

# Equity-Based Decision-Making Framework

This Equity-Based Decision-Making Framework is designed to support communities in implementing the Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Response. The purpose of the Framework is to ensure that as homelessness service systems respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, system processes and policies proactively eliminate racial inequalities and advance equity.

*This draft was developed based on the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's Racial Equity Toolkit and feedback from system administrators and people experiencing homelessness in King County, Washington. The GARE toolkit is accessible at [https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial\\_Equity\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf) This Framework is published as a product of the Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 response.*

## Contents

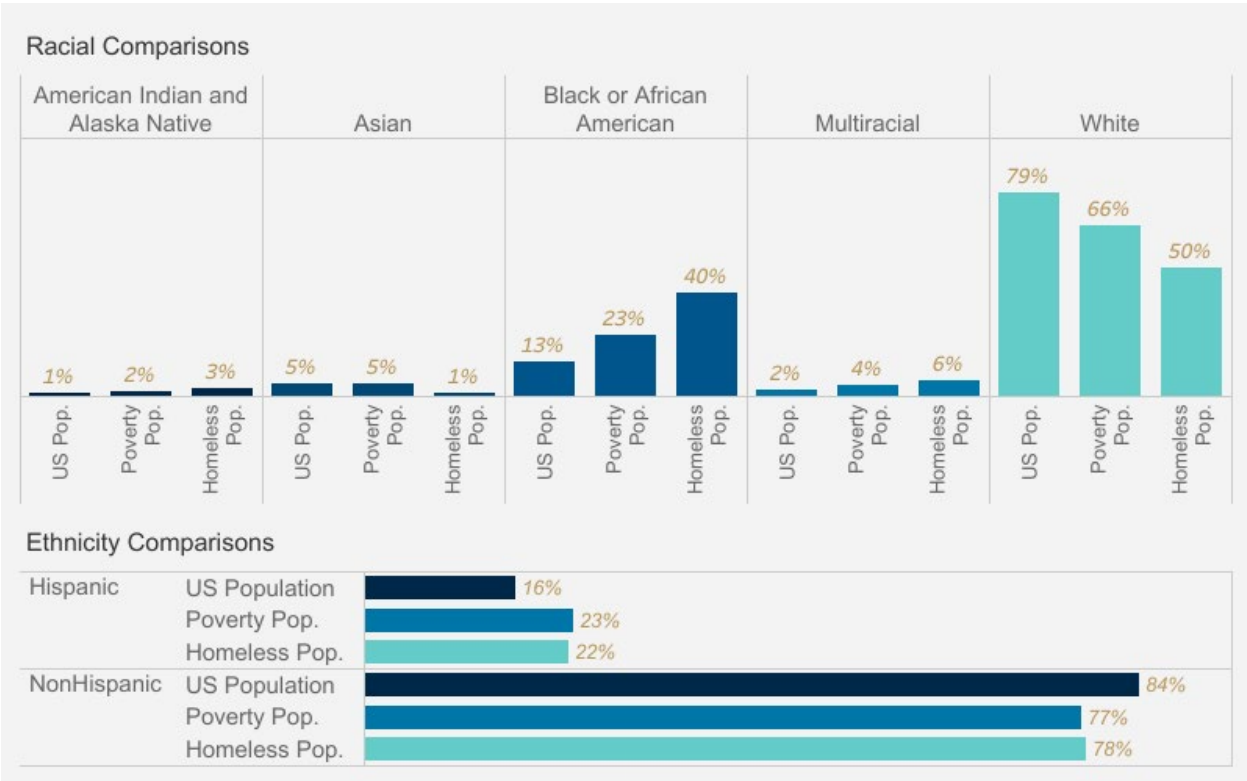
Background	2
1. Policy Decisions and Strategy	4
2. Business Operations	7
3. Hiring Operations	9
Additional Reading and Resources	11

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# Background

The overrepresentation of people of color and members of other historically marginalized communities among the population of people experiencing homelessness is rooted in and perpetuated by structural racism and other types of intersectional systemic oppressions.



Janosko, Jackie. "Race And Ethnicity Analysis." *National Alliance to End Homelessness*. Mar 20, 2019. Available from: <https://public.tableau.com/profile/jackie.janosko6878#!/vizhome/RaceAndEthnicityAnalysis/RaceEthnicityDashboard>. (accessed June 18, 2020).

