

Establishing a Statewide Office of Racial Equity

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This brief was prepared by Vital Research, LLC (Vital) to provide information to the California Racial Equity Commission who is charged with developing a Racial Equity Framework, providing technical assistance, and reporting progress. The opinions expressed in this brief reflect those of Vital and do not reflect the views of the Racial Equity Commission, Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI), or the Office of the Governor.

Sustaining the Racial Equity Commission's Work

The Racial Equity Commission is scheduled to sunset in 2030, per [Executive Order N-16-22](#), and with the Racial Equity Framework now published, it is important to look ahead and consider how to continue the Commission's work across California. The purpose of this memo is to identify the types of support required to continue the Commission's legacy beyond 2030 and describe why infrastructure is important for the sustainability of advancing racial equity within the state. To this end, Vital Research, LLC (Vital) reviewed existing examples of government entities focused on racial equity work to explore the possibilities of establishing an Office of Racial Equity in California. **We present information on existing government entities that are focused on racial equity work and weigh the benefits and challenges of establishing an Office of Racial Equity in California.**

Looking Beyond 2030

The Racial Equity Commission's charge is to: develop a Racial Equity Framework; provide technical assistance on implementing strategies for embedding racial equity throughout government entities; engage with communities across California; and prepare annual reports that summarize feedback from community engagement efforts, provide data on racial inequities and disparities in California, highlight milestones of the Commission, and recommend best practices on tools, methodologies, and opportunities to advance racial equity. With the development of the [Racial Equity Framework](#) completed in December 2025, the Commission is now turning to developing a technical assistance and implementation strategy to support government entities operationalize equity and use the Framework as a tool to support their process. The Commission plans to continue identifying tools and methodologies to grow the Framework's toolbox, and they will also continue to publicly engage with communities across California. In tandem, the Commission is also developing an evaluation strategy to assess the Commission's efforts as they provide technical assistance to government entities. These ongoing efforts highlight the need for durable infrastructure to sustain and institutionalize this work beyond the Commission's statutory sunset.

It is important to account for the time it will take for government entities to adopt the recommendations in the Racial Equity Framework.

Recognizing that creating change can take time in any government entity, it is important to have a governing or advisory body like the Commission to guide this change process for many years to come. Therefore, planning beyond 2030, after the Commission sunsets, is crucial for continued cohesion to racial equity work across California.

Consider Establishing an Office of Racial Equity

Establishing an Office of Racial Equity is one way to sustain the work of the Racial Equity Commission beyond 2030. An Office of Racial Equity could serve an array of roles including:



A centralized entity to guide and inform racial equity work across various government entities. Although racial equity work is and should continue to be implemented at each individual government entity, having a centralized entity can help to streamline efforts. An office could provide individualized support to government entities, based on their infrastructure for advancing racial equity. Further, establishing an Office of Racial Equity could support the infrastructure needed to ensure racial equity work is sustained across administrations ([GARE, 2025](#)).



Provider of technical assistance on implementing the Racial Equity Framework. Since the Commission is charged with providing technical assistance to state and local government entities as they apply the Framework to their work, an Office of Racial Equity could continue this critical work. As an example, an Office could organize workshops and use coaching models to support the application of racial equity tools in government processes. This form of technical assistance is common among other racial equity offices. For instance, the [San Diego County Office of Equity and Racial Justice](#) has developed racial equity tools and provided training to ensure county staff and leadership are equipped to use these tools in their work.



A connector that looks across state and local government entities for areas of synergy. Many government entities have been engaging in racial equity work for years, and opportunities to share existing work and lessons learned can help other government entities begin or build upon their racial equity work. The Commission is planning to organize a Biennial Statewide Equity Summit to bring together government staff working on advancing racial equity to create opportunities for connection, peer-to-peer learning, and cohesion in racial equity efforts across California. Events like this summit could be continued with an Office of Racial Equity. Similarly, the [Washington State Office of Equity](#) has organized several convenings to bring together community members and state agencies to build relationships and discuss ways to create an equitable state together. In this way, an office could create new opportunities for collaboration and help to break down silos, create opportunities for collaboration, and encourage cross-level communication.



Entity to ensure accountability and sustainability so that government entities are held accountable to continuing racial equity work. To keep other government entities accountable, the Office of Racial Equity could request information on racial equity indicators or metrics relevant to each government entity's programs and services, which could serve as an annual checkpoint for government entities to report on their progress towards racial equity goals. For example, the [San Jose Office of Racial and Social Equity](#) works with city departments to develop, implement, and report on departmental racial equity action plans. The Office of Racial Equity could work collaboratively with government entities to determine appropriate metrics to evaluate their racial equity efforts. The information gathered could be included in annual reports produced by the Office of Racial Equity and shared with communities.

Ways to Establish an Office of Racial Equity

After conducting research and engaging in conversations with key individuals who were involved in establishing the Commission, it became clear that creating an Office of Racial Equity through legislation is likely the most viable path forward. However, **there are several ways an Office of Racial Equity could be established: (1) legislation, (2) executive order, (3) ballot measure, or (4) government reorganization plan.** Table 1 provides selected examples of how various new government entities have been created through these different approaches.

