

BRIEF ON MODEL FOR TRANSFORMATION

March 2025



This brief was prepared by Vital Research, LLC 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 Research 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.

From Vision to Action: California Racial Equity Commission’s Model for Transformation

The purpose of the Model for Transformation is to inform the California Racial Equity Commission’s (Commission) deliberations as they advance a proposed vision of **“a California for all, where every resident can live and thrive to their fullest potential.”** This brief presents (1) the model development process between Vital Research, LLC (Vital) and Commission collaborators, (2) an explanation of the Model for Transformation components including practical strategies for implementation, (3) the definition of systems change and how to impact change at the structural level, and (4) suggested actions for the Commission to consider as next steps to create long-lasting structural change.

Vital did a systematic search for and review of existing racial equity efforts across the United States to document key commonalities in their approaches. Vital specifically searched for published racial equity plans and offices that could be used as examples for California. The literature search yielded 25 racial equity plans and offices. Through a document review process, Vital analyzed patterns in content, focusing on values, vision statements, goals, strategies, objectives, and domains.

A set of values were proposed to the Commissioners based on language in [Executive Order N-16-22](#), discussions with Commission staff, and common values identified from the document review. The Commissioners discussed, revised, and approved the values at the quarterly December 2024 meeting with the following modifications: (1) The value, “Address Historical Wrongs” was revised to “Prevent and Address Historical Wrongs,” and (2) the value, “Transparency & Accountability” was added.

The Commission approved seven values to guide their work and achieve their strategic objective and vision.



The Commission’s values are intended to guide the priorities of their work and inform each step of the process outlined in the proposed Model for Transformation. In essence, the proposed model is a way to explain how and why the Commission will work and provide practical examples for how state staff can advance racial equity through their work. For example, as the Commission’s staff has been charged to provide technical assistance to state agencies and local governments, while following legal parameters (including Proposition 209), they will do so in a way that advances equity and racial justice, centers community and lived experiences, ensures intentional collaboration, encourages data-driven decision-making, and prevents and addresses historical wrongs. These seven values lie at the heart of the proposed Model for Transformation and provide a foundation for the Commission’s actions.

The proposed Model for Transformation is a roadmap of Commission activities with practical strategies that will impact systems change across California.

Proposed Model for Transformation

The Commission’s charge is to develop a Racial Equity Framework that is used to advance racial equity and address structural racism. The proposed Model for Transformation was made by synthesizing existing racial equity work and refined through discussions with Commission staff and feedback from Commissioners. An initial draft was presented to Commissioners at their public meeting in December 2024. Commissioners requested the following changes: add “shift power to communities” in the strategic objective, use the term “intermediate strategies” to reflect how the Commission’s actions lead to the strategic objective, and include a fourth intermediate strategy on engaging communities as an action to shift power to communities. The revised model is below.

Proposed Model for Transformation



Questions for Staff and Commission Discussion

- How does the Commission define¹ **each of their values** in the context of their work?
- How does the Commission intend to shift power to communities?
- What **mechanisms** will be put in place for the Commission to **measure and evaluate progress** as well as **hold themselves accountable to these values**?

¹ Sample definitions are in the document review findings.

The proposed Model for Transformation is grounded in a set of proposed guiding beliefs:

1. By aiming to shift the structural conditions that uphold racial inequities, the Commission can influence systems change. Impacting and transforming systems will take time and require persistent and ongoing efforts to sustain equity and racial justice for the long term.
3. Given that marginalized communities largely continue to be excluded from policy decision-making and other governmental practices, the Commission's charge is to explicitly engage community. The Commission's intention is that over time, power can be shifted to communities.
4. As the Commission does its work, being accountable to the public is important. Accountability and transparency will be spotlighted through public meetings and regular progress and annual reports.
5. Providing practical strategies for implementation is important so that Californians can see a real positive difference in their lives.

