC builds stronger functioning relationships across community members and city staff, unlocking the potential for deeper impact on systems change and equitable climate resilience strategies.

Building a Shared Purpose for Action

Many city staff have gone through the undoing racism trainings, which is foundational and an important achievement. Essential to building on that momentum is identifying and implementing shifts in practices to increase capacity for transformational change. This demonstrates commitment beyond the training—a commitment to transforming one's understanding, beliefs, and practices around power, privilege, and race. One member articulated that “building [anti-racism practices] into their [department] structures would be the next step. It takes the burden off of the committee.”

Making these shifts in a governmental system that was not set up to support equity can be a challenge. As the purpose of the REJC evolved, there is a tension in navigating the need to work across the government as a whole with the initial commitment. As one city staffer articulated, “to make sure the Office of Sustainability is getting policies and programs right and has its own source of accountability...It feels like we are doing the replication, yet we haven't even finished the model.”

There is an opportunity for breakthrough in exploring how addressing the root issues of structural oppression across government can open up possibilities for the programming and policies within specific departments, namely the Office of Sustainability, to move forward racially equitable sustainability solutions.

The tension between community and government is felt when it comes down to tangible requests from community members and perceived actions or non-actions from the city. City staffers have expressed limitations in working within the politics and power dynamics in City Hall. Yet in working together thus far, they have actually made significant ground towards shifting conversations and finding inroads to move the city culture towards equity.

Together, REJC community members and city staffers can continue to shift each other's paradigm; they can continue to experiment and take risks for a just Providence for all. One staff member noted that they've “learned so much and are constantly doing so.” City staffers may learn pathways to shift City Hall dynamics from community leaders, who are experts in organizing. In turn, city staffers can leverage their understanding of bureaucracy to support community members in engaging in the system to create more wins within City Hall. This multi-directional learning and experimenting is what it will take to move the needle.

Role Clarity & Communication

Forming the REJC required deep relationship building and purpose alignment to guide the work. Identifying clear roles and responsibilities has been a constant exploration with varying expectations and questions across stakeholders. Both stakeholders see the role of city staff as connectors between the REJC community members and the city. How that takes shape in practice may be unclear given the newness of the community committee within a government department. To build clarity, REJC community members have developed role descriptions and expectations for themselves and city staff. Each stakeholder must stretch beyond typical notions of their roles and be transparent about what they can commit to and what their limitations are.

In an effort to calibrate roles, the committee is re-thinking through how city staff members and community members interface and work together to address power. They are “trying to shift into better a relationship dynamic that’s less involved in order to be more productive.” Rather than having weekly meetings with both city staff and the REJC project team, they are shifting to weekly affinity meetings to move the work forward and holding joint city and community member meetings at monthly checkpoints.

Critical to this pivot is maintaining dialogue with REJC community members to build capacity of city staff in understanding the issues and also in building positive relationships with community members. One REJC member said “being a part of the conversations is important...You need that background and context to be a good advocate [in City Hall].” Holding a mix of affinity and joint meetings supports both stakeholders to reflect on their practices and identify how they can better insert equity in every step. There is an opportunity for both stakeholders to build authentic relationships, as connecting to each other’s humanity is a core condition for transforming policies and practices to being more racially and environmentally just.

While bridging across silos fosters new possibilities, community REJC members and city staff experience political tensions from their respective positions and contexts. One staff member expressed challenges in “implementing the agenda that is supposed to be the community’s” while navigating other agendas and politics within City Hall. One REJC member perceived that city staff are at risk of losing their “credibility” within the city as they may experience questions or pushback from their colleagues regarding work with the REJC, given the fraught dynamic between community and the city. Playing the role of a connector can be isolating. Strengthening relationships and identifying more systems

change champions within the city can reduce isolation, build power among staff, and unlock possibilities for transformative change.

Community members have also experienced credibility challenges in working with the city, as the REJC has “real organizing energy coming from best organizers in the city...who are now drawing a paycheck from the city, which makes them less credible to other organizers. And it sucks up their time.” Another REJC community member expressed that when she joined the REJC, it took a lot of re-building of relationships among community leaders due to the tension in working with an entity, the city, that has been a part of harming communities of color and low-income communities.

Both stakeholders are grappling with how to navigate the politics of what it means to be in relationship and accountable to each other in this REJC structure. Finding a middle ground in terms of risk taking to move the needle is still being fine-tuned. Identifying this and finding balance among stakeholder expectations could catalyze big shifts towards closing inequity gaps.

Another key question is where the REJC sits in the broader ecosystem of environmentally focused groups in Providence. Aligning on the role and criteria required for mainstream environmental groups to be involved in centering the needs and priorities of those most impacted by the climate crisis could unlock a lot of power and influence for the REJC. One city staff member expressed that they would “like to see traditional environmental organizations be allies to environmental justice organizations and truly understand what that [allyship] means. One REJC member passionately expressed that “so many people are doing this work independently, but it’s all state violence. The culture that allows this stuff to happen is all the same—the culture of domination. Working on this alone doesn’t make sense because it’s all connected.” Building a broader multi-stakeholder network can harness more political power to support the rationale for the systems change strategy, and it can cultivate more holistic and effective solutions.

When speaking about the value of having the diverse backgrounds and perspectives on the REJC, one member said, “If we all agreed, it would suck. I actually think it enhances collaboration. We’re 80% on board with everything, and there’s 20% that they’re holding back because they have to. They don’t have a choice [because of the unique priorities of their respective organizations and bases]. The collaboration they do is conflicted, which ends up with a more thought-out solution and a much better outcome. And that’s something to be proud of.” In that same vein, building towards deeper collaboration between community leaders and local government could foster more effective outcomes than either

stakeholder working on their own. Government can tap into that by deepening its capacity to partner with communities of color and frontline communities.

Navigating these tensions could strengthen the inside-outside strategy. The REJC is working with the city to transform the system so that it is made for those most impacted, and thus will have the capacity to benefit everyone. Working to mend the relationships can strengthen commitment, improve communication, and build clarity around appropriate stakeholder roles, responsibilities, and actions.

Closing

Since the REJC's inception, it has worked diligently over the past few years to build power through articulating a vision for a just Providence while also increasing capacity across stakeholders. This has culminated in demonstrations of the power the REJC is building to apply racial and environmental justice principles to the city policies and practices, in particular with sustainability policies and impact on city decision-makers. Much of this is due to the REJC and lead city staff's commitment to purpose, relationship building, and a committee structure that supports the strengthening of those relationships and the development of effective solutions.

Case Study: Seattle EJC (Environmental Justice Committee)

This case study was written with data gathered from interviews with committee members conducted in the summer of 2018 and from a comprehensive survey conducted with committee members and city staff prior to the interviews. A longer version of the case was shared with committee members for feedback. This condensed version is for the purposes of observing cities to learn from existing efforts to establish formal collaboration with community-based organizations and leaders to advance solutions to racial and environmental inequities.

A • WHERE ARE WE NOW?.....

Vision & Purpose

The municipal community-driven Committee for Racial Equity and Environmental Justice in the City of Seattle was initiated to inform the implementation of the Equity & Environment Agenda. Some of the community leaders who worked on the Agenda now serve on the committee or helped to establish it so as to build capacity for strengthening the local democracy through systems change and culture shift.

To advance environmental justice requires going further than policy recommendations; we must fundamentally change the way policies are created and prioritize historically excluded communities to have power in leadership and decision-making. = Jill Mangaliman, GOT GREEN
(From the Equity & Environment Agenda)

The Equity & Environment Agenda and the collaboration with community leaders to draft it set forward a clear set of goals for addressing existing inequities as well as a clear set of principles for achieving those goals with desired outcomes reflected at every step. The EJ Committee is positioned to steward that process, but the persistence of status quo tendencies across local governments limits the capacity of the committee to do just that. This reality opens up big questions for the committee as to how to spend its limited capacity to make the shifts needed to realize the Equity & the Environment Agenda.

Some committee members indicated that there was progress towards a shared vision but that more work is needed to achieve the level of cohesion around purpose needed to advance towards the vision.

“We had a retreat in February, and we tried to get to a shared purpose at that point... Because that was the completion of the first year, and I think it has just taken a bit to get to that cohesion... It is a challenge to recognize that we are each coming from different communities, and yet aiming to have this collective purpose and goal, we don’t yet have a vision statement.” -
Committee Member

When asked about the purpose of the committee, survey respondents either left the question blank or responded in ways that differed notably from other respondents. When asked to elaborate on this question during the interview process, it became clear that taking the time to engage in developing shared purpose clarity could benefit the committee, particularly given limited capacity and the magnitude of systemic challenges.

