Draft Action Plan: Findings and Recommendations from the CoC Racial Equity Committee

June 16, 2021

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Vision

Uncover the scope, causes, and potential solutions of race serving as a predictor for homelessness in Sacramento.

The **20-member committee** is comprised primarily of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), many with lived experience of homelessness.

The committee is tasked with developing an action plan to guide the decision-making process of the CoC Board over the next three to five years. This plan will be fully informed by BIPOC with lived experience of homelessness, as well as input and recommendations from stakeholders, studies, pilots, local systems evaluations, and the learnings of other communities.

The ultimate vision is to create an equitable, accountable, and transparent homelessness system that catalyzes structural change both inside and outside of our current sphere of influence.
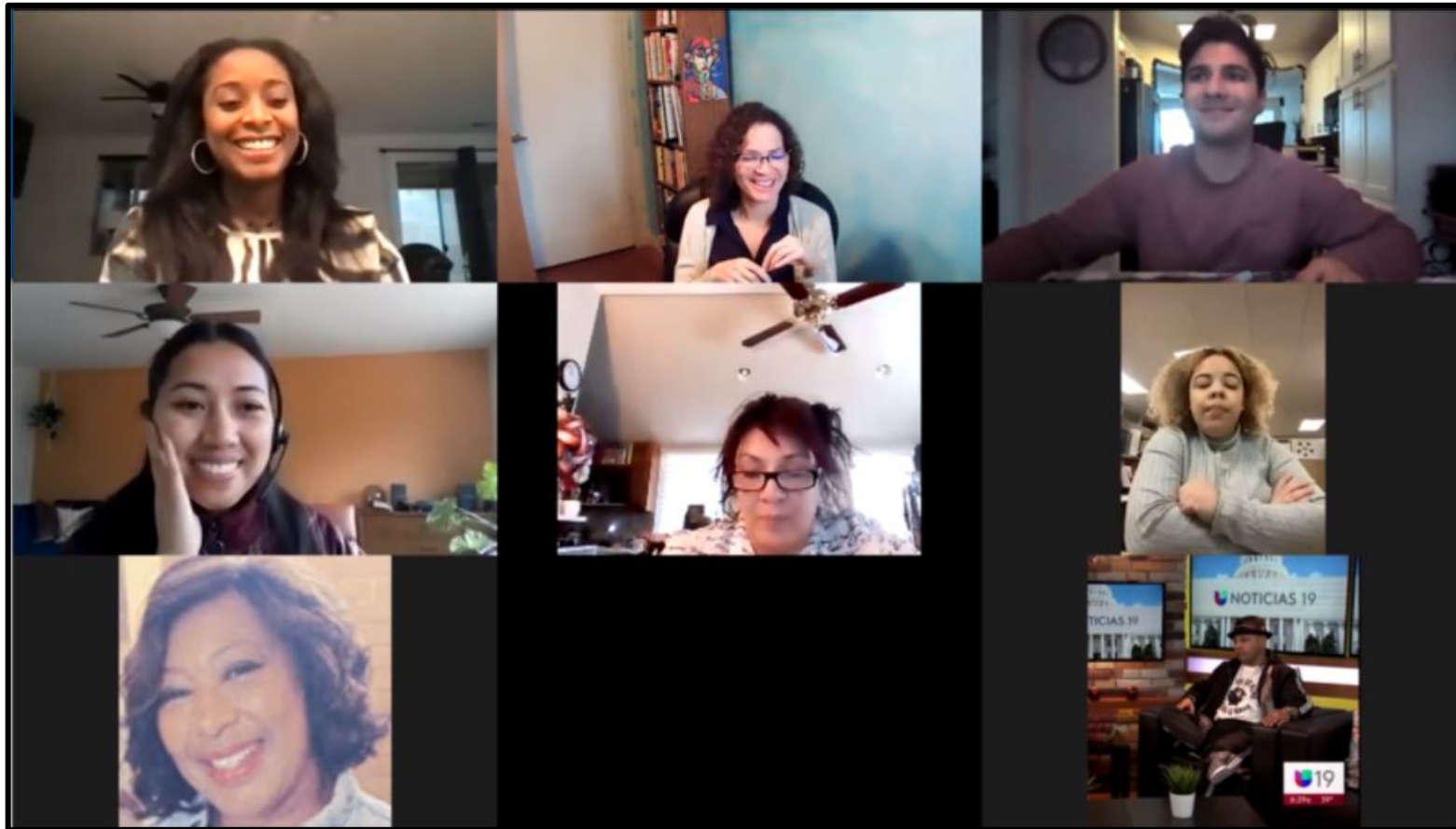
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Process