Intermediate Strategies for Transformation

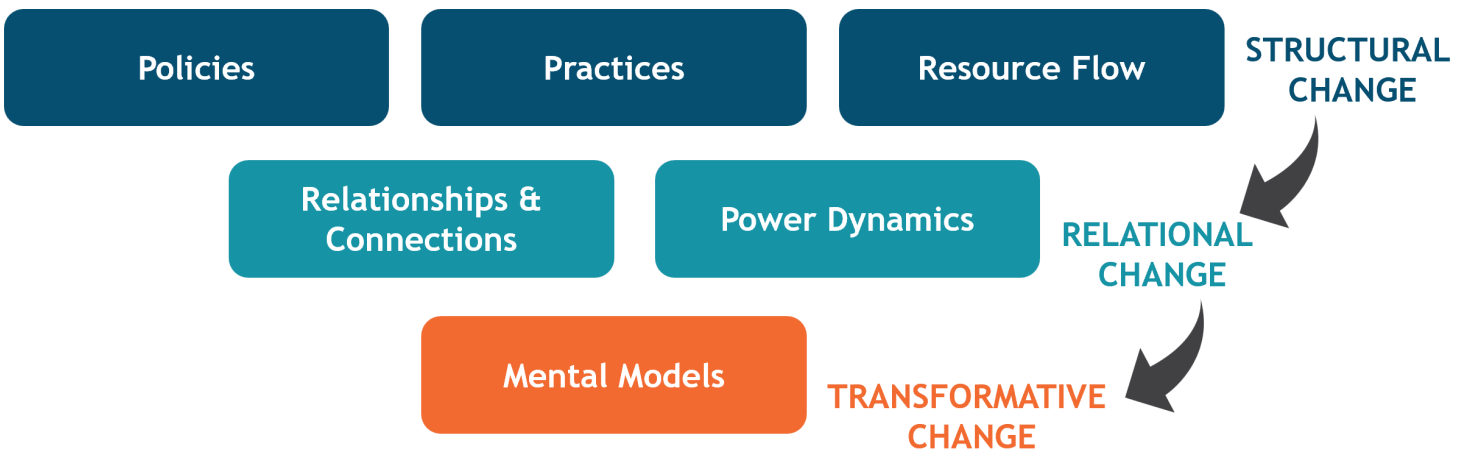
The proposed Model for Transformation serves as a roadmap for the Commission. The Commission's activities will incorporate four key intermediate strategies to reach the Commission's goal and respond to its charge outlined in [Executive Order N-16-22](#). Several racial equity tools and efforts found during Vital's document review process can serve as examples for each strategy.

- **Racial equity tools and methodologies are embedded into existing processes (for example budgeting or strategic planning).** The [City of San Jose's Office of Racial and Social Equity](#), for example, has published racial equity tools like a [Racial Equity Action Plan Template](#), [Racial Equity Impact Analysis Guide](#), and a [Budgeting for Equity Worksheet](#), for city staff, departments, elected officials, and community members to use when determining policies, practices, and programs.
- **State agencies modify community engagement efforts, so communities have a more active role in decision-making processes.** The City of Redwood published an [Equity Plan](#) and sought to better engage those who were not well-represented in policy decision-making. In light of this plan, the city engaged in a [participatory budget process](#) using the [People's Budget](#) approach so community members could use a democratic process to decide how public funds were to be spent in the following year. As a statewide example, Washington State's legislature passed community compensation guidelines to equitably increase participation from communities that have been historically excluded from policy decision-making processes. The [Washington State Office of Equity](#) released [Community Compensation Guidelines](#) for state agencies seeking to change their community engagement efforts to be more inclusive.
- **State agencies and local governments are supported in implementing the Racial Equity Framework through technical assistance.** For example, the [City of San Diego's Department of Race and Equity](#) engages in several forms of technical assistance, such as [Equity Centered Coaching](#), which supports City departments in strategizing and considering ways to advance racial equity in their procedures and policies. This department has also developed a range of [trainings for City employees and departments](#), covering topics such as budget equity, inclusive public engagement, and leading equity work. As another example, the [City of Oakland's Department of Race & Equity](#) has [organized citywide workgroups and trainings](#) to expand City staff's abilities to apply racial equity principles in their work, build leadership capacity to advance racial equity, and better engage underserved communities.
- **Community voices are incorporated via the Commission's ongoing community engagement.** The Commission approved a [Community Engagement Plan](#) intended to better incorporate community voices in the Commission's activities. Specifically, Phase IV outlines the ongoing community engagement efforts that the Commission will engage in as they support the implementation of the Racial Equity Framework. As described in their plan, the Commission will report back on their community engagement efforts in their annual reporting.

Proposed Considerations That May Influence Structural Change

We define systems change as *a planned process to adjust or realign different parts of a system so that the changes work together to ultimately shift the status quo.*² The Six Conditions of Systems Change³ framework proposes that achieving transformational systems change requires macro-level structural shifts, including changes in practices, policies, and resource flows. These structural changes are explicit and tangible, creating a trickledown effect that can influence relational and interpersonal dynamics, ultimately fostering deeper cultural and mindset shifts. As an appointed public advisory body, the Commission is charged with specific actions (e.g., technical assistance, Racial Equity Framework) that can start to influence structural changes, laying the groundwork for broader systemic transformation rather than directly shaping relational or cultural shifts. Thus, we focus on elements of structural change for this brief.

Six Conditions of Systems Change



Vital applied the Six Conditions of Systems Change framework to identify possible considerations for the Commission to consider informing structural changes across governing bodies in California. Structural changes have shown to be successful in implementing racial equity work in other governing bodies such as:

- Localities in California including the [County of Sonoma, Office of Equity](#), [City of San Diego, Department of Race & Equity](#), [City of Los Angeles, Office of Race and Equity](#), and the [City of San Francisco, Office of Racial Equity](#) have established offices or departments with the authority to require and enforce policy and process changes.
- Some California state agencies, such as the [California Air and Resource Board \(CARB\)](#), have engaged in systematic efforts to embed racial equity within their processes across the agency.
- Statewide racial equity efforts in other states have commonly been initiated by the Governor's office and have been implemented through various mechanisms, including through a statewide equity office (i.e., [Illinois](#), [Washington](#)), the Office of the Governor (i.e., [Oregon](#)), or through interagency partnerships (i.e., [Minnesota](#)).
- Examples of other Commissions on racial equity exist in several cities, including the City of New York, which established the [Commission on Racial Equity](#) to determine equity priorities for the city, publicly track equity work, and respond to public comments on the continued impacts of racial disparities.
- These governing bodies and commitments to racial equity work have been established through state legislation (e.g., Washington State), ballot measures (e.g., City of New York), and ordinances (e.g., City and County of San Francisco).

