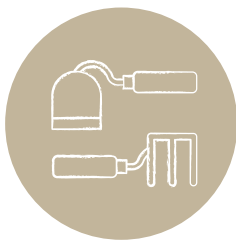# From Seed to Harvest

A TOOLKIT FOR COLLABORATIVE RACIAL EQUITY STRATEGIES

race forward

From Seed to Harvest: A Toolkit for Collaborative Racial Equity Strategies

2021

race forward

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Racial Equity Tool for Collaborative Governance

Purpose of This Tool

This tool is meant to guide racial equity[1] practices in the creation and assessment of sustainability and renewable energy policies and programs. It offers a framework and systematic process to build cultures of accountability and work towards racial equity outcomes in decision-making. Lastly, it provides a tangible pathway for an ecosystem[2] approach to operationalizing collective racial equity values.

Who Should Use It

Community organizations, advocates and governmental institutions working in a collaborative space to advance racial equity in their policies, recommendations and practices.

Why Center Race in Climate and Energy Work

Racial disparities are neither natural nor random. They are the result of systems that were designed and constructed to benefit white people and justify the dehumanization of Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities--including forced extraction from our lands and exploited labor from our bodies. The placement of toxic waste facilities, the development of highways that cut through neighborhoods, and the proximity to Superfund sites target places where low-income BIPOC communities live and work. These intentional and unintentional policy decisions demonstrate the disregard and devaluing of the people and land that they harm. Additionally, policymakers largely do not reflect or represent directly-impacted communities and the policy process is designed to exclude them. To move racial equity forward, it is necessary for everyone in the ecosystem who are doing climate and sustainability work to first collectively recognize the interconnectedness of race and environmental justice, identify where there are opportunities to further racial equity in their narratives, strategies and solutions; and ultimately shift power[3] to BIPOC communities most directly affected by structural racism.

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1   **Racial Equity** is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.

2   An **ecosystem approach** includes community residents, community based organizations, local government, small business, philanthropy and other sectors collectively working toward racial justice.

3   **Racial justice** is a system of shared power, which must be imagined, organized and constructed. It takes organizing to build, shift and exercise shared power.

Collaborative Governance

Communities of color practice various forms of governance within our familial and kinship networks, community-based organizations, cooperatives, mutual aid groups, tribal nations, religious communities, worker associations and civic organizations. Governance, which can include but is not exclusive to government, incorporates rich practices and histories of democratic practice[4] - often towards the provision of goods and services that fall through the gaps of government disinvestment, neglect and inefficiency.

Government - distinct from governance - through an existing set of processes, tools and structures built to uphold white supremacy and deep class inequality, can marginalize communities most impacted by policy, and fail to address structural causes and historic harms. With explicit and intentional racial equity practice, government collaborators, as servants of the public good, have the potential to contribute to solutions that upend the status quo of pervasive white supremacy.[5]

As changemakers, we are at once intervening in existing processes and institutions, dismantling existing inequities and creating new forms of governance. **Collaborative governance**[6] brings together changemakers within government and BIPOC residents and organizations as well as racial and social justice practitioners steeped in community-based governance to create new processes and practices that center racial equity. Collaborative governance accounts for the assets and distinct roles of each individual, while moving toward shared vision and goals. The model recognizes the trust and relationship-building necessary to address and repair historic and present-day harm, while collaborating towards a new and transformative system.[7]