- Racial Equity Committee (REQC) Approval, Recruitment, and Formation
- Subcommittee as Working Group
- Activities and Inputs:
  - REQ 3-Part Training Series
  - BIPOC Interviews
  - Listening Sessions with Other Communities
  - Stakeholder Forum
  - Annual CoC Meeting
  - Presentations on System Performance
    - Local Race and Ethnicity Data
    - VI-SPDAT
    - Coordinated Entry
    - Gaps Analysis
  - Presentations on Best Practices
    - Native American
    - Latinx Intersectionality
    - BIPOC with Disabilities

Racial Equity Committee

Findings

- The REQC was established in November 2020 to develop an action plan for the CoC board's consideration.
- The initial REQC commitment extended through July 2021 for members and staff.
- The REQC has become a valuable resource in the community, serving to give voice to BIPOC with lived experience of homelessness, to provide input on matters beyond the action plan, to foster trust and accountability, and to raise questions, concerns, and solutions in a brave space.
- Its members believe that an equitable homelessness response system in Sacramento is more likely to be achieved with an extended commitment to dedicated racial equity work.

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Recommendations

Secure funding to staff the REQC, supporting the members with committee logistics as well as meeting the liaison, training, and advocacy needs of the committee with other organizations in the community.

Expand the term of the REQC as a standing committee of the CoC Board, which would primarily provide support for implementation of the action plan and the racial equity work of the other committees.

Incorporate racial equity goals and tools into each of the CoC Board's committees when they develop their annual work plans. Have the REQC advise on the development and implementation of these goals and tools.

Data with a Racial Equity Lens

Findings

- The vast majority of our data is quantitative.
- Quantitative categories do not always capture true identities or make all communities visible. This is particularly true of those that are not community-defined, as is the case for our HUD-designated racial and ethnic categories.
- Data is generally most useful and actionable when it is disaggregated. Disaggregation can be challenging when there are small numbers of a subpopulation.
- Qualitative data can provide meaningful context to understanding quantitative data.
- Racial inequities can be compounded by other demographic factors such as disability, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation, creating a multiplier effect.
- Outside of the official HUD definition of homelessness, there are many who are housing insecure and ineligible for services.

Recommendations

To include a clearer picture of the BIPOC homelessness experience:

- Explore intersectionality data to understand multiplier effects of demographics outside of race and targeted universalism solutions
- Collect, analyze, and report qualitative data when exploring issues related to equity.
  - *Note: qualitative data report summarizing REQC interviews in production for June 2021 REQC review.*

To make data on racial equity more meaningful:

- Provide contextual information prepared with REQC input when presenting quantitative data.
  - *Note*: *Contextual information for REQC website prepared and reviewed by REQC in May 2021.*
- Disaggregate data on race/ethnicity identity as much as possible when presented.
  - *Note*: *Disaggregated information for REQC website prepared and reviewed by REQC in May 2021.*
- Develop and provide input to HUD on mandated race and ethnicity data process.
  - Explore opportunity to collaborate with other CoCs.
- If HUD presents an opportunity for community input on the definition of homelessness, advocate for a broader definition.

To incorporate more BIPOC voices :

- Discuss racial equity data initiatives with the REQC and other racial equity advocates to get input on key aspects such as data definitions, data collection, analysis, and findings.
- Work with the REQC to identify racial equity key performance measures.

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Training and Education/ Normalizing Conversations
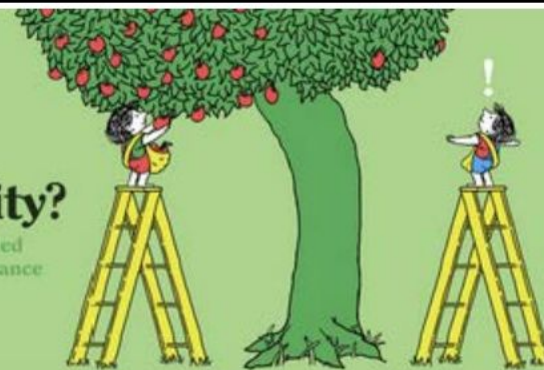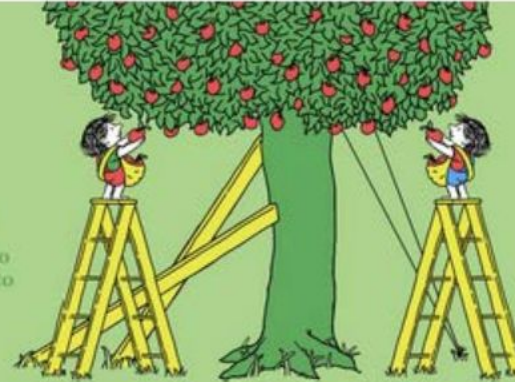
Findings