A few powerful themes emerged from interviews that demonstrate what could be possible through alignment around the purpose of the committee or the unique driving motivation and role it could play in advancing the Equity & the Environment Agenda:

Building Civic Leadership Pathways

Multiple committee members see the role/purpose of the committee as building leadership pathways for residents from impacted communities, including their own, to advance community solutions.

“What I like about the agenda are the opportunities for community leadership. Every part of the agenda is important, but to advance the initiative, we need more people from our communities to be involved in decision-making, projects, research, any capacity.” - Committee Member

It’s clear that leadership pathways must be paved with equity practices, such as language equity, culturally relevant engagement, and direct leadership development and capacity building, as well as community organizing and alliance building to cultivate the kind of community power that would put weight behind community voices and resident leaders. Many committee members see their role as building and sustaining a bridge between their communities and the government entities needed to make the changes in policy to help close equity gaps. At the beginning, being a bridge simply looks like information sharing in two directions between local government and impacted communities. But committee members are clear it can’t stop at information sharing and are asking the tough questions around how to cultivate genuine community voice, power, and influence over city policies.

“Environmental justice is equivalent to people having their own ability to shape their own experience and livelihood in communities. In the work I do with EJC, I’m thinking in the frame that communities know what they need and can find solutions that work for them...” - Committee Member

Building leadership pathways to affect policy and systems change for racial and environmental justice is also about repairing the harm that has been caused between government and communities. The members of the EJC are playing a critical role in supporting their communities to see their role within governance and begin healing the divide that limits community participation:

“For me, everyone should be on same page in terms of what’s going on. And a lot of times, communities of color are left out because of language and culture, as well as a lot of other reasons. That’s why I think of our

purpose is connecting the government to the people. A lot of time, what we've experienced is the disconnection.... Unless I don't do anything wrong, government has nothing to do with my life... But people don't see the connection, and they don't see that they can participate. That's the sad thing. I believe a lot of immigrants groups have had the same experience with government [in their of origin]." - Committee Member

Transforming the Culture of Participation & Planning

Closing equity gaps requires transforming the culture of participation as key to removing the barriers impacted communities experience when they seek to affect change. Some of the community-based organizations represented on the committee are providing models for what community-driven planning and participation looks like and can serve as excellent partners to local government in achieving the level of community participation it will take to implement equity solutions. Again, the need for systems change becomes evident:

"The culture that needs to change is to take a different approach to decision-making and outreach..." - Committee Member

"We met with them last year when they were talking about implementing electric vehicle chargers, we gave them all the recommendations on how to do real community engagement, and they didn't take our recommendations. They only engaged the folks in the apartments right across the street from the chargers. They only did translation in Spanish even though this is a predominantly API community. They were not prepared to meet with the community and take their concerns. And when we spoke up, they become defensive. The development was not well thought out. It is on a one-way street. It is by a popular coffee shop, and the owners didn't even know about it. People park there and are not even charging. It is a waste of money." - Committee Member

The hope is that the city will work with the existing community-led processes and/or that the committee will play a role in advancing community-driven planning as common practice. Sixty-six percent of committee members who took the survey (6 out of 9 respondents) named designing and facilitating community-driven planning processes to develop and implement EJ solutions as important work for the committee moving forward. If the city is going to conduct direct engagement of impacted communities, committee members strongly suggest more relationship-building and training before talking to communities.

Building Cross-Community Power at the Intersection of Race, Environment, & Economy

The most salient issue affecting low-income communities and communities of color at the intersection of fundamental forces is economic displacement, which can be further exacerbated by community revitalization and "greening." Multiple committee members named economic displacement as a top-priority issue for their communities, and yet there are some challenges around strategy for the

committee to overcome before they can achieve the kind of alignment needed to leverage the committee for the purpose of preventing displacement.

“How can we get these housing issues integrated into green? But there are so many other competing priorities.” - Committee Member

“Such a complex issue and challenging one that only recently have we started a conversation about housing and displacement.” - Committee Member

The committee has key opportunities to explore at the intersections:

- How can the work of preventing displacement be informed by the work of urban Indian communities, displaced for generations, to achieve decolonization at multiple levels from the individual to the structural? *“Seattle is set up on a history of redlining and stolen indigenous land.” - Committee Member*
- How can our communities work with one another and with key allies in local government to establish a comprehensive platform that speaks directly to communities living at the intersections of racial, environmental, and economic inequities, and that has enough teeth to hold systems accountable? *“Now that we were able to get housing on the agenda, I think they are seeing that their collective voices are being heard and they are trying to figure out solutions together.” - Committee Member*

The makeup of the committee, the mutual respect between members, and the need for real political power to achieve equity goals, at least partly through a framework of decolonization, point to the potential on the horizon for this committee to build strategic alliances across communities to achieve shared victories.

“I want to show up for other POC and want them to do the same for me... How do we actually show up for each other in a balanced way without competing for resources?” - Committee Member

“The redistribution of power has to be the biggest thing that we need to work for... We have a City Council that is progressive enough to vote on these policy changes, but corporations have so much power that they can manipulate the outcomes.” - Committee Member

To advance cross-community solutions with impact for the long term will require creating new resourcing models that limit dependence and build towards community ownership:

“Environmental Justice Fund: in EJ agenda - build this fund to build capacity and leadership to support communities impacted to lead the work. We said that the EJ Fund should be led and owned by community. We asked the city to invest in us, so we do more than just manage it, but learn how community-driven grant making works and invest funds and do our own fundraising to invest in ourselves. We want to step away from a charity model. We don’t want to depend on the city and depend on grants. How can we invest in ourselves. That is ownership. At least from my perspective.” - Committee Member

Systems Change to Achieve Racial Equity

Members of this committee and the city staff who work in collaboration with the committee have each expressed in different ways a vision of collaborative governance in which the local government is truly accountable to all communities and its internal practices are set up to receive bottom-up feedback, learning, and accountability to racial and environmental equity goals and practices. There is a strong call to repair the social contract between the local government and the people who give it power.

“...Establishing principles—the 8 opportunities for leadership are guideposts for the Equity & the Environment Agenda. So I find that they serve as anchors for us to look at things through because we don’t have statutory power. We have to be strategic on how we are empowering that lens; I think that one effective thing we’ve done is put together principles for public space. It’s effective because it’s speaking the language of city government; hard tangible document that provides guidance for how the city should approach shaping public space...” - Committee Member

“Having more people within the city system understanding the movement analysis. People are often looking to lift things they are seeing in CA, or where there are large EJ partners. Here in Seattle, we don’t have that in quite the same way. We have community groups that are EJ focused but just building up their capacity. It takes a while to build that up. Philanthropy just started investing in the last several years.” - Equity & the Environment Program Manager

Addressing silos among city departments is a common systems change goal that committee members and city staff from the Equity & the Environment Agenda alike see as a priority:

“If there were an opportunity to change how city departments talk to each other - this would be an easy barrier to break down.” - Committee Member

There are also simpler changes that the committee could help the city make that would unlock resources for community solutions and foster more collaboration with community groups. For example, the data requirements of city grant programs could be adapted to meet community needs:

“Funding: A lot of this comes down to data and metrics. As CBOs, we are always pushing back. Some departments are doing better to support us in not requiring personal identifying info because they are more focused on the demographics rather than individual data. Not all departments are open to that yet, especially the way city does granting. It’s very data heavy. And I understand they have to be accountable and track data, but it’s a tricky balance keeping those two, especially in a time where governments are capable of using this information against our immigrant communities. And that’s where CBOs are learning how to navigate that.” - Committee Member

Current Structure & Practices

The Seattle EJ Committee is still in its forming stage. At this stage, there are incredible strengths and assets to draw on as well as key challenges to establish the kind of structure and internal practices that will make this committee the vehicle it needs to be to achieve the vision and purpose articulated in the Equity & the Environment Agenda, and in the respective work of members.

Committee Member Selection & Capacity to Represent Communities

Many committee members expressed the diversity and caliber of the committee members as an asset and even a “win.” And yet there are genuine concerns among committee members as to their shared capacity to genuinely represent the voices, priorities, and concerns of their communities.