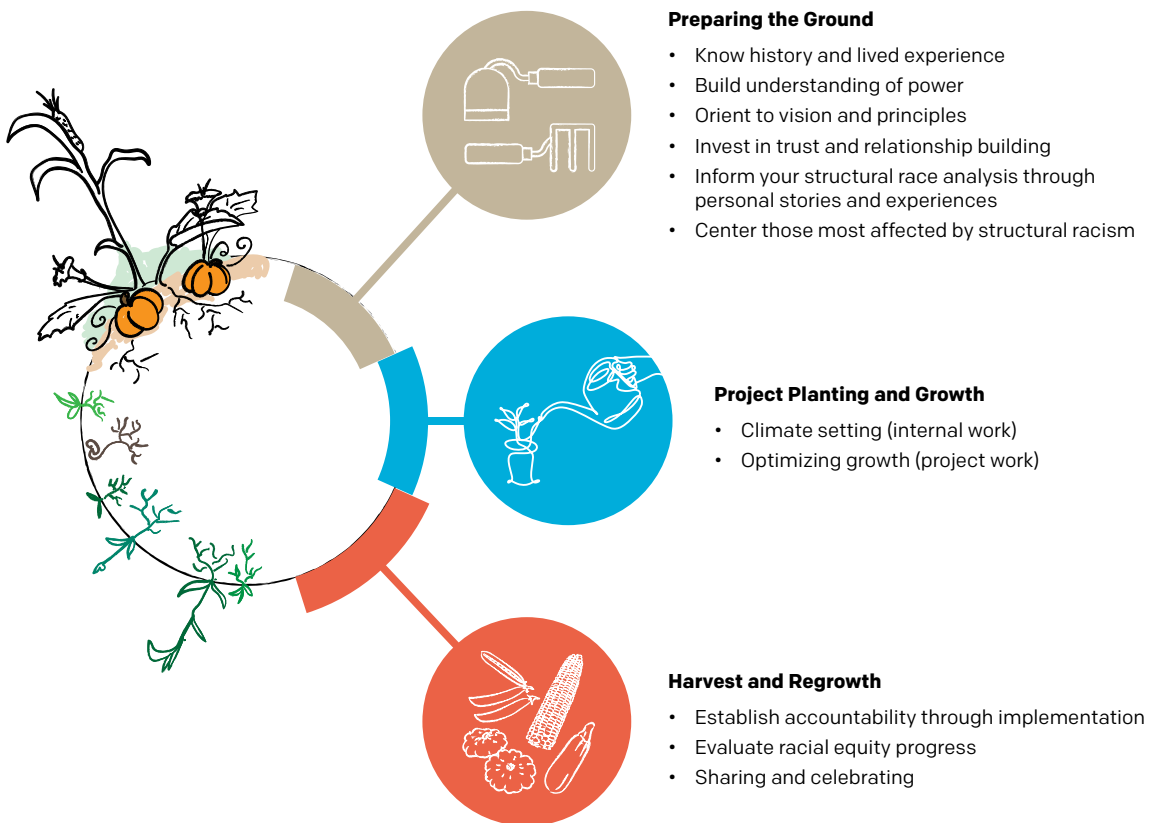4   See Jessica Gordon Nembhard's work on the history of the Black cooperative movement.

5   It is important to note that Indigenous people have sovereign nations within tribal governments, which should not be defined as, or lumped together with, governments that uphold white supremacy.

6   See the work of Kapwa Consulting, Facilitating Power, Movement Strategy Center, National Association of Climate Resilience Planners and Urban Sustainability Directors Network; for example, this report with tools on community engagement and collaborative governance.

7   The solutions that emerge from a community driven process will not fit neatly into one government department's mission. This work will generate the need for cross-government responses, and government is not designed that way. This work requires transformational leadership and applying organizing strategies within government as well.

Racial Equity Tool for Collaborative Governance Guide

Below is a process and set of questions to use collaboratively in the ecosystem before, during and after the creation of a plan, program, set of recommendations or policies. While the steps are iterative, it is important to start with preparing the ground for this work. This will inform the planting and growing of the project. The harvest and regrowth of this work may mark completion - or beginnings of other work. Within each section there is no particular order in which to address the questions, but it is important to discuss each section collectively and thoughtfully, and to revisit questions based on contextual changes and new learnings.

