

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, established via [Executive Order N-16-22](#), will sunset in 2030. In December 2025, the Commission published the state's first Racial Equity Framework and has now begun the implementation phase of operationalizing racial equity across California government entities. Vital Research, LLC (Vital) was contracted by the Commission to review examples of government entities around the country and within the state of California that are operationalizing racial equity in their work. This memo offers insights based on this review and offers next steps for establishing a statewide Office of Racial Equity with the capacity and authority to continue the long-term work essential to ensure that government entities serve all Californians.

Future of the Racial Equity Commission

The Racial Equity Commission's charge is to:

- Develop a Racial Equity Framework and budget equity tools in partnership with California's Department of Finance;
- Recommend best practices, build capacity, and provide technical assistance to government entities so that they can implement strategies that embed racial equity throughout their budgets, practices, and policies;
- Engage meaningfully with communities across California to increase government transparency and accountability;
- 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 [Racial Equity Framework](#) completed, the Commission's efforts now focus on developing technical assistance and implementation strategies to support government entities operationalize equity and use the Framework to support their process. The Commission will continue to identify tools and methodologies to grow the Framework's toolbox, while engaging with communities across California. In tandem, the Commission is developing evaluation strategies 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.

Creating the necessary changes that will ensure all Californians thrive fairly and equitably can take time. Implementing equitable and fair government processes and outputs is a critical piece towards this goal. It is important to have a governing body with the capacity, expertise, and authority to guide change processes for many years to come. Therefore, planning beyond 2030, after the Commission sunsets, is crucial for continued cohesion and effectiveness of racial equity work across California.

This is also not the first time establishing an Office of Racial Equity has been explored in California. In 2021, statewide advocacy efforts for [Senate Bill 17](#) would have created a California Office of Racial Equity. Those efforts evolved into the creation of the Racial Equity Commission instead. However, these past efforts demonstrate the existing interest in establishing of an Office of Racial Equity in California.

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, inform, and coordinate 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 provides standards, consistency, and accountability to streamline overall government efforts and mandates. An Office of Racial Equity can also provide individualized support to government entities, based on their infrastructure for advancing racial equity. Further, it creates necessary infrastructure required to ensure racial equity work is sustained across administrations ([GARE, 2025](#)).



Provider of technical assistance on implementing the Racial Equity Framework. Per EO N-16-22, the Commission is charged with providing technical assistance to state and local government entities as they apply the Framework. An Office of Racial Equity would continue and advance 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.



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.



An entity to ensure accountability and sustainability continues so that government entities are supported as they fulfill their obligations to provide fair and equitable services to all communities. 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. 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 and shared with communities.

Ways to Establish an Office of Racial Equity

Vital conducted research and engaged in conversations with key partners who were involved in establishing the Commission to explore several ways that an Office of Racial Equity could be established: (1) executive order, (2) ballot measure, (3) government reorganization plan, or (4) legislation. 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"/>			

Several existing racial equity offices and Commissions across the nation were established through an executive order, and this is a viable option for establishing an Office of Racial Equity in California. Other state examples include the [Illinois Office of Equity \(2021\)](#) and the [New Jersey Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging \(2021\)](#). Using an executive order can be a swifter approach to establishing a new office and afford more flexibility to the office to adapt to changing circumstances during the start-up phase. Importantly, establishing an Office of Racial Equity through an executive order would require close collaboration and buy-in from the Governor of California. In addition, in California, ballot measures and government reorganization plans have also been used to create agencies, including 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](#).

Ways to Establish an Office of Racial Equity (continued)

Another pathway to establish an Office of Racial Equity would be through legislation; it can require more time and buy-in from state legislators but can offer long-term stability. When a statutory office is established in state law, its purpose, authority, and duties are explicitly defined. Eliminating or substantially altering such an office would require legislative action, safeguarding the integrity of the original intent of the bill beyond administration changes. 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, to institutionalize 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. These offices provide technical assistance, training, and consultation to build capacity, while ensuring that all state government entities are serving all communities. 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.

These pathways for establishing an Office of Racial Equity can be combined. A two-step approach is conceivable to establish an Office of Racial Equity in California: Initiate the office through an executive order, then secure its long-term stability through legislative action.

This combined approach would allow the Office of Racial Equity to be established swiftly through an executive order, enabling the new office to start up operations flexibly and adapt to emerging needs. The start-up activities would help inform the operations and purposes of the office, which can then be more clearly defined in the follow-up legislation. This approach would also allow time to build support for legislation, which often requires a longer timeline.

Where to House an Office of Racial Equity

The Office of Racial Equity may be housed strategically within the appropriate existing administrative infrastructure. The California Government Operations Agency (GovOps) is one option for housing the office. GovOps currently oversees 15 departments, boards, offices, and programs. An Office of Racial Equity would align with GovOps' existing mission, strategic goals, and core values, which explicitly outline advancing equity across state operations, and complement the Chief Equity Officer's charge under GovOps. As an office within GovOps, the Office of Racial Equity could also operate as a control agency to coordinate equity work across government entities and act as a technical assistance hub for helping all government entities advance equity through their respective processes and programs. Cohesive adoption of racial equity best practices across California will require the ability to coordinate equity work enterprise wide.

Where to House an Office of Racial Equity (continued)

Other options for housing the Office of Racial Equity could be within the Office of the Governor, where the Commission is housed now, or within 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. Regardless of where an Office of Racial Equity may be housed, 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 to establish an office, 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. Braided funding is another option that aligns 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.

Shared Governance Between Government Entities is Critical

If an Office of Racial Equity is established, shared governance between the office and other government entities would be 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 would require cooperation and understanding across entities but provide unique opportunities to better institutionalize efforts to advance racial equity in government processes.

Acknowledgments

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