Communities that should be considered to be historically marginalized and disproportionately impacted by homelessness in the United States include: Black and African Americans; people who identify as Latinx, Native, or Pacific Islander; individuals with disabilities; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ); incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals; and undocumented individuals and mixed-immigration-status families and communities.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities for people of color and compounded the impact of structural racism. The virus has had an elevated and disproportionate

impact on communities of color, particularly Black, Latinx and Asian communities. Racism essentially shapes COVID-19 disease-related inequities as it affects “disease outcomes through increasing multiple risk factors for poor people of color, including racial residential segregation, homelessness, and medical bias.”<sup>1</sup> Black people account for 34% of the total COVID-19 deaths in the United States, despite comprising only 13% of the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup> Relatedly, but beyond the spread of the virus itself, individuals of East Asian descent are facing increased xenophobic racism and marginalization in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This decision-making structure is designed to deconstruct the processes that perpetuate oppression and, instead, establish accountability to people experiencing homelessness and position customers of our homelessness service systems and programs as decision-makers and power-holders within these systems.

This framework is designed to be applicable at all levels of homelessness service systems, including in policy and program design, operations, budgeting, technical assistance provision, contracting practices, and human resources processes.

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- 1 Laster Pirtle, W. (2020). Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Inequities in the United States. *Health Education & Behavior: The Official Publication of the Society for Public Health Education*, 1090198120922942.
  - 2 Johns Hopkins University and Medicine (2020) Maps and Trends: Racial Data Transparency States that have Released Breakdowns of COVID-19 data by race. Johns Hopkins University and Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center. Retrieved 05/26/2020, from <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/racial-data-transparency>.

# 1. Policy Decisions and Strategy

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities for people of color and compounded the impact of structural racism. The virus has had an elevated and disproportionate impact on communities of color, particularly Black, Latinx and Asian communities. Racism essentially shapes COVID-19 disease-related inequities as it affects “disease outcomes through increasing multiple risk factors for poor people of color, including racial residential segregation, homelessness, and medical bias.”<sup>1</sup> Black people account for 34% of the total COVID-19 deaths in the United States, despite comprising only 13% of the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup> Relatedly, but beyond the spread of the virus itself, individuals of East Asian descent are facing increased xenophobic racism and marginalization in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## 1. Accessibility and Clarity

Proposals and strategy-setting or decision-making processes should be clear, transparent, and accessible to a wide range of stakeholders in the community and should explicitly name the policy, program, practice, or budget decision under consideration. The documents, meetings, and feedback mechanisms built into these processes should explain system jargon and acronyms and should be translated into the primary languages used in the community.

These processes should also include a clear articulation of the assumptions that informed any proposals or strategies, as well as the desired results and the desired outcomes in racially-explicit terms. All data used to inform these discussions and processes should be broken out by race and ethnicity wherever available. If that data is not available, it should be a priority to collect or analyze data by race and ethnicity in all future data-gathering efforts.

## 2. Community Engagement

Decision-making processes should be informed by communities that are disproportionately impacted by homelessness, leading with race, and the specific issues

any given proposal or decision seeks to address. Proposals should ideally originate from insights and feedback offered by people with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability, and the proposal development and implementation process should be circular, regularly iterating based upon customer feedback and data (see section below: Data).

Community engagement processes should include opportunities to provide feedback on proposals before they are decided upon, inform the assumptions underlying the proposal, and add qualitative context to the quantitative data articulated below before final decisions are deliberated. These processes should be ongoing to ensure that decisions can be shifted and changed based on engagement outcomes and insights.

Additionally, the individuals and communities engaged should reflect those disproportionately affected by any given issue based on the most recently available demographic data with specific emphasis on race and its intersections with disabilities, gender and sexual orientation, immigration or documentation status, and housing status in the community. Data on the spread and risk of COVID-19 should also be leveraged to identify key constituencies, ideally by race and neighborhood.

### **3. Data**

All decision-making processes should be informed by data that is specific to those overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness, disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and other historically-marginalized communities. These processes should include steps to interpret and synthesize what the data indicates about the impact on people of color and strategies to gather qualitative data to clarify quantitative findings. Data analysis processes should always include a comparison to data specific to the population of people experiencing homelessness more broadly as well as data specific to white people. Each of the available data points and data sources should be shared with all those engaged in informing decision-making.