“We were invited as individuals representing diverse communities to be on the committee. For now, the city perspective is that they have a room full of people who represent the community. From the community side, we haven’t had those conversations to make sure they feel their voices are being represented. Maybe some of us are doing it more than others, but that could be more explicit, and also that’s about capacity as well.” - Committee Member

Other members bring perspectives that could support the committee to go beyond “representation” in its practices and culture:

“I struggle with ‘representing community.’ It might be a cultural thing. It doesn’t feel right to say I represent my community, rather I am a part of the Urban Native community. I don’t speak for them, but I summarize my interpretation of what has been said. There is no government to speak on our behalf. All we have is the trust in each other.” - Committee Member

Agenda Setting & Facilitation

All committee members are pleased with the development of the co-chair model, as it allows for agenda to be set by committee members and has created more time for committee members to meet on their own. The co-chair model contributes to a sense of ownership over the committee. Many are grateful for the standing agenda item of community updates/report-backs, as it gives committee members a window into the multiple communities represented by the committee. The focus of the community report-backs is basically, “What are you hearing from your community and how can we support?” This practice brings a more human element to the agenda. The co-chairs also established a protocol for prioritizing how much time is spent on requests that come from the city to the committee. Using a set of criteria, the committee allocates an established amount of committee time and follow-up time by co-chairs to a given request by the city.

“Co-chairs keep us on task. Some of the stuff on the agenda is what we want and some of it is what [the city] wants. They keep us on track so we can get through all of the tasks.” - Committee Member

“We meet once a month—9-12 and sometimes afterwards. Last year it was all Sudha and Sarah led. We followed their program. This year the change is that Nancy and Melissa are the co-chairs. This started in January.” - Committee Member

There is notable interest among committee members to take advantage of this dynamic grouping of community-based leaders to build cohesion, trusting relationships, and shared strategy.

“...This is a really good space for us to learn from each other and connect with each other. I feel we need to do more relationship building...” - Committee Member

“Asking questions: a good strategy we’ve adopted structurally into our EJ committee. At end of each meeting, we have an opportunity to pitch questions to different department heads and the mayor’s office about initiatives that have an impact or are framed as EJ trying to problematize them more.” - Committee Member

Decision-Making Protocols

The committee is currently in the process of developing an equitable decision-making protocol, and there are mixed levels of trust in that process. Four out of nine survey respondents said they were confident in the process, three said they were somewhat confident, and two said they were somewhat concerned. Confidence in the process stems from the fact that it is a collaborative process within the committee, while concerns seem to stem from bigger questions related to city capacity and the power and influence of the committee. Through the interview process, committee members expressed a range of possible shapes decision-making can take:

“We lean more towards consensus building because that’s how we like operating. But then when interacting with policy systems, that may not be as effective. There is some tension between the community organizing perspective/way of doing things and the policy making way of doing those things...” - Committee Member

B • WHERE WE ARE HEADED.....

Committee leaders have set clear goals to model collaborative governance through co-creating climate justice solutions. Goals include: 1) mapping the strengths and assets of the committee; 2) building the leadership of the committee through political education to more effectively navigate systems; 3) cultivating shared purpose and accountability within the committee by agreeing on a shared project, prioritizing a policy goal, and exploring what accountability means; 4) increasing city capacity and accountability through racial equity training for all staff and cultivating accountability and communication across departments; and 5) building community leadership and influence on environmental issues through an investment in community organizing.

C • WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET THERE.....

Building on What is Working

Members of the Seattle EJC and some of the staff from the Office of Sustainability & Environment are bringing great strengths and assets and have made major strides from which they are building.

Diversity & Trust of Committee Members

The Equity & the Environment Agenda built a diverse committee, representing multiple communities, issue areas, and approaches to community leadership. The leaders on the committee are considered to have deep trust in the communities from which they come. Many leaders currently live in or come from environmental justice communities. Establishing this committee and the Race and the Environment Initiative increased leadership of color on environmental issues at the municipal level by 100%.

“Strength: Representation that you have is deep into its community and has already built the trust.” - Committee Member

“When certain members say something, there’s not a whole bunch of fighting because it’s been vetted or they bring it to the community to vet.” - Committee Member

A Member-Driven Structure

The co-chair model is an example of desired outcomes being reflected at every step. As the committee continues to make strides towards collaborative governance and community ownership, it will be important to continue to draw on internal practices that both reflect and build those skills.

“The co-chair model adds capacity for the committee. Co-chairs do things that Sarah and Sudha probably could not have had the capacity to do; it redistributes some of that power back to the community; it has been an opportunity for us to make a lot of the decisions; it adds clarity to the work and the things that are coming out of the committee.” - Committee Member

“It’s hard for folks in city capacity to understand that bringing people together is inherently a process that will cause friction and rely on consensus building. We all come with our own perspectives and experiences and look at problems and decide how to respond. Space facilitates that. We realize there could be a notion of success in the future. How do we shape our own dynamic as reps to move towards that success?” - Committee Member

Building Trust and Relationships with City Staff and Electeds

The committee creates the opportunity for community leaders to build trust and working relationships with leaders positioned within the government, and yet there are tensions that need to be broken through. The Equity & Environment Program Manager has the closest relationship to the committee, and many expressed great appreciation at having someone steeped in community organizing, climate justice, and racial equity playing a strategic bridge role within government. The fact that she brings lived experience to the role and can translate between “city language” and “community language” is important to being able to cultivate genuine relationships with community leaders:

“We have some expertise, but the learning curve for understanding politics and actual structures is much too steep for us to go into any meeting. The city staffers we work with, I would say (with gratitude), they think like organizers. Sudha, and even Sarah, who is technically framed, she still realizes that when things go south, it’s because information has not been delivered in the right way.” - Committee Member

And yet there are times when it is difficult for some committee members to know if what she is saying is coming from her or her superiors. Some committee members also question how much control over the committee the Equity & the Environment Agenda staff are willing/able to allow to the members. But it is the trust that has been built that keeps committee members committed and open to continuing to do the work in collaboration with the city as much as that is possible with the existing power dynamics within government:

“Sarah and Sudha—we see them on the daily, and we like them as people. Sometimes I don’t know if it’s them talking or if it’s coming from someone else. They are in a tight spot. It’s the bridge. I know Sudha wants to have a bold vision for EEI, and I don’t know if that has been affected by conditions in City Hall. Sometimes there is tension with us and them too so we can have space, so we can have control. I don’t hold it on them because they are in a tight spot as POC in the city. And bosses are on their case. We don’t know all the details and are trying to see them as as allies even when we struggle.” - Committee Member

There is a lot of awareness on the part of committee members as to who among city staff can be trusted, who can’t, and who they aren’t yet sure of. Building upon existing relationships to continue to build inroads within the city is a key leverage point for committee members:

“There is momentum with the city inspiring and building new relationships with the community, especially POC. At same time, it’s the mentality and prior experience that is stigma of how the city is working, but part of me wants that to be unlearned...” - Committee Member

The EJC could be positioned to build linkages across departments and other committees within the city:

“One other thing that I’ve been trying to do with other committee members is to get the committees to talk to each other—other diversity committees. We don’t have any opportunity to meet with each other. Social events with food to build relationships across departments with some ways to have dialogue and exchange with maybe a couple of people presenting—not too heavy on the formal aspect. Have a way to designate which committee you’re on. Send something out that shares what each committee does...” - Committee Member

This level of intentional relationship-building that builds trust over time can create the conditions for personal and interpersonal breakthrough so essential to systems change:

There needs to be self reflection on the city government side—trust in the government to make the processes transparent can be vulnerable for government staff because it will become clear how many dynamics are based in white dominant culture.” - Committee Member

Cultivating Community Accountability/Balancing Power at the Committee Level

Multiple committee members expressed current actions or ideas for using their positions of relative privilege (i.e. a seat on the EJC) to build true community accountability:

“We are trying to implement better accountability to our role—grounding our position of privilege and recognizing that we cannot speak for everyone, and hopefully we can be conduits to get people in the door.

We have introduced accountability for this second term Defining: being intentional and putting time to appeal to a base and hearing from a base of folks who hopefully can be more represented in these policies. So people who may not see themselves in these conversations. We have done that now by checking in with leaders to see what they think. I also think that this is an important modeling tool. The default for the city is to turn to ECJ and get our approval and then go back to rubber stamp. We have to consistently break that inclination. Where we're conduits now, this can actually be done without us. There are people who want to be heard, and there are resources the city has available to create better space to hear those folks. How can you do better?" - Committee Member

Being thoughtful about recruitment is essential to building genuine community accountability.