Preparing the Ground

- Know history and lived experience
- Build understanding of power
- Orient to vision and principles
- Invest in trust and relationship building
- Inform your structural race analysis through personal stories and experiences
- Center those most affected by structural racism

Project Planting and Growth

- Climate setting (internal work)
- Optimizing growth (project work)

Harvest and Regrowth

- Establish accountability through implementation
- Evaluate racial equity progress
- Sharing and celebrating

"The Three Sisters" companion planting technique is often attributed to Northeastern Woodland tribes, especially the Iroquois Confederacy. In fact, the name "The Three Sisters" comes from an Iroquois legend. According to the legend, corn, beans and squash are inseparable sisters that were given to the people by the "Great Spirit." It is important to note, however, that the "Three sisters" are also found in many other areas and tribes around North America. Other known sites include: New Mexico among the Tewa with a fourth sister (Rocky Mountain bee plant); the four corners area among the Anasazi, where it was adapted specifically for an arid environment; and Mesoamerica, where the technique was applied on larger scale farms.
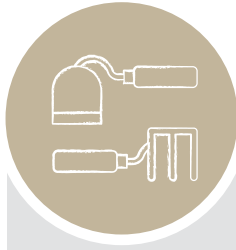
1 Preparing the ground

These guiding questions help us "prepare the ground" for this work. Our model of collaborative governance recognizes that trust and relationship-building are necessary to address and repair historic and present-day harm while collaborating towards a new and transformative system. This will inform the planting and growing of the project.

KNOW HISTORY AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

- What is the history of racial inequity in your community, especially related to energy injustice and environmental racism?
- How have institutions been accountable to past decisions and how have they recognized harm?

BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF POWER

- What is the group's understanding of different forms of power (eg, political power, money power, relational power, consumer power)?
- Who currently holds what forms of power?
- Who are we seeking to build power with or transfer power to?
- Who is benefitting from the current system? And who is being harmed?
- What are we trying to transform and what will it take to shift power?

ORIENT TO VISION AND PRINCIPLES

- What is your project vision as defined by the collective ecosystem?
- What shifts and outcomes do you hope to see as a result of our work?
- How is each team member interpreting the group's collective vision?
- What principles and values will guide your decisions in the future?

INVEST IN TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- How is this group actively working to combat white supremacy culture, and build a culture of racial equity?
- When tensions arise, what methods will you use to put issues on the table and respond to them?
- How is this group working to build relationships beyond this project?

INFORM YOUR STRUCTURAL RACE ANALYSIS THROUGH PERSONAL STORIES AND EXPERIENCES

- What data do you currently have that can give you a deeper understanding of which communities (relating to race, gender, class, geography) are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by energy injustice and environmental racism?
- How are communities affected differently?
- What stories and lived experiences need to be elevated to shed light on structural inequities?
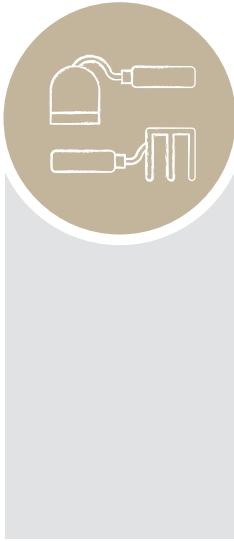
CENTER THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY STRUCTURAL RACISM

From the introduction to the work, to the development and implementation of a proposal, those most affected by structural racism must be authentically involved throughout this process.

- Who is missing and how can they be engaged at the outset?
- Which communities are most impacted by environmental racism and energy injustice? When answering this question, elevate the voices of those most connected to community residents who understand the structural inequities in this issue area.
- What are the opportunities and plans for those most impacted to be involved in developing, refining and finalizing the proposal?
- What is your plan to include community partners in the inception, development and evaluation of this project?
- Have you created a budget that includes participation honoraria?

2 Project planting and growth

Preparing the ground gives us a foundation for the planting and growing of the project. Climate Setting is the internal work that helps us optimize growth of the specific project. Together, we are creating new processes and practices that center racial equity by accounting for the assets and distinct roles of each individual while collaborating towards a new and transformative system.