Data should, whenever possible, assess the impact of the policies or decisions at hand on specific geographic areas, with particular attention to hubs for communities of color. These processes also offer an opportunity to delineate what data gaps exist locally and an opportunity to develop and prioritize strategies to obtain better data moving forward.

### **4. Analysis**

Decision making processes should include steps to develop analyses of how any given proposals will 1) change current dynamics, 2) which stakeholders will potentially benefit from the proposal, and 3) which stakeholders will potentially be burdened by the proposal, with particular attention paid to the implications for people experiencing homelessness across demographic groups, leading with race. This analysis should also include available data and projections on the spread of the novel coronavirus. Engagement with people with lived experience of homelessness should shape these analyses.

## 5. Racial Equity Strategies

Any changes in current policies, funding streams, or priorities offer the opportunity to shift power dynamics and add explicit strategies to advance racial equity and justice and/or strategies to mitigate negative unintended consequences of the decisions at hand. Strategies to advance racial equity and social justice include: identifying the existing inequities that decisions seek to address, identifying the goals the proposal seeks to accomplish, and identifying the power dynamics influencing the existing inequities.

6.

## 7. Implementation, Accountability, and Evaluation

Decision-making processes should include implementation plans that articulate what implications the final decision has for funding and resources, including a plan for adequately resourcing customer engagement processes, ongoing data collection, and evaluation. If additional resources are needed for the proposal to be implemented, the plan to gather or leverage those resources should also be addressed and moved forward by decision-makers and their partners.

Implementation plans should include details such as: when qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating the impact of the decision will be collected and analyzed and how the decision will be revisited or reaffirmed if there are unintended consequences on people of color experiencing homelessness. The process to revisit decisions in the case of negative outcomes should include targeted customer engagement to inform an improved proposal.

## 8. Communication

Shifts in priorities, strategies, and policies, particularly in the context of the current pandemic, should be clearly and transparently communicated to customers and key stakeholders affected by the decision. Communication plans should be transparent, accessible, and should center accountability to people experiencing homelessness. Successful communication plans identify communication strategies for people currently experiencing homelessness, leadership and executives, members of the community across the region, service providers, elected officials and their offices, and other stakeholders as needed.



## 2. Business Operations

In order to center racial equity and effectively meet the needs of marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by homelessness, budgeting and procurement processes must be redesigned in a similar manner to policy-setting processes. Strategies to achieve this are outlined below.

### 1. Strengthening Participatory Budgeting

For each funding stream and local budget cycle, system administrators should work with members of the community to identify which budget categories can be substantially shaped by community-defined needs, priorities, and desired results. Leaders should work with elected officials to extend planning timelines to ensure that participatory budgeting is feasible wherever possible.

### 2. Request for Proposal (RFP) Framework

All RFPs should include descriptions of the relevant needs, priorities, and desired results identified through participatory budgeting.

Responses to RFPs should be expected to have clear strategies and activities that directly address structural racism and intersectional oppressions including ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, misogyny and other sources of inequities for people who are currently homeless. They should also be expected to offer an analysis of who will benefit from and who will be burdened by the program.

### 3. Contractor Selection

Proposal review process should evaluate contractors' connection to historically marginalized and disproportionately impacted communities, in particular people with lived experience of homelessness. This can include an evaluation of those in leadership and decision-making roles, not just people in frontline staff positions, as well as how contractors center lived experiences of homelessness in program design and execution. Representation of members of impacted communities in leadership roles should be a critical factor in selection.

RFP processes and contractor selection processes should include steps to determine the cost of living where contractor staff live and seek to ensure that contract amounts allow for wages at or above the median income or "liveable wages." Proposals should prioritize an increase in wages for frontline staff, before increasing wages for senior management, and accommodate hazard pay where appropriate in the context of the pandemic.

Communities can and should establish processes for people with lived experience to participate in contractor interviews, site visits, and final selection decisions.