Useful Tensions to Address for Breakthrough

There are notable, healthy tensions, primarily between what committee members are working to achieve and what status quo power dynamics and governmental practices will allow. Breakthrough could be achieved through leaning into and addressing one or more of the following tensions:

Time Spent on Consultation or Voice

Committee members and city staff who work with the committee are all clear that one of the most important benchmarks is to get to the place where the majority of committee capacity is dedicated to advancing their own agenda. Four roadblocks that they must overcome to get there include: 1) Time/Capacity: many committee members are over-capacity, and this level of work takes significant time; 2) Alignment: there is still work to be done to achieve the kind of synergistic/mutually reinforcing alignment that makes a proactive agenda across multiple communities possible; 3) a culture of urgency and dominance around things moving on the city side makes it difficult to carve the space and time to get into a proactive, community-driven stance; 4) the items coming from the city side will significantly impact committee members' communities, and so there is a big obligation to weigh in.

"We struggle to maintain a sense of autonomy and a sense of character of what our committee is because we do have some directives and commitments to Office of Sustainability and Environment and capacity lent by OSE, looking to strike a balance between doing our own agenda setting and digesting expectations from OSE that is more reflective of the work that we think is important." - Committee Member

"We are advising on existing items and haven't had a chance to propose our own ideas. This group has a lot of brain power, can develop solutions, and can hold the city accountable to EJ, but still feels really distant." - Committee Member

Inside vs. Outside Strategy

Getting to the level of sustained voice (influence) to affect the level of policy and systems change needed to implement the Equity & the Environment Agenda requires building significant political power through both an inside and outside strategy.

There were already lots of recommendations in our EEI and in our spaces. The EEI is being held as a model nationwide, but where is the accountability on city's side? We will always have to do advocacy until we have accountability and guarantees from the city that we are not being tokenized or used as a check-box. The city needs to still win the trust of communities. Also all City staff need racial equity training and EEI training. With the exception of Sudha, Sarah, most staffers of color, and women staff, city staffers are very siloed and defensive when we talk to them about our issues and give them feedback. It's difficult if there is not a willingness on the city's part to actually understand and practice equity.” - Committee Member

Many committee members point to the need for an inside strategy to build political power and city accountability:

“We are a committee that is supposed to create policies in the executive branch, but I don't think that every department or even many important people—decision-makers—even know about our existence. The ones that do, I don't think they really take us seriously.” - Committee Member

For many members, being on the committee is an opportunity to learn how the system functions; this learning curve is critical to being able to leverage the position to be able to affect systems change:

“It's harder to break into city system and understand how those things work, so getting that knowledge from them was helpful for me.” - Committee Member

Meanwhile, there is a significant need to build a shared outside strategy to generate enough political pressure to motivate systems change and hold systems accountable to the goals that have been set:

“Where we are coming from as a committee and how we are situated within the city as a POC committee to give voice and power to communities of color. But we are not building the kind of power needed to address the powers that be.” - Committee Member

Serving on the committee, however, creates an ironic challenge for grassroots groups in how to effectively engage an outside strategy to hold the city accountable when there is an unspoken expectation to avoid conflict in the name of “collaboration.”

“Interesting dynamic we have on the committee is that there are organizations that have systems change and political orientation, and that’s not the best interest of the city government, and the city’s interest is to preserve. Added opportunities to promote inside strategy to an organization whose framework is systems change is important. I’ve observed how difficult it must be for the city representatives to justify the EJC when a systems change analysis is regarded as an asset for our role as “community reps” but must be reframed to fit more appropriately within the culture of the city. We have to broker how authentically the city is committed to change versus preserving the status quo. This is bound to make department heads, political appointees, and elected officials uncomfortable.” - Committee Member

An outside strategy also requires a commitment to ongoing relationship-building with residents and community groups, but many committee members point to the fact that communication with communities is limited or stifled when processes don’t match desired outcomes:

“The same goes for members of the public. As much as we’d like for city departments to know that we exist, we need the community to know that we exist. We all work in the community, and yet most people probably don’t even know that we exist. Would take a lot of work with the community to know what they think, what they need. Most of the knowledge we bring is organic. We are not speaking for everybody.” - Committee Member

Continuing to build real community power and making the most of the committee to leverage that power for policy and systems change also means ensuring that all communities are represented and having some autonomy to make that happen.

“Weaknesses: Not enough representation. We have Abdullahi—no Iraqis, no migrant workers, no Nigerians. We haven’t contacted or connected with the leadership of certain ethnic groups in the city.” - Committee Member

Community Infrastructure or City Capacity to Sustain Solutions

By participating in the committee, community-based organizations are able to not only advance priorities set in the Equity & the Environment Agenda, but also make recommendations to the city about how they implement programs that support low-income communities, communities of color, and migrant and refugee communities. As solutions take hold, choices need to be made about how to build the sustained capacity and infrastructure for effective programs. Should the program be collaboratively managed between community and local government? Should community capacity and infrastructure be built to manage the program? Or should local government take full responsibility of managing and sustaining the program? Having clarity around these questions for solutions that the EJC is advancing is important because it can inform *how* community groups advocate, what specific elements they request of government or other stakeholders, and what they build community capacity for. In addition, there is a needed shift and high learning curve on the city side as to how to genuinely partner with community-based organizations and to make the most of potentially powerful collaborations:

"Example: Freshbucks program, a priority in EJC is to address food deserts and lack of access. We have a grant to do outreach on this, and early on, the program was solely about outreach and education to promote Latino populations to go to local farmers markets. In the committee, it was two organizations that had successfully done the program. So we had conversations with community members and realized that it's not that we don't go to farmers markets, it's that we don't go to shop. It's a day out w the family. Something new and different. So when they ask us where we go, we say Safeway or local tiendas (ethnic shops). That's when we externally gave feedback to city. Would you be willing to try something to offer benefits at local ethnic stores? Support on training and marketing to promote using Freshbucks at farmers markets or at local ethnic store. They were able to pilot that which was successful. At EJC, we see this as success that can potentially change that system. Now they are trying to build internal capacity, so they will stop partnering with CBOs to build that capacity to do more - and while we think it's good that they want to do more, it's going to be a real challenge to reach as many people in multilingual communities without any prior built-in trust. They are going to need us, not to just be an outreach team. We won't just be your temporary outreach workforce. We want to be true partners and learn how this system works. We want to build our own support systems within our communities. That's one example that comes to mind."

In establishing the Environmental Justice Committee, the City of Seattle has convened a brain trust with the knowledge and community connections needed to advance the solutions outlined in the Equity and the Environment Agenda. The success of the committee will depend on its capacity to set its own agendas and develop an inside-outside strategy that will significantly increase its political influence within the city. Continuing to build relationships with electeds and facilitating communication across departments while aligning around shared policy goals and community organizing tactics, they may be able to do just that. Deepening existing relationships with philanthropic partners and hiring a third-party facilitator will help to accelerate this process.

Case Study: Washington, D.C. EAG (Equity Advisory Group) - Ward 7

This case study was written with data gathered from interviews with committee members conducted in the summer of 2018 and from a comprehensive survey conducted with committee members and city staff prior to the interviews. A longer version of the case was shared with committee members for feedback. This condensed version is for the purposes of observing cities to learn from existing efforts to establish formal collaboration with community-based organizations and leaders to advance solutions to racial and environmental inequities.

A • WHERE ARE WE NOW?.....

Vision & Purpose

Staff within the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) in Washington, D.C. sought to shift the way the DOEE typically does community engagement and applied for a Partners for Places Grant (paired with support from local funders) to form the Equity Advisory Group (EAG). The EAG is made up of a diverse array of residents of Ward 7 and staff from community-based organizations working in Ward 7 to ensure that the ward has access to resources to meet community needs. This effort was initiated and led primarily by city staff of color who have worked internally to integrate more racial equity efforts into the District’s planning and implementation policies and practices. Thus, they set intentions to prioritize those most impacted by climate disaster—those on the frontlines.

Ward 7, a community subject to historical and current disenfranchisement was identified as a priority community for deeper engagement. It is a primarily African American community east of the Anacostia River that enjoys green space, a rare amenity in the city, yet it is contaminated with toxic chemicals and sewage, and the community lies in a flood zone. The river is often seen as a dividing line as “the median household income is less than half what it is for the city as a whole.”⁵⁹ This spring (of 2018), the river passed annual health check with a D rating for the first time in 10 years, which has led to questions of who will be able to enjoy the benefits of the green space and river.⁶⁰ An EAG member described the ward saying:

I love where I’m from. My whole family—both sides—are from here, and I start to cross the river now and I don’t feel like this is the city I grew up in. And I don’t want to feel that way in my neighborhood. And I don’t really want that in my city either...I feel more guarded in my own city...My dog and I go on Watts Branch [Creek Park in Ward 7] on our long walk. There’s a lot of pollution, and when it floods, there’s really dirty water...But [my dog] loves the water that he’s walking on. We use the trail a lot, and it’s fairly safe, except that the trail constantly floods...[the government] coming in and saying we want to fix the flooding issue. I’m leery that this will [negatively] impact the community. It always seems to me that government says we are going to fix these problems, and then a lot of predatory developers and activities follow up...and ends up kicking people out.