- The community will participate in workshops, educational presentations, trainings, and courageous conversations when those opportunities are offered. There is strong interest in learning the context for racial disparities in homelessness, as well as how to take personal and organizational action.
- Some community members have requested that providers receive training in Housing First principles and good communication skills, as well as training on the unique history, needs, and best or promising practices for specific racial and ethnic populations that are little understood in relation to homelessness services.
- There is a continuum of expertise within the local community, with some members newly entering these conversations and others who have significant depth of understanding.
- Bringing CoC board members, providers, volunteers, and other members of the CoC community together to learn about and openly discuss the challenges that BIPOC face demonstrates leadership and fosters trust and collaboration.

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Recommendations

Provide ongoing training and educational opportunities that are free and open to the entire community. The trainings should be determined by the needs that are demonstrated and expressed to better understand and promote racial equity.

Adapt the national Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards to provide guidance to the homelessness sector, and provide training on how to implement the standards.

Draw on local and national expertise to provide this education, uplifting the experience and voice of BIPOC with lived experience of homelessness in the process.

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Staff and Leadership Diversity

CoC Board Members

Erin Johansen
Chair

Executive Director, Hope Cooperative

Representing: Mental Health

Angela Upshaw
Vice Chair

Associate Director of Programs, Berkeley Food & Housing Project

Representing: Veterans

Pixie Pearl
Secretary

California Homeless Youth Project

Representing: Transition-Age Youth, LGBTQ Community

Learn about the CoC Board Members **here.**

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Findings

- While many of the organizations and institutions that comprise the CoC have line staff that reflect the racial and ethnic demographics of Sacramento's population experiencing homelessness, there is less diversity at the leadership level.
- It is often the leadership within these organizations and institutions that are recruited to the CoC board because of their authority and influence.
- As such, the CoC board does not reflect the community's racial and ethnic diversity.

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Recommendations

Among Sacramento's homelessness service providers, encourage social equity -- intentionally hiring management level individuals with lived experience.

When recruiting for the CoC Board and committees, replicate the process of recruitment for the REQC, intentionally seeking overrepresentation of BIPOC, especially those with lived experience.

Explicitly offer stipends for participation for board and committee members with lived experience.

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Assessment and Prioritization

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Findings

- Version 1 of the VI-SPDAT has been criticized for not properly scoring BIPOC, under-prioritizing them for services.
- Some communities have modified their assessment and prioritization process to account for communities that have experienced gentrification and displacement and/or a history of redlining.
- Many individuals in Sacramento wait for long periods of time in the Coordinated Entry process after their VI-SPDAT data is gathered.
- There is the potential for real and perceived bias on the part of anyone involved in the assessment process.
- There is also the potential for the person being assessed to feel uncomfortable with those involved in the process based on their demographics and lived experience.

Recommendations

In order to address/prevent potential issues with the VI-SPDAT tool:
- Use a more recent version of the tool.
  - *Note*: *Switched from version 1 to version 2 in February 2021.*
- Involve the REQ Committee in any other planned changes to the Coordinated Entry assessment process before implementation.
- Explore alternative tools and methodologies for potential future use.

In order to better support individuals experiencing homelessness:
- Continue to improve the Coordinated Entry process, so that people do not wait for long periods of time after data is gathered from VI-SPDAT.

In order to address/prevent potential assessment administrator bias:
- Educate those who conduct needs assessments about racial disparities in housing and homelessness.
  - Advocate for racial equity training for anyone who administers an assessment.
  - Define how organizations can meet the requirement .
- Collect race/ethnicity data about those who give tests to understand to what degree administrators represent population they serve.
  - Administer survey or ask organizations to provide information.

Language Access

Findings

- Because the VI-SPDAT is only offered in English, individuals and families without English as their Native language are at a disadvantage from accessing entry, assessment, resources, and housing at an equitable level.
- While there has been a transition from discouraging translation to allowing bilingual service providers to translate, this adjustment is recent, not widespread knowledge, and leaves a heavy burden on those bilingual service providers to adequately understand, interpret, and translate complex assessment tools.
- With the exception of the consent form, vital documents necessary to navigate successfully through the HMIS process are not translated into languages other than English.