2. Foster-Fishman, P. G., Nowell, B., & Yang, H. (2007). Putting the system back into systems change: A framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 39, 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9109-0>

3. Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018, May 15). The water of systems change. FSG. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

These established organizational structures such as offices and departments have demonstrated the capacity to implement racial equity work enterprise-wide by, for example, supporting the establishment and work of core teams and the use of racial equity tools (e.g., racial equity action plans, budget equity tools) across departments and agencies. These offices have also set up accountability mechanisms to report on their own work as well as racial equity work happening across their jurisdictions. Notably, creating these racial equity offices requires additional resources, like hiring staff, administrative support, etc.

I. Practices and Policies

As a public advisory body, the Commission can recommend tools, methods, best practices, and strategies to advance racial equity in California. Structural change requires both practice and policy changes. This process can be more efficient when agencies and governing bodies go beyond policy recommendations and make policy changes. Even though the Commission is not a policymaking body, it is well-suited to suggest practices that can serve as a base for future policy changes and the start of systems change.

Actions Outlined by Commission Charge	Recommendations for Practices and Policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission is charged (Executive Order N-16-22) with several actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold quarterly community engagement meetings. • Partner with community-based organizations. • Develop a Statewide Racial Equity Framework. • Publish annual reports on the Commission’s activities. • In alignment with this charge, the Commission staff could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance on integrating racial equity into hiring, budgeting, program design, and service delivery. • Create tools and templates for agencies to use related to budgeting, strategic planning, community engagement, and measuring progress through annual reporting. • Establish a mechanism to monitor their activities and efforts to provide technical assistance and support the implementation of the Racial Equity Framework across California agencies and local government bodies. • Demonstrate effectiveness of the Commission’s activities to work towards each intermediate strategy in annual reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propose structural changes that can institutionalize the Racial Equity Framework in California. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct a centralized entity to coordinate and support the implementation of the Racial Equity Framework. • Serve as subject matter experts for the Office of the Governor and California State Legislature to inform their decision-making aimed at advancing racial equity through administrative and legislative policy. • Support capacity-building within state agencies to implement the Racial Equity Framework. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the implementation of the Racial Equity Framework (e.g., budget equity tool, Racial Equity Plans) in all state agencies with accompanying training and technical assistance opportunities. • Encourage creation of racial equity core teams in state agencies with regular interaction with leadership to support the implementation of the Racial Equity Framework. • Encourage state agencies to establish Racial Equity Action Plans and produce annual progress reports in partnership with the Commission. • Develop a system to track racial equity work across the state, including implementation of the Racial Equity Framework and accompanying racial equity tools (e.g., City of San Jose dashboard). • Provide regular updates on the progress of equity work across California.

II. Resource Flows

Enacting and sustaining structural changes that advance racial equity can be done by effective management of resource flows (such as new and existing allocations, people, knowledge, and other assets within a system). The Commission is well-positioned to recommend strategies that inform decision makers. To create more equitable and just systems, resources should be evaluated for their benefits and burdens on marginalized communities.

Proposed Actions for the Commission	Recommendations for Optimizing Resource Flows
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission staff are directed to provide technical assistance to state agencies and local governments seeking to implement the strategies outlined in the Racial Equity Framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with subject matter experts and community partners to provide technical assistance. • Ensure technical assistance includes community, where feasible and addresses the unique needs of communities and how different aspects of their identities intersect. • Partner with the organizations and collaboratives that support racial equity capacity building within governing bodies. • Organize convenings to bring together state and local government officials working to implement the Racial Equity Framework in their respective agencies and offices to break silos across governing bodies and create opportunities for new synergies and learnings to advance racial equity work across the state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify existing resources (e.g., personnel, time, funds, existing tools) available for implementation of the Racial Equity Framework. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with government officials to identify ways to incrementally shift existing work to be inclusive of elements of the Racial Equity Framework. • Allocate time to ensure staff are equipped with the skills and have the capacity to implement the Racial Equity Framework within existing processes. • Encourage staff to work together to creatively identify ways to incorporate the Racial Equity Framework into their work over time. • Pursue funding opportunities to support the implementation of the Racial Equity Framework, including training staff on ways to implement racial equity practices within existing processes, hiring additional personnel to engage in the racial equity work and supporting community engagement efforts.

Systems change and transformation take time. It will take time to undo generations of harm and achieve racial equity.

The statewide Racial Equity Framework aims to build upon existing efforts across California as an additional building block to advance racial equity in California.

The Model for Transformation, along with the accompanying activities, presents an ongoing and long-term strategy to work towards a California for all.