⁵⁹ Fenston, Jacob. “The Consequences of Cleaning up the Anacostia River.” *Weekend Edition Saturday*. Host Scott Simon. National Public Radio. May, 2018. [Radio Transcript](#).

⁶⁰ Lang, Marissa J. “[After 10 Years of Flunking, Anacostia River Passes Annual Health-Check with D Rating.](#)” *The Washington Post*, 13 June 2018.

EAG members are dedicated to fighting for their community as they navigate environmental hazards and combat risk of displacement. Despite mistrust of government programs, the EAG process with the DOEE was an opportunity for community members to intervene on typical government plans and practices. One member stated that “it’s our [tax] money the government is getting, [and we] need to take ownership of the process.”

The EAG’s purpose was to provide recommendations for implementing the Climate Ready D.C. Plan and the Clean Energy Plan in Ward 7. It was largely defined prior to bringing together the EAG members. While the DOEE had already developed the two plans, the EAG members cultivated their own ideas for transforming how planning happens in Ward 7. This vision includes asserting that Ward 7 residents “have a seat at the table” with decision-makers and are actively making sure district plans reflect community priorities while also intervening on damaging policies that would negatively impact their community. One EAG member said they envisioned that the EAG would grow into a committee with “individuals [staffed at] grassroots organizations that do public service for the ward—meet[ing] with City Council members, planners—whoever has decision-making power. We’d all sit at a table and recommend what we think should happen...Ultimately, the goal of the EAG is to get this model adopted for each agency.”

The EAG acts as advocates for their homes, neighbors, and community and has catalyzed multi-directional learning across stakeholders. For example, they have already transformed the way the DOEE understands climate resilience. Through their inquiries, expertise, and problem-solving, the EAG worked with the DOEE to establish a shared understanding that planning for climate disruption and renewable energy are not isolated from key challenges the community faces around workforce development, youth development, and a need for shared community space. Responding to changing climate conditions and building sustained economic and community development opportunities must go hand in hand for true climate resilience of frontline communities.

This six-month process marked a shift in community and DOEE relations. It led to a deeper valuing of community priorities among district staff. This is a key developmental step towards building the community-driven governance capacities that will enable the EAG’s vision for shared decision-making power over the plans and policies impacting their community to become a reality. This can result in more effective, holistic solutions to the climate crisis because of collaborative cross-sectoral expertise and deeper buy-in across stakeholders to implement the identified solutions. Building on the energy fostered through this EAG process will be essential to creating the conditions for sustaining more equitable community engagement practices and policies and thus more effective solutions.

Accomplishments to Date

In roughly a six-month period, the EAG and Project Team accomplished forming the EAG, deep relationship building, and development recommendations that were then shared out with the broader community.

From the onset of the EAG formation, the EAG created a growth opportunity for the district in increasing its capacity to work with communities of color and low-income communities, which has initiated a culture shift within the small team of DOEE staff. Specifically, when the EAG learned that the plans impacting their community had already been developed and that the community outreach process to inform those plans had been limited, they held the DOEE accountable. In turn, the DOEE owned its mistake, acknowledged the power dynamics, and took actions to begin to address the harm that had been done.

One EAG member reflected that “when [the district] came with something already decided and expected to determine how to implement [with us]...that was the epitome of the problems with engagement for a long time—not engaging upfront from the beginning.” Both stakeholders showed commitment to themselves and each other by engaging in open dialogue, and the community assessed if this process was something they would participate in. They set expectations for their time together to be productive, for their expertise and lived experience to be valued, and for the process to generate actual results for their community.

By showing their collective power and expressing expectations for dignity and respect, the EAG members set the stage for the DOEE staff to shift how they are in relationship with frontline communities. In response, the DOEE staff created more of an opening (via discussions with staff of more institutional power within the DOEE) for the EAG to impact the district’s climate plans in a more meaningful way.

In doing this, the EAG set the tone for expectations of accountability through social contracts. In fact, one DOEE staff member said about accountability: “I know the EAG will be asking me questions about where things are at. I would like to keep their respect. If we aren’t able to carry through on implementation, people won’t be feeling heard...I am dedicated to it, and having the [quarterly] calls is a good accountability structure to keep it at the top of the list.” This creates the conditions for authentic relationships and shifting the culture of typical community engagement processes towards multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The EAG has finalized its recommendations for the implementation of the Climate Ready D.C. Plan and the Clean Energy Plan and in September held a public meeting to share their work. These recommendations fall outside of the siloed understanding of what climate resilience is. In articulating community priorities around workforce and youth development, the EAG worked with the Project Team to expand understandings of how climate and environmental justice are connected to economic and community development. One EAG member stated:

Before the EAG, there was no discussion in my day-to-day dialogue on storm water, flooding, etc. It was informative on my end because now I can be a liaison on environmental justice in my community. I now have this dialogue with people. We are not only discussing, we are having working groups and we are chopping this down...[We] found a way to align our needs to their [DOEE] needs so we were able to weave and see how the [issues] connect to each other...people in the ward need jobs and solar panel energy. How do we put this together?

And another EAG member spoke about civic ecology, saying:

Everything is interdependent. Bees pollinate, and if they didn't, we wouldn't have anything to consume. They are part of the natural ecology, but there's a civic ecology as well, regardless of the functions or decisions made by government, local or otherwise, on the behalf of the people. It's still up to the residents to be a part of that ecology as well, and as with anything, they have to be willing to put in the work...to move yourself [out of] positions of dependency.

This process has helped to collectively elevate the reality that climate impacts amplify existing social inequities. These inequities are intrinsically linked to the extraction of both human labor (e.g. Transatlantic Slave Trade, migrant labor, etc.) and of resources from the earth—the root cause of both social and ecological crises.

Current Structure

The EAG is made up of 14 community members, is horizontal in structure, and met once a month over a six-month period. Currently, the formal, funded process has ended, but the EAG has volunteered their time to meet with the DOEE via conference calls once a quarter to continue to move the work. The committee was formed through community outreach.

A Project Team, made up of three DOEE staff, Georgetown Climate Center (GCC), Skeo Solutions consulting firm, and an equity auditor from the Raben Group held the majority of the administrative, logistical, and facilitation responsibilities. The DOEE staff played the role of providing technical assistance and bringing in different departments to inform EAG members on climate adaptation and mitigation information. GCC project managed, acting as the administrative and planning engine. Skeo supported in planning and facilitated the meetings with a focus on building community power. Agenda development was primarily led by the Project Team, and surveys were sent out after each meeting to EAG members to inform the agenda. Later in the process, EAG members were invited in to review agendas directly and to

offer suggestions. EAG members received stipends along with child care, and the meetings were held over meals at accessible locations.

Decision-making processes were developed by the facilitator and adopted by the EAG. Typically, surveys and voting were the process utilized by the EAG to make decisions, as each member held equal positioning in the group. The post-meeting surveys also offered alternative forms of feedback, allowing people privacy and time to reflect and ask questions they may not have felt safe or had the time to ask during EAG meetings.

B • WHERE ARE WE GOING?.....

Opportunities on the Horizon

In order to build momentum to move the recommendations from the EAG process, EAG members are assessing possibilities of building capacity among EAG community members for advocacy. Staff have communicated to EAG members that several local funders have expressed interest in resourcing advocacy training.

DOEE staff and EAG members identified a need to continue to increase government capacity to authentically partner with communities to carry out priorities and recommendations community members identify. To that end, the DOEE co-published a 40-page Community Engagement Guide. It models transparency (a key to shifting power) by documenting their processes with the EAG, including lessons learned, best practices, and elements of racial equity outcomes from the EAG's process and deliverables. The DOEE distributed the guide to 26 agencies in the district in an effort to build momentum and interest in practicing more equitable community engagement processes for more equitable plans and solutions development, and at the very least, to activate more conversations about racial equity and policy in the district. The DOEE is practicing tactics identified in their guide in other projects, such as the 100% Renewable and Equitable Cities efforts. They have identified a need to create a racial equity tool to assess the effectiveness of these projects and the implementation of them.