CLIMATE SETTING (INTERNAL WORK)

EXAMINE PERSONAL IDENTITY AND POSITIONALITY

- What assumptions are you bringing into this work?
- How does your race, gender, class and position influence how you arrive in this space?
- What shifts will you need to make to combat implicit bias?

CLARIFY ROLES

- Are community residents seen as community experts and decision-makers?
- Is there clarity on everyone's role and responsibility in this work to ensure accountability?
- How is the work distributed equitably?
- How are community members resourced to participate?

ENSURE EQUITABLE DECISION-MAKING

- How will this group make decisions?
- Is there space for consensus-building in discussions?
- What decisions will be made in committees, in a leadership group and in the group as a whole?
- How do your principles guide these decisions?
- How can the group embed transparency and accountability in decisions?
- How will you ensure that the voices of directly-impacted residents and community organizations are given equitable space in discussions and decisions?

OPTIMIZING GROWTH (PROJECT WORK)

IDENTIFY ROOT CAUSES

- What factors may be producing and perpetuating racial inequities associated with energy and the environment?
- How did the inequities arise?
- Are they expanding or narrowing?

- What are the key institutions and policies involved in the inequities?
- What are some other intersecting or compounding factors?
- What dominant narratives or myths contribute to the inequities?
- Does the proposal address root causes? If not, how could it?

DEFINE GOALS AND PURPOSE

- Are your purpose and goals race explicit?
- How will this benefit and build the power of BIPOC communities?
- How do your goals connect to your vision and history?

DESIGN BASED ON RACIAL EQUITY

- Based on experiences in the impacted communities you have identified as well as data you have collected, what are your strategies for advancing racial equity?
- How is the proposal designed to respond to root causes (including the disproportionate amounts of environmental pollution, adverse health impacts, displacement and more for communities of color)?
- What are the anticipated racial impacts of your proposal for different racial groups? What are potential unintended consequences and what are parallel strategies for mitigating them?
- How will you monitor for unintended consequences? And when something unintended happens, how will this team respond?
- What is your implementation plan (focus on activities, timeline and who is responsible for which pieces of the plan)?

DETERMINE RACIALLY EXPLICIT SUCCESS INDICATORS

- What are the racially explicit success indicators and progress benchmarks?[8]
- How will you disaggregate success indicators (i.e. your main measure of success is the improvement in the material conditions of communities of color)?
- How will impacts be documented and evaluated? How will the level, diversity and quality of ongoing stakeholder engagement be assessed?

PLAN FOR PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

- Is the proposal realistic and adequately funded, with mechanisms to ensure successful implementation and enforcement?
- Are there provisions to ensure ongoing data collection, public reporting, stakeholders participation and public accountability?

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8   https://www.managementcenter.org/resources/smartie-goals-worksheet/

3 Harvest and regrowth

The harvest and regrowth of this work may mark completion - or beginnings of other work. It is important to revisit questions here, and in each previous section, to account for contextual changes and new learnings. Collectively, these steps support our creation of new processes and practices for collaborative governance that center racial equity.

ESTABLISH ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION

- How will you ensure accountability (both to the network/coalition and to those most impacted)?
- What are your messages and communication strategies that will help advance racial equity?
- How do you create a feedback loop with folks directly impacted by your work?
- Are there opportunities for those most impacted to be involved in developing, refining, and finalizing the proposal?
- What information or project documents can be made available to the public?

EVALUATE RACIAL EQUITY PROGRESS

- Using the success indicators, how did you do?
- How did this project change conditions for communities most impacted in the short, mid, and longer term?
- How did BIPOC communities tangibly benefit and grow power?
- What are some missed opportunities to center racial justice in this work?

SHARING AND CELEBRATING

- How are you celebrating collectively and holding space to reflect on this process?
- How are you documenting your successes? What successes can you share with other communities?
- What strategies, narratives, and practices helped move this process forward?