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Recommendations

VI-SPDAT Risk Assessment
- Create and provide access to the assessment in multiple languages
- Train service providers on how to access and deliver assessment

Vital Documents
- Consent Form
- Train service providers on navigating access to translated form
  - Additional Documents (e.g., third party verification, self-certification, disability certification, program information, practices and policies)
  - Translate all necessary information and documentation into multiple languages
  - Ensure that all newly implemented tools and documents are offered in multiple languages

Funding for free and ongoing access to realtime translation and interpreting services for providers and programs without bilingual and multilingual staff.

Assess all documents that are provided to clients for readability; as necessary, re-create them to read at a 4th-5th grade level.

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Equitable Funding

Findings

- Small, BIPOC-led organizations are at a disadvantage in the NOFA and other competitions for contracts and grants due to infrastructure challenges such as lack of board training and development, liability insurance and other requirements, internal HR processes and procedures, and prior large-scale contract or grant management.
- Small organizations are burdened with data collection, preventing them from playing to their strengths: direct service provision.
- Competition between service providers stifles collaboration, innovation, and new funding streams.
- There is community concern that legacy projects are not effective enough and continually funding them without thorough evaluation of their impact impedes the funding of other projects that may be more effective.

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Recommendations

Explore developing the capacity of small, BIPOC-led organizations by offering cohort and individual training and technical assistance annually, in preparation for competitive procurement and successful implementation of the NOFA and other opportunities to diversify Sacramento's network of homelessness providers. Explore paying existing BIPOC-led providers to provide the training and technical assistance as peer mentors.

Incentivize larger organizations to partner with small, BIPOC-led organizations that have a longstanding history of working in the community by providing preference to their funding applications when such partnerships are in place or by requiring complementary collaboration.

Evaluate current funded projects for effectiveness with BIPOC populations.

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Partnerships

You are on Native Land

Sacramento Tribal areas consist of:
- Nisenan
- Foothills and Southern Madiu
- Valley Miwok
- Wilton Miwok
- Me-Wuk people

South of the Sacramento River, are the
- Patwin
- Wintun
- Wintu

SNAHC
Sacramento Native American Health Center

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Findings

- Federally recognized tribes have the authority to create their own CoCs. There is one federally recognized tribe in the Sacramento area, Wilton Rancheria.
- There are many organizations and institutions that provide preventative or supporting services to individuals and families facing homelessness who are not connected to or knowledgeable of the CoC.
- The disproportionate numbers of BIPOC in institutions and systems that are further upstream contribute to the racial inequity found in homelessness. Unsupported exits from the foster care, juvenile and adult incarceration, education, and health care systems increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness.
- Youth homelessness strongly predicts adult homelessness.

Recommendations

Offer formal support and allyship to Wilton Rancheria in the creation and sustainability of a CoC.

Conduct outreach into the community to develop a more comprehensive database of organizations and institutions that could aid the efforts of the CoC. Include these potential partners in communications about funding opportunities, board and committee meetings and openings for membership, forums, trainings, and other engagement that will strengthen case management/case conferencing, housing development and placement, HMIS utilization, and collaborative program design.

Establish a workgroup to learn from other communities that have established data-sharing agreements among multiple systems and provide case management prior to anticipated exits from overrepresented BIPOC systems, to determine the feasibility of replicating this type of transition coordination in Sacramento.

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Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

Findings

- Not all providers use HMIS, and among those that do, data quality varies - although there is widespread agreement that having a single database or integrated platform would enable better system performance.
- HMIS is considered by some to be too burdensome for data entry and too complicated to navigate.
- Some volunteers of BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving organizations that are not currently CoC-funded have specifically requested that they be trained to enter data into HMIS.

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Recommendations

Convene leaders and database administrators to discuss opportunities to standardize data collection and reporting, reduce duplicative data entry across systems, and explore potential for future data sharing (*Source: Gaps Analysis*).

Consider funding a diverse team of resource specialists to provide intensive hands-on coaching with current and potential HMIS users to increase their comfort and success with inputting and accessing HMIS data.

Individuals who are serving as volunteers or staff for BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving organizations should specifically be outreached to receive this HMIS support.

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Questions or Comments?

Please email tgreen@sacstepsforward.org

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