Goals for Strengthening Practice & Deepening Impact

At the Engagement to Ownership Convening, a small team made up of Washington, D.C. staff members and three EAG members identified goals to move towards deeper impact:

- Secure funding to form an additional EAG process
- Re-imagine a future process, given new knowledge and clarity, e.g. clearer boundaries to align the EAG with their goals, a SWOT analysis based on who is at the table, holding themed meetings
- Identify a strong facilitator to guide the process
- Identify how to capture low-hanging fruit
- Identify what short-term accountability looks like with achievable actions along a timeline
- Narrow broad views (give actionable steps to be piloted)
- Shift government approach and policies for this work (e.g. change process/policy on spending on food, stipends, childcare, transportation, etc., build more government allies to support equity)
- Hold positive view for the work ahead (unicorns & rainbows!)

C • WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET THERE?.....

Building on What is Working

Identifying what is working and building on those strengths is an essential strategy to continue to move towards collaborative governance between community leaders and government staff in Washington, D.C. Two key components that contributed to the success of the EAG process was dedication to relationship and trust building and developing a multi-stakeholder, committed team.

Relationship and Trust Building

The overarching key ingredient central to the EAG process is the commitment to relationships and trust building through an effort to practice equity throughout the process. Each stakeholder has consistently put forth their best effort, and when mistakes were made, there was an earnest acknowledgement of those missteps and an intention to build healthy relationships with the community. The DOEE knows that in order to honor the relationships and effectively build on this six-month effort, it is imperative to continue with the same dedication to move towards results that the community can see.

The relationship and trust building with the community started with recruitment. Recruiting involved multiple strategies, but key recruitment was lead by a DOEE staff member who lives in Ward 7. He invited resident leaders into the process through his connections to his community, which was named as instrumental in forming the EAG. There was an overwhelming response by EAG members that one of the keys to its success was “the local sheroes and heroes” at the table. They were “people who had credibility within the community, and it was important to have them there as

stakeholders...” The EAG is intergenerational. It includes a youth seat and has long-time and newer residents. Residents have diverse expertise and interests, and there was an intentional effort to create space for new voices. This created conditions that fostered collaboration, respect, powerful solutions, and ultimately new friendships. One EAG member said, “We are in it together, everyone gets dirty, frustrated, and celebrates,” signalling the meaningful relationship dynamics and commitment members have to the group and to developing solutions for their community.

Additionally, EAG members expressed that seeing their priorities, feedback, and insights reflected back in the next meeting was another signal of trust building. It gave them a sense that this was not intended to be merely an exercise as they saw their expertise and questions being reflected in documents and meeting agendas. This was evident when EAG members voiced a desire to hear from other departments in the district. In the following meetings, the Project Team had arranged for representatives from the district to present on issues relevant to Ward 7. EAG members also expressed the importance of connecting them with key decision-makers who ultimately have the power to implement the EAG’s recommendations. This would be a significant and necessary step towards building the conditions for the EAG to have more impact.

The culture of the meetings reflected true intention to center EAG members. The Project Team intentionally protected the EAG’s time together, requiring outside presenters to be very streamlined in their presentations and ensuring that who presented was actually speaking to an interest of the EAG. Additionally, the Project Team “made conscious efforts to support business in Ward 7 to support the [local restaurants] and provide food for [EAG members].” One EAG member recalled that her “son wanted Doritos...and a [Project Team member] went out and got my son Doritos.” The EAG member expressed safety concerns to have someone not from the neighborhood walking around by themselves, but the Project Team member insisted, saying, “No, it’s more important for you to be in the room here than me. That level of commitment spoke volumes. They actively demonstrated they are actually invested, and that speaks volumes. It increases the trust.”

This process has also initiated a transformation with many EAG members. One noted that they’d “never been a part of something like this, and for me this is how it should go. It makes so much sense.” The DOEE and EAG are leading the district in taking initial steps to make deeper cultural shifts that can build momentum for structural shifts. Structural shifts are necessary so that regardless of the individuals upholding the system, the integrity of the process and policies for true climate resilience will positively impact everyone, especially those most impacted by the climate crisis.

Committed Team

There was a whole Project Team dedicated to supporting the EAG process and deliverables. The EAG members brought irreplaceable expertise and insights on how to effectively plan and implement resilient strategies in Ward 7 and

showed grace in engaging in a process with the DOEE, despite historical and current missteps. The DOEE staff used their institutional power and access to bring forth useful data and context for the process and is tasked with working collaboratively with the EAG to carry out the recommendations.

The EAG appreciated the stakeholders in Project Team as a whole. They saw the GCC as having flexibility to adapt to the process and bring in resources to move the EAG's efforts along. The equity auditor from the Raben Group was also important to building capacity of the DOEE and the Project Team in working with the EAG. Along with conducting a final report, they also provided a mid-report and acted as an active advocate of the EAG along the way, recommending adjustments to facilitate deeper ownership for the EAG over the process.

Several EAG members expressed appreciation for the two African Americans on the Project Team: the facilitator and the DOEE staff lead. The shared lived experience and heritage allowed for nuanced connections to be built as these Project Team members brought in their expertise in navigating the bureaucratic systems of local government. One EAG member said that they "were key...in making the EAG work" and specifically speaking about the DOEE staff member they said "because he looks like us and lives here, it made you trust him more. He was connecting dots that [I believe] other [Project Team] members couldn't see."

The resounding feedback of how instrumental this DOEE staff member was in the process exemplifies the necessity to have a *system change champion* who uses their relative institutional power to influence government structures and systems, is connected to communities of color, and has the racial critical analysis skills to do this work. This individual is necessary to beginning to shift the systems that perpetuate inequities and marginalization of front-line communities. While they are key, one individual is not sufficient in transforming the culture, practices, and policies on inequity. A team is necessary, and EAG members expressed this too: "There needs to be more individuals [like him] that work for these agencies like DOEE. And there needs to be more diversity in the DOEE...to get a true sense of [the needs of] the different nationalities and races [in the district]."

The DOEE is in the process of building this team as they just brought in another staff member of color with experience in this work who already has relationships with the EAG. DOEE staff working with the EAG are "trying to make change from the middle" and are aware that while they "have official buy-in and approval [from Senior Leadership], there's still some discomfort with what [they]'re trying to do related to co-creating policy and programs with the community. There's discomfort in giving decision-making to community."

Change often yields discomfort, and the staff are committed to working through the discomfort in order to center the voices of the communities they are accountable to. They realize this requires a substantive approach. "A substantive

approach is as simple as saying what you mean and meaning what you say. The first substantive approach is for us, as an institution, to make a commitment to equity and define what it means and does not. As a city, we must take that step. Beyond that, we must answer the question, ‘How do we garner equity without talking about the wealth gap or race?’” The DOEE has built on the momentum of the EAG process as the new DOEE staff member led the way in drafting the Community Engagement Guide, which encourages the entire district to practice more equitable, community-driven planning processes. This cadre of DOEE staff are dedicated to showing the district that community planning processes that share power and decision-making can actually cultivate better, more holistic solutions.

Useful Tensions to Address for Breakthrough

Addressing the following tensions could unlock potential and increase the impact of the EAG and DOEE’s work together: priority and expectation setting, pacing that meets both stakeholders’ needs, planning for governance to support a sustained community engagement process and product, and building racial equity capacity.

Priority & Expectation Setting

While the DOEE largely set priorities prior to forming and engaging the EAG with the Climate Ready D.C. Plan and Clean Energy Plan, they are working to course-correct typically top-down planning practices by elevating community priorities and engaging in an inclusive, community-centered equity advisory group process. This shift requires addressing tensions of transparency, accountability, and expectation setting that, if attended to, could greatly increase the capacity of the EAG and Project Team to achieve equity results in Ward 7 (and ideally D.C. more broadly).

The EAG was clear that what is real for people’s lives right now must be the focus. One EAG member said:

If you are going to be D.C. government and you care about D.C. natives, then your priority should be about addressing D.C. native concerns. There is a high unemployment rate here, and I need to understand more about how you decide what you do and how you do it. There’s so much crime here because there’s unemployment, and why not solve this problem to address other issues...I want to know what D.C.’s true plan is, and that’s something I feel I would never know...Because of our perspective, we helped them see things they wouldn’t be able to see [as it relates to building sustainability for Ward 7].

DOEE is responding by centering EAG priorities, which cultivated cross-sectoral understandings of the climate crisis and of the solutions needed in Ward 7. Yet, this shift takes time, and so does establishing trust. One essential component of trust building is articulating clear expectations across stakeholders regarding what it will take to implement the EAG’s recommendations. One DOEE staff expressed that “being clear about expectations is important...we explicitly did not want to draw the boundaries, but at the same time, it is challenging to meet things that go beyond our [the DOEE’s]

boundaries. We need to be [better] able to articulate the tradeoffs and the risks—which areas outside of our core [work] do we have a likelihood of moving forward? Having a conversation about tradeoffs [with EAG members] is important.”

