

May 22, 2025

Subject: Racial Equity Commission December 19, 2024 Community Engagement Committee Meeting Minutes
Prepared By: Joyce Chiao, Consultant, Abundance
Reviewed By: Toya Davis, Operations Manager, Racial Equity Commission

Recommended Action

Approval of the December 19, 2024, Racial Equity Commission Community Engagement Committee Meeting Minutes.

Racial Equity Commission December 19, 2024 - Meeting Minutes

Agenda Item #1: Welcome

A. CALL TO ORDER: Committee Lead Salas called the meeting to order at 10:08 AM. Shared a reminder that the Commission condemns acts of hate and discrimination. Committee Lead Salas shared the CA vs Hate resource line.

B. REVIEW OF THE AGENDA

C. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM: Quorum Met; 4/4 Commissioners Present

Commissioners Present:

1. Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead
2. Commissioner Candis Bowles
3. Commissioner Traco Matthews
4. Commissioner Virginia Hedrick

D. PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

Public Comment

No public comment.

Agenda Item #2: Public Comment on matters not on the agenda

Martha Calmo Ramirez of El Tímpano.

Agenda Item #3: ACTION: Approval of September 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Committee Discussion

Due to technology challenges, the Commission lost audio between approximately 10:25AM-10:32AM. As a result, there is no record of Committee Discussion to develop this section of the meeting minutes.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Agenda Item #4: ACTION: Commission Plan for Community Engagement to Inform Framework

- Executive Director to present [proposed Community Engagement Plan](#) for Committee approval

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Committee Discussion

- Due to technology challenges, the Commission lost audio between approximately 10:25AM-10:32AM. As a result, there is no record of Committee Discussion to develop this section of the meeting minutes prior to Commissioner Matthews' discussion comment.

Matthews: Reflected on Community Meet-n-Greets in Kern County and City of Oakland. Emphasized the need for the plan to embed flexibility into it. Noted that this plan does embed flexibility. Agreed with Commission Bowles about being thoughtful about what we communicate.

Salas: Highlighted the Riverside Meet-n-Greet in July 2024 as an illustration of the ways that racial equity looks different in different regions. Encouraged that community engagement and discussion topics be tailored to the community and the key issues in that region. Underscored the importance of Community Meet-n-Greets in helping the Commission understand the range of lived experience in California.

Estes: Expressed commitment and excitement to continuing the Commission's level of community engagement throughout the state.

Committee Discussion

- Committee to share feedback on proposed Community Engagement Plan.

Hedrick: Emphasized the need to think about how to do more effective outreach towards Tribal communities and leaders, as well as other communities, across California. Expressed a desire to see either this point explicitly articulated in the plan or thoughts on how to reach communities who are not currently being reached.

Estes: Highlighted that the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation recently began working with a Tribal consultant. Acknowledged the desire include more explicit detail on outreach plans for those communities not currently being reached.

Bowles: Consider data disaggregation to identify any gaps in outreach and tailor outreach more effectively.

Matthews: Affirmed need to identify these gaps to deliver better outreach and support, such as in the case of providing relevant language access. Reminded the Committee to not allow imperfection impede progress. Reiterated support for the plan.

Salas: Agreed with continuing the approach of partnering with an organization to develop appropriate and responsive engagement for that region. Reiterated the importance of language access. Recommended that the Commission explore how state demography may be changing and thereby impacting community engagement. Agreed with Commissioner Matthews in supporting the plan. Expressed a desire to document learning from the process to inform future engagement.

Estes: Reflected Commissioner feedback. Noted the addition of detailing specific outreach and emphasizing data disaggregation to account for all communities. Noted the addition of a specific call-out around shifts in population and immigration. Noted the recommendation of documenting learnings.

Public Comment

Vince Leus of Prevention Institute and California Racial Equity Coalition, Niko Shahbazian of Catalyst California and California Racial Equity Coalition.

Motion by Commissioner Hedrick and seconded by Commissioner Bowles.

Motion passes (4-0-0*). *Marks abstention or absence from vote.

Agenda Item #3: ACTION: Approval of September 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

- Returned to agenda item #3 to conduct a roll call vote on approving the September 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Motion by Commissioner Hedrick and seconded by Commissioner Matthews.

Motion passes (4-0-0*). *Marks abstention or absence from vote.

Agenda Item #5: 15-Minute Recess

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Committee Lead Salas called a recess at 10:55 AM.

Committee Lead Salas called the meeting to order at 11:08 AM.

Committee Lead Salas called for a 10-minute recess to adhere to schedule.

Agenda Item #6: DISCUSSION: "Simplifying Communication to Support Inclusive Community Engagement" – Panel Discussion and Committee Discussion

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Jeffery Marino, Director, Office of Data and Innovation

Allyn Brooks-LaSure, Vice President, Communications, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Panel Discussion

Estes: Can you both explain the necessity of using plain language to engage communities equitably?

Brooks-LaSure: Communication is supposed to do something. Speaking in jargon creates more distance between ourselves and the members of the communities with whom we are trying to be in partnership. You can partner with communities successfully when you do not do that.