Table 1: Examples of ways government entities have been established

Government Entity	Method Entity was Established			
	Legislation	Executive Order	Ballot Measure	Government Reorganization Plan
California Housing and Homelessness Agency				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
California Privacy Protection Agency			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
City of San Jose Office of Racial and Social Equity			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Colorado Statewide Equity Office	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Illinois Office of Equity		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
New Jersey Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
New York City Commission on Racial Equity			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Vermont Office of Equity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Washington State Office of Equity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

A statutory office is established in state law, with its purpose, authority, and duties explicitly defined. Eliminating or substantially altering such an office would require legislative action. Compared to other approaches, statutory creation provides greater stability across administrations, stronger standing in budget negotiations, and clearer authority for interagency coordination. Statutory creation also allows operating resources and funding to be embedded into the existing state budget, with appropriations allocated by the legislature. [Colorado \(2022\)](#), [Vermont \(2018\)](#), and [Washington \(2020\)](#) established Offices of Racial Equity through statute, each with the shared goal of institutionalizing racial equity across state government. These offices focus on embedding equity into all aspects of how agencies operate, how policies are made, resources are allocated, and data are used. Washington State’s Office of Equity is additionally authorized to solicit and receive gifts, grants, and endowments to supplement state funding.

Across these three cases, statutory placement enables these offices to function as centralized, cross-agency coordinating bodies that use data to support accountability and evidence-based equity efforts. Rather than serving primarily as enforcement entities, these offices provide technical assistance, training, and consultation to build capacity. This model aligns with the purpose of the current Commission and the long-term needs an Office of Racial Equity would be expected to sustain.

Other pathways to establishing an Office of Racial Equity include executive orders, which were used to create both the current Commission and similar offices. Other state examples include the [Illinois Office of Equity \(2021\)](#) and the [New Jersey Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging \(2021\)](#). In California, ballot measures and government reorganization plans have also been used to create agencies, like the [California Privacy Protection Agency created through California Privacy Rights Act in 2020](#) and the [California Housing and Homelessness Agency \(CHHA\) scheduled to be established in 2026](#).

If an Office of Racial Equity is established, another key consideration is where to house the office within existing administrative infrastructure that will allow for consistency across government entities. For example, the Office of Racial Equity could be housed within the Office of the Governor, like where the Commission is housed now. Another option could be to house the Office of Racial Equity in an existing entity like the Civil Rights Department. Like the [Commission on the State of Hate](#), which was established in the Civil Rights Department by statute in 2021, the efforts to advance racial equity across government entities through an Office of Racial Equity could be folded into the activities of the Civil Rights Department. **When considering where to house the Office of Racial Equity, it is important to consider the authority that can be granted within the overarching government entity and the ability for the office to hold other government entities accountable and mandate actions.**

Funding Considerations

Regardless of the mechanism selected, funding will be a critical consideration. Potential funding sources include state General Fund appropriations, federal funds, grants or philanthropic support, and contributions from state agencies. California's experience with statutorily established equity entities offers a useful reference point. One example of a statutorily established state agency created to address inequities is the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CCSWG, established in 1965). CCSWG has core ongoing funding through state budget appropriations and is authorized by state law to seek and attract philanthropic support. The CCSWG is a stable example of a California-specific model for establishing and sustaining an equity-focused entity that can administer targeted programs and play a non-enforcement role focused on research, coordination, and technical assistance.

Braided funding is another option that could work by aligning multiple funding streams around a shared goal while keeping each source separate for budgeting, tracking, and reporting. This way, the office can coordinate complex equity work without combining funds or violating fiscal rules. For an office that is cross-cutting, systems-focused, and engaged in training and coordination rather than service delivery, this approach can reduce reliance on one funding source and buffer against budget swings. Taken together, pairing statutory authority with diversified funding streams can support both the stability and flexibility needed for a statewide Office of Racial Equity to be effective over time.

Benefits & Challenges of an Office of Racial Equity

Below we summarize some of the possible benefits and challenges of establishing an Office of Racial Equity in California.

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established infrastructure can ensure the sustainability of racial equity work in California for years to come• Centralized entity to oversee and provide technical assistance for racial equity work enterprise wide• Keep government entities accountable to their racial equity work and goals• Create opportunities for cross-collaboration and learning, avoid duplicative efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding allocation is not guaranteed for an office, even if established• Racial equity work across all government levels are at risk of getting budgets cut (GARE, 2025)• Unintentional shift in perceived responsibility that an Office of Racial Equity will do all racial equity work in California, when in fact the responsibility of racial equity work must be shared among state and local government entities

Shared Governance Between Government Entities is Critical

If an Office of Racial Equity is established, shared governance between the office and other government entities is critical to ensure equity work is shared and embedded across entities. For example, the Office of Racial Equity could collaborate with the Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications to continue to improve statewide community engagement efforts so that racial equity remains front and center. As another example, working with an entity like the Department of Finance, which has the authority to review and approve government entity budget plans, could create an opportunity for an Office of Racial Equity to see through the integration of budget equity best practices into the state budgeting process. These partnerships will require cooperation and understanding across entities but provide unique opportunities to better institutionalize efforts to advance racial equity in government processes.

Next Steps to Keep the Momentum Going

Looking ahead, it is important to weigh the benefits and challenges of establishing an Office of Racial Equity and explore options for establishing an office, if determined to be useful in sustaining the work of the Racial Equity Commission and continuing to advance racial equity across California. It is critical to involve communities during the process of developing an Office of Racial Equity to ensure such an office is responsive to the diversity of interests and needs across communities in California. While conducting outreach about the Racial Equity Framework with government entities, the Commission's staff should also discuss with additional partners whether an Office of Racial Equity could be an appropriate mechanism to continue the legacy of the Racial Equity Commission for decades to come.

Acknowledgments

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