There is a tension of who sets priorities and who has control over actually implementing those priorities. EAG members remain cautious of the district, noting that “there has been a terrible track record [of district involvement in Ward 7]...and there needs to be some proof that deals we [the EAG and Project Team] come up with are true agreements.” Intentional discussions on stakeholder expectations of what is possible, roles of each stakeholder, and accountability mechanisms to achieve results for the community is imperative to maintaining the trust and momentum the EAG process has built.

Pacing

One key tension identified was the limited time the EAG had together with the supports of the grant and Project Team. Originally, the EAG was meant to have one year together, however, due to a range of factors, this time was cut in half. Despite the leaps the EAG made, all stakeholders voiced this as a significant setback that limited the opportunities for the EAG and Project Team, both in the development of their recommendations and in capacity building for governance.

The fast-paced process required steep learning curves for everyone. In order to equitably set the EAG up to offer their expertise and insights to the plans, they needed the right information in a digestible way as it related to the technical aspects of the climate and energy in their community. EAG members noted, “base-level information is necessary...Also you don’t want people who all work on environmental issues because you want outside thought. So, you need some level of understanding of what is happening [from the beginning]. It would have been best to have factored in more of that.” Additionally, DOEE staff could have benefited from more time to build their capacity to articulate their role in supporting the EAG absent GCC and Skeo, who acted as key facilitators of the process.

Planning for Governance

The condensed time limited the capacity building needed to support all stakeholders in moving towards more equitable planning processes and solutions. There was minimal time to take key steps to plan for governance, such as applying for funding to sustain these efforts, identifying a leadership or role structure among the EAG to delegate responsibilities for governance, or an accountability structure and/or setting stakeholder expectations to hold the DOEE and other Project Team members accountable. One EAG member voiced, “One thing that we saw when people came together was there was no shortage of ideas, dialogue, curiosity, and interests. And so had we been given the full year, the level

of development would have been far greater, and we would have been able to think about future funding opportunities to formulate a proposal to keep working together. We have this great momentum, and now it's been truncated.”

Multiple stakeholders mentioned how essential it was to have a skilled facilitator with deep expertise in leading community-driven planning efforts in communities of color. The facilitator was essential to the achievements of the EAG and building capacity of all stakeholders to engage in a more equitable process. Yet having a facilitator not rooted in the Ward 7 or D.C. community was challenging, as it took time to orient and align the facilitation process with where the community was. This disconnect is also felt post-process, since they are not in the community, and thus accessing them is more challenging (and costly) than it would be if they were local.

Non-governmental Project Team members offered essential supports including developmental support for DOEE staff to build capacity to work with the community in more meaningful ways. This was imperative for the success of the project at this stage. However, one unintended impact of the roles and responsibilities of the Project Team was that some stakeholders felt that, at times, it perpetuated a separation between the DOEE staff and EAG members. With feedback from the equity auditor, the DOEE did make adjustments along the way in an effort to build more closely with EAG members.

One respondent noted the importance of “setting things up in the future so that practices and protocols are in alignment with equitable principles and values so that everyone has an equal voice in the planning process...It's the same thing as having a strategic plan without having a budget attached to it. What's the point? Our protocols need to align with the stated values around inclusion and equity.” This is similar to developing a plan so that it does not sit on the shelf, also known as planning for implementation. Similarly, *planning for governance* requires key capacity building steps along the way. For example, an awareness of *who* has decision-making power over identifying selection criteria for consultants, selecting the consultants, and articulating their roles in the process is important. There is a need for a shift in practices and systems in order to make the deep work that the EAG and Project Team has done sustainable. Doing this work will truly shift power imbalances and achieve real equity outcomes.

Building Racial Equity Capacity

Underpinning all of this—the priorities and expectations, pacing, and planning for governance—is cultivating a shared understanding of the role of institutional and structural racism and its impact on Ward 7. The EAG process began with an initial discussion about the role of racial oppression affecting Ward 7. However, further discussions were needed to build a shared understanding of the issues and a shared language on how to navigate and address them. Constraints articulated above, such as pacing, made engaging in deeper dialogue a challenge.

Still, the Project Team's action of stepping back to center EAG's voices demonstrated an acknowledgement of power dynamics, laying a strong foundation on which to build. The culture created in the EAG process began to model a shift towards consultation on the spectrum, a key developmental step towards more collaborative processes. Yet it is also important to hold the EAG and Project Team's work in perspective, as the reality of power and privilege between the DOEE and the EAG when it comes to influencing decision-makers and implementation of the plans still lies with the DOEE, and more broadly with the district.

One EAG member said:

We did not spend enough time on race and power dynamics. We need to have more explicit and open conversations on race and power. We also need to have trauma-informed healing discussions about what are we bringing into this process as individuals and what parts of our family lineages are we bringing into this space...In order for anyone to move forward, truly with equity, you have to start with the heart in order to create space for anything else to come in.

Having the EAG, DOEE staff, and consultants on the Project Team engage in a shared or parallel process to build capacity around understanding power, privilege, and race dynamics could unleash capacity for taking the work of the EAG to the next level through healing, connection, and power building. Implementing racial equity trainings and/or discussions to the broader DOEE and District, is also a crucial step in garnering understanding of the value of the EAG's work to close equity gaps and develop holistic solutions to the climate crises.

Closing

The EAG process has planted a seed that can be cultivated towards deeper community and DOEE collaboration on climate resilience solutions where community members are involved up front in the development of city plans, accountability structures are built to ensure community priorities guide the direction of plans, and where those plans are adhered to upon implementation. In order to cultivate that seed, identifying short-term accountability steps and building momentum for a larger shift within the DOEE and district are essential.

APPENDIX

Learning & Evaluation Tool: Assessing the Process from Community Engagement to Ownership⁶¹

The following learning and evaluation tool is based on the [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#), which serves as a guide to community-based organizations and local governments working to progress developmentally towards community-driven governance models.

Stance Towards Community	0 IGNORE	1 INFORM	2 CONSULT	3 INVOLVE	4 COLLABORATE	5 DEFER TO
Impact	<i>Marginalization</i>	<i>Placation</i>	<i>Tokenization</i>	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Delegated Power</i>	<i>Community Ownership</i>
Descriptions	<i>Impacted communities are systematically disenfranchised from decision-making processes that affect them</i>	<i>Governmental agencies and/or NGOs provide impacted communities with information related to the impacts</i>	<i>Periodically, impacted communities are asked to provide input into options or decisions within frameworks already established by local government</i>	<i>Increasingly more frequently, processes are established to ensure impacted communities have genuine influence over key decisions affecting them</i>	<i>Community-based institutions and local government agencies form authentic partnerships to ensure capacity of impacted communities to co-define the problems affecting them and co-design solutions for long-term viability</i>	<i>Multiple stakeholder coalitions work together to build capacity for community-driven planning to develop and implement community-derived solutions that generate community assets and significantly close equity gaps</i>
INDICATORS						

⁶¹ This learning & evaluation tool was developed by Rosa González with editing support from Victoria Benson. The content is informed by the work of Vivien Twyford, author of *The Power of Co: The Smart Leader's Guide to Collaborative Governance*, as well as work in the field as a facilitative leader within collaborative initiatives. The indicators were all vetted with committee members of the four municipal community-based committees participating in this learning & evaluation project.