Marino: Words and promises are meant to lead to an action and improve the lives of Californians. We need to be clear in our words and invest in what it takes to hear one another. Meeting folks where they are means being able to communicate clearly, listen, and respond. Plain language is necessary for the success of our democracy and our state.

Estes: Allyn, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has released a Structural Racism and Health Messaging Guide, including multiple Health Equity Graphics, emphasizing the need for multiple graphics of the same subject to increase accessibility across a larger audience. Could you speak to the importance of visual messaging for accessible communication?

Brooks-LaSure: We underestimate the power of visuals. Metaphors allow us to cut across barriers and distance from different communities. Visuals and graphics can be incredibly powerful and sometimes in conflict with the words we are saying.

Estes: Jeffery, you're a self-described "data storyteller." What is the importance of storytelling in making the complex language of data more accessible, and how do tools at the Office of Data and Innovation, like the Plain Language Equity Toolkit, help facilitate that accessibility?

Marino: At the Office of Data and Innovation, part of our work is to do human-centered design and government services. Our experts in content design have driven our plain language efforts, including our plain language standards that we have implemented as part of the Governor's Executive Order on Equity (EO N-16-22). When designing content and documents that we share with one another, how you prioritize what goes on the page can change the effectiveness of your communication. Visual design, content design, and layout on the page are critical. Storytelling of data is important. Behind data are communities and people. Our Office views data as a signal in the noise. To understand that signal, you need to have a conversation with the people who are sending out that signal. Likewise, you need to tell a compelling story to inspire action based on data.

Estes: You have both highlighted the necessity of plain language and simple communication for meaningful community engagement. How can we broaden the use of plain language beyond community engagement to implement as a standard for all forms of communication?

Marino: The Plain Language Act was passed under the Obama administration. California does have legislation requiring the use of plain language in government documents. However, the lack of a measure for plain language in the policy makes the act of getting plain language into law very difficult. Setting a standard enables clear communication of need and necessity. It provides a benchmark. Standards are being adopted. The Office has released trainings to help State staff and departments to implement that standard. We encourage frontline staff to

participate in these free trainings. Frontline staff understand the importance of translating government information into plain language. They engage their leaders and legal teams to institute plain language standards in an ongoing and sustainable way. Start somewhere, and find your allies who can help move plain language standards forward more broadly.

Brooks-LaSure: We have to model it first. We have to not just tell people how it works but also show how we be more impactful by just speaking more clearly. We have to think about the people for whom we are doing this work every time we are trying to be in dialogue with other people.

Estes: What are two key takeaways that the Committee and Commission should be aware of to advance plain language or simple communication?

Brooks-LaSure: Many of us do not have a sense of what communications are happening in community already. We are injecting ourselves into conversations that may have been happening for awhile before we arrived. We need to understand how conversations are currently happening on social media, in faith communities, etc. The second takeaway is that plain language can start with us. It does need a major plan with PowerPoint presentations and thick documents. We can model clear communications from day one.

Marino: One takeaway would be that we use plain language because it is for everyone. We have examples from our daily lives. Plain language is being used all the time to engage us, from a button that says “buy now” or “like.” It helps to move people through the process more quickly and builds trust. It is easier to translate plain language into other languages. Secondly, how we communicate is a holistic approach. Plain language is a discipline and a mindset. Use the most appropriate form of communication that is going to resonate most with the people with whom you are interacting.

Committee Discussion

Salas: Thanked the panelists. Invited Committee members to share reflections, thoughts, and questions.

Matthews: Thanked the panelists for their time and insights. Appreciated the modeling from both panelists, who spoke about plain language in a very technical yet very accessible way. Reflected that leadership is about communication and creating a bond, not creating that distance and proving your competence. Emphasized that we can and must commit to communicating in plain language for the people we want to serve well.

Hendrick: Reflected that structural racism is built by people and can be unbuilt by people. Highlighted that, as a member of the Yurok Tribe, visuals, place names, monuments, and town names are powerful, often taken for granted, and pieces of structural racism that we all acknowledge and that uphold very racist concepts and structures.

Salas: Thanked the speakers. Reflected on daily work to discuss what constitutional and civil and human rights really mean in lived experiences. Asked Director Marino to share more ways to communicate in plain language in government, such as in the voting process.

Marino: Emphasized the need for investment and rigor. Reflected that the voter information guide is improving but will continue to require thoughtful, meaningful engagement to maintain

the strength of that part of the democratic process. Highlighted that communities already encounter many barriers to voting and that mail-in ballots, which were adopted during the pandemic, have been impactful. Encouraged us to not wait for the next crisis to continue innovating. Recommended that we continue to push our legislators towards plain language.

Public Comment

Malena Dala of El Tímpano and Vevila Blossoming Bear of California Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Agenda Item #7: Next Steps for Staff Action

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Committee Discussion

No Committee Discussion.

Agenda Item #8: Meeting Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 11:47 AM.