#### **4. Data and Performance Management**

Budgeting and RFP development processes should be informed by data specific to and provided by communities overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness, leading with race, and should articulate what the data indicates about the impact on people of color. Proposals can articulate program metrics, qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, and evaluation processes to evaluate the success of the program that are aligned with the metrics and performance targets established through community engagement processes and based on a shared understanding of community needs, priorities, and desired results as specified in the budgeting process.

Procurement processes should provide adequate time and financial resources for customer engagement processes, on-going data collection, and evaluation. RFPs should articulate how program structures and metrics will be revisited if there are negative impacts on customers and other people experiencing homelessness. The process to revisit program design should include targeted customer engagement to inform improvements.

#### **5. Public Communication and Accountability**

Budgeting and procurement processes and decisions should be transparent and accessible to members of the community in the same manner as policy and strategy-related decisions. Homelessness service system partners should seek to create public communications plans that include identifying and funding community-based organizations in impacted communities and individual customers to proactively educate community members on how funding, budgeting, and procurement processes work.





## 3. Hiring Operations

Hiring and related talent processes within homelessness service systems should also prioritize racial equity in order to ensure that the staff and providers within the systems are well-suited to support individuals experiencing homelessness. All processes, policies, and guidance should be in alignment with federal and state regulations and Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO) requirements.

### 1. Headcount Planning

Prior to engaging in hiring, organizations are encouraged to engage in a reflective headcount planning process to confirm and/or identify the necessary capacity to accomplish organizational goals/outcomes. Organizations may consider:

- Ensuring that all business unit leader(s) and/or their staff members have the opportunity to provide feedback on capacity needs and support in the direct scoping of new roles, or the modification or roles copes of roles newly vacant with scopes that no longer match the highest priority needs of the team budget on which this roles sits.
- Staggering the posting of new roles based upon organizational needs at various points in the year to maintain a specific cash-flow and/or account for anticipated shifts or potential changes in strategy based upon an organizations continuous improvement process, as applicable.

### 2. Active Recruitment Strategy

To expand and diversify recruitment pipelines of highly skilled candidates for all open positions, it is recommended that an organization will post all new and newly vacant roles deemed necessary for the continuation of related work streams. Each role description should include clear information on the application process and how referrals can be made, if applicable. Organizations may consider:

- Establishing guidelines for ways in which hiring managers, a hiring team and an HR/Operations office collaborate within a hiring process and contribute to actively recruiting staff.
- Creating a tailored, targeted recruitment plan that works to ensure a diverse, highly-skilled group of 2-3 candidates can be evaluated at the final stage of the interview process.
- Creating guidelines for role(s) to be posted internally (internal applicants only), in alignment with any relevant labor agreements, where applicable.

### 3. Multi-stage/Competency-based Selection Process

To support a rigorous hiring process that actively works to acknowledge and minimize bias, an organization should leverage a multi-stage, competency-based process to support objectivity in the identification and selection of the highly-qualified candidates, most qualified for each vacant role. This work will support diversifying finalist pools, reinforcing active recruitment effort. Organizations may consider:

- Establishing guidelines for ways in which hiring managers, a hiring team and an HR/Operations office collaborate within a hiring process and make decisions regarding a hire.
- Creating specific frameworks and corresponding guidance for staff.
- Training staff on these frameworks and the direct application of this approach.
- Creating of a 2-5 stage interview process, inclusive of third-party reference checks, to assess philosophical alignment to the organization, content knowledge expertise and job acumen specific to the role (as required)
- Creating guidelines around modification of this selection process/related selection models for internal applicant(s), in alignment with any relevant labor agreements, where applicable.

### 4. Leveraging Diverse Hiring Panels and Collective Input Practice

To acknowledge and minimize bias in the hiring process and build a culture of inclusive decision making, organizations should create hiring panels that reflect diversity including, but not limited to role level, department name, gender/gender identity and racial self-identification to garner input from a variety of individuals a part of the selection process to support the selection of a highly-qualified candidate, most qualified for each role.

Organizations may consider:

- Creating a model with ~2-3 selectors providing input at each stage in the selection process, typically totaling ~6 contributors to support the hiring manager (or other, pre-identified staff member) in making a final selection/hiring decision.
- Selecting panelists with aligned content knowledge expertise and job acumen specific to the role and/or work closely with the individual selected for the role.



## Additional Reading and Resources

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