<p>Commitment to Model (<i>a developmental shift towards community ownership through the practices of collaborative governance</i>)</p>	<p>Local government is opposed to collaborative governance models</p>	<p>Currently, power dynamics are more focused on keeping community engagement contained; community asking to be kept informed</p>	<p>Interest lies primarily in engaging community members in inclusive processes such as focus groups; steps towards inclusion may feel like leaps to community groups and city staff</p>	<p>Community groups put enough pressure on local government to take steps towards actual decision-making power; city staff commit to figuring out what practices best contribute to community influence over policy and systems change</p>	<p>Through significant relationship-building and power-balancing, a coalition of community groups and a critical mass of city staff commit to a collaborative governance model that allows for co-definition of the problems and solutions</p>	<p>There is a recognition among a coalition of community groups and a critical mass of city staff and electeds that in order to close equity gaps and achieve environmental justice, significant shifts towards community ownership over solutions and decision-making processes that govern the essential elements of life (housing, food, air, water, education, etc.)</p>
<p>Purpose Clarity</p>	<p>City does not see the need to have a committee or calls on a committee ad hoc to meet its own needs, never revealing those needs to the leaders engaged</p>	<p>No time is dedicated to engaging members in defining a shared purpose; the default purpose of the committee seems to serve city interests and is often unclear</p>	<p>The purpose of the committee defaults to providing input to them by city staff and thus no time spent developing shared purpose; there may be mixed messages or confusion as to the actual role the committee is playing</p>	<p>The committee is focusing on developing its own agenda and thus takes the time to cultivate shared purpose clarity at the intersection of their respective visions and objectives</p>	<p>From the start, the committee is established in collaboration between city and community leaders who work together to establish a shared purpose rooted in repairing the social contract between government and community</p>	<p>The committee (or whatever structure best serves the purpose) is established via a community coalition with a bold vision for achieving racial equity through reclaiming community governance over the essential elements of life; city staff are engaged in service of this larger vision and purpose</p>

<p>Equitable Decision-Making Capacity</p>	<p>Decisions happen behind closed doors, and there is no effort to adequately inform the community</p>	<p>Decisions happen behind closed doors, and the community is informed after the fact</p>	<p>Decisions are effectively already made, but city staff check for agreement with community members, and/or city staff have selected some options for community members to choose from</p>	<p>Communities most impacted by the potential decision are core decision-makers, have information needed for informed input, and ample time for discussion + assessment of impacts before decisions are made from</p>	<p>City staff + community organizing groups based in impacted communities work together to design decision-making processes that engage large-scale participation in assessment, development, and implementation of decisions</p>	<p>Decision-making processes are fully designed and managed by community members most impacted by the decisions being made; processes are guided by community values and the practices of whole governance to ensure all perspectives are engaged for transformative solutions to community problems</p>
<p>Community Capacity & Organizing</p>	<p>Community organizing is either overtly or covertly suppressed</p>	<p>Community organizing capacity is limited to educational efforts, informing impacted communities of the harms to which they are exposed</p>	<p>Community organizing happens in spurts to mobilize people around issues, but not to grow long-term leadership capacity or consistently win on issues</p>	<p>Community organizing groups have built enough of an organized base to assert resident priorities and narratives to tackle the problems they face. Still, organizers are stretched too thin to get ahead of issues and consistently lead with bold vision</p>	<p>Through alliance building, community groups have built or strengthened a base of impacted residents to define the problems they face, develop bold vision and transformative solutions, and regularly engage in community assessment and leadership development</p>	<p>Community groups own and manage collaborative systems to ensure everyone has equitable access to and decision-making over the essential elements of life</p>
<p>Community Resourcing</p>	<p>There is not adequate investment in community capacity to be able to participate effectively in developing and</p>	<p>Community-driven projects are resourced periodically that create pockets of community</p>	<p>Increasingly, community groups are being consulted in resourcing questions by philanthropy and/or</p>	<p>Community groups have capacity semi-regularly mobilize residents to weigh in on key issues impacting the</p>	<p>Collaborative effort between multiple sectors (i.e. local government, philanthropy, and community-based</p>	<p>Community assets generate resources for ongoing resident leadership and solutions development</p>

	advancing solutions to the issues that impact them	capacity, but it is too dispersed to translate into impact; community has little to no voice within philanthropy or public budgeting processes	local government; current resourcing of community capacity only translates into periodic engagement	community; philanthropy and/or local government is beginning to consider community perspectives on resourcing questions	institutions) to ensure sufficient capacity within impacted communities to serve as genuine partners in the design, implementation, and management of solutions	
City Capacity & Racial Equity Training	No prioritization of capacity for racial equity work	City staff have named equity as a priority and are seeking clarity and support around how to approach it, but this may be limited to a single department or a few champions within a department	City staff are engaged in equity trainings to understand the role of local government in interrupting structural racism and other forms of institutional power that perpetuate equity gaps; seeking to develop solutions; POC staff members may become tokenized, undervalued, or overburdened with carrying out all consultation, relationship building, and engagement of communities of color	City staff have experienced multiple trainings in understanding structural racism, have set equity goals, have established an equity commission, and have adequate capacity and support to build authentic relationships with groups building community power to rethink how they do community voice and leadership to make sure work is informed by impacted communities	After more than a year of training and capacity-building, the city is applying lessons to make significant progress toward equity goals and/or closing key equity gaps	Through vibrant leadership pathways, residents from communities most impacted by racial inequity are now leading municipal efforts to achieve the kind of structural shifts needed to not only close but prevent equity gaps
City Resourcing	No resources allocated to engagement of	City staff are not explicitly supported in	City dedicates limited resources to staff for racial	City increases investment in staff capacity to	City resources enough capacity across multiple departments to make	City budgets fully reflect community priorities; Participatory budgeting or

	<p>community leadership in assessing nor addressing equity gaps; how City dollars are allocated is opaque to the public; information is difficult to access and/or understand</p>	<p>allocating their time to engage with impacted communities to elevate community priorities; staff time is used for informing only; a handful of rogue city staff find time to push racial and environmental justice efforts on top of their existing work plans</p>	<p>and environmental justice initiatives, typically through one-off, philanthropic funding; a few staff are able to make limited progress towards collaboration with community-based organizations to begin addressing inequities, but are overburdened</p>	<p>effectively engage leaders within impacted communities to have genuine influence on policy development, policy reform, and systems change to allow for racial and environmental justice solutions</p>	<p>needed policy and systems changes to allow for community priorities to be adequately addressed through collaborative governance; city contracts with community-based organizations to assess, develop, and implement equity solutions (as opposed to outside or corporate consultants)</p>	<p>similar processes allow for resourcing of collaborative efforts to close equity gaps</p>
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<p>Power & Influence of Committee to Achieve Tangible Solutions</p>	<p>Local government is more focused on blocking power and influence of impacted communities</p>	<p>There is less overt blocking of community power, but lack of effective engagement results in community groups having little to no influence over policies and practices of local government</p>	<p>Some departments and/or electeds within the city are interested in consulting with community leaders to ensure viability of plans, policies, or initiatives; community groups may experience “one-off” victories through political pressure, but not enough to garner sustained influence within the city.</p>	<p>There is a community-driven learning and evaluation process with enough teeth to hold local systems accountable to community equity goals; elected officials and/or department heads are in dialogue with community leaders on a regular basis</p>	<p>Key stakeholders work together to balance power dynamics to ensure political will for racial and environmental justice solutions to thrive</p>	<p>Large-scale alliance building, leadership pathways, and investment in community assets result in a power shift that fully restores the social contract; governance is fully by and for the people</p>
<p>Trust & Relationship Building</p>	<p>There is deep mistrust between local government and impacted communities that prevents meaningful engagement or collaboration</p>	<p>The relationship between local government (or other local institutions) and impacted communities is one-sided, as residents simply receive information</p>	<p>Consulting with impacted communities both requires trust and can help to build trust; although trust can be broken if communications are disrespectful or purpose and expectations are not clear</p>	<p>For communities to have genuine influence over policy development, working relationships must be built with key city staff. This requires agreements to be established and potentially a reconciliation process to remedy past harm, particularly harm</p>	<p>Collaboration between multiple stakeholders with varying degrees of institutional power requires intentional trust-building, open and honest dialogue, and spaces for working through misunderstanding. Most important is a demonstrated commitment on the part of city staff and electeds to follow through on needed policy and systems changes and</p>	<p>At the level of community ownership, the burden of trust-building can shift towards community-driven institutions that must make decisions and investments that serve the whole community as well as provide spaces that allow for the full range of viewpoints to be expressed and weighed in favor of the common good</p>

				caused by those holding more institutional power	efforts to balance power	
Principles & Practices to Ensure Equity at Every Step	Procedures have been designed to limit participation and access to information by communities most impacted by racial and environmental injustices	Possible gains made in making information more accessible to impacted communities, but other than that, stakeholders with more institutional power may be unwilling or unaware of how to implement equitable practices and procedures	Stakeholders with less institutional power and social privilege may or may not be advocating for more equitable practices. Either way, existing pressure is not enough to make the kind of progress that would allow for impacted communities to have genuine influence over decisions made	Gains are being made towards more equitable practices, but it requires consistent pressure from stakeholders with less institutional power and social privilege	Procedural practices among collaborating stakeholders are equitable; convenors consider and work to overcome barriers to participation (schedule meetings when people are available, provide child care, healthy food, and translation as needed). Most importantly, all stakeholders critique existing institutional power dynamics and work together to balance power and privilege to ensure equitable collaboration	Practices and procedures are established through community-driven processes to ensure they are equitable, culturally relevant, and effective at maximizing diverse skill sets across multiple stakeholders