

Notes from Meeting Applying the Racial Equity Toolkit to the SAC's Work
Nov. 29, 2022

Participants: Stephen Gockley, Teresa Bosteter, Holly O'Neil, Mardi Solomon (Eve Smason-Marcus was unable to attend)

Purpose: The purpose of this subcommittee meeting was to apply the [Racial Equity Toolkit: Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) to the SAC's work. Questions in the Toolkit were summarized into a worksheet which was provided to the subcommittee before the meeting (attached below meeting notes).

Meeting Outcome: The group utilized the Toolkit to evaluate the process of the SAC. Overall, the content of the Vision, Values, Goals, Needs/Gaps and Recommendations shows understanding of inequities and commitment to change. There is clearly a lack of adequate data, and that data is necessary to monitor whether we are changing the disproportionate incarceration of BIPOC community members. This is already called out in the Needs and Recommendations chart. What appears to be the most important strategy for change, however, is to ensure inclusion in the process of implementing the recommendations, and monitoring results. Hence, the subcommittee recommends this addition:

Proposed Addition to the SYSTEMS NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Need: BIPOC communities and people with lived experience with incarceration (personal or family member) need to be directly included in decision-making about policies and practices in the criminal legal system, actions that should be taken, and monitoring of results.

Recommendation: Ensure that during the various steps of implementing the recommendations in the Needs Assessment, BIPOC communities and people with lived experience are included in that process in a way that is intentional, meaningful, and genuinely accessible.

Meeting Discussion:

Opening:

- Holly asked about people's experience of applying the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) questions to the SAC's draft Needs/Recommendations/Outcomes chart. Everyone agreed it was challenging.
- In doing the analysis and trying to answer the RET questions, we discovered more questions, which is OK.
- When the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) makes its recommendations to the County Council, the report should make clear that we have done our best to apply a racial equity lens.
- Stephen observed that the RET analysis could be done on two levels:
 - Evaluate the content of the SAC's work (or)
 - Evaluate the process for the SAC's work.

We decided to look at the second level, the SAC *process*.

- We proceeded to go through the questions in the toolkit; adjusting the questions as needed to make them applicable.

How have communities of color have been involved in the process?

- Jail inmate/staff surveys
- The Vida Agency's (TVA) work

Could we/should we do more? Was our approach adequate?

- We have done a pretty good job given the community engagement work and identifying areas where there isn't much data. The criminal legal system sections have some data, but not enough.
- We never have enough data. We will never be able to adequately evaluate implementation without better data.

Ways the Needs Assessment process has fallen short, when considering a racial equity perspective:

- Not enough inclusion of people of color on the SAC.
- Having a representative from each of the tribes didn't meet the need for their inclusion, as they did not choose to participate.
- Not enough inclusion of people of color who have been incarcerated.
- We don't have any people of color helping with this RET analysis today.
- TVA began their work late in the process.
- Needed more outreach to tribes sooner.
- Asking for representatives from the Lummi Nation & Nooksack Tribe is a flawed approach because it:
 - Doesn't honor the fact that the tribes are sovereign governments.
 - They are busy and understaffed.
 - They are being asked to participate in white processes, some of which are with groups that are rife with racist behaviors.
 - One person shouldn't be responsible for representing a whole collection of experiences & perspectives.
 - They often aren't paid for their time to participate (the SAC didn't offer compensation).

Some Actions to address these weaknesses:

- Could ask Dr. Alexes Harris (UW) to review Needs Assessment.
- Could ask Racial Equity Commission to review Needs Assessment.
- Could recommend to County Council that they bring ordinary people from disproportionately affected communities into the process to help the Council in the next steps that will follow the Needs Assessment.
- Could recommend to County Council that during the various steps of implementing the recommendations in the Needs Assessment, BIPOC communities and people with lived experience should be intentionally and meaningfully included. Their perspectives are important in the development of actions and the monitoring of progress.
- There are many ways this can occur. Creating a committee, or having representatives on a committee, may not be the right approach. Every community of color has different needs and cultural norms requiring different approaches for effective inclusion.

RET #2: Data – In relationship to each of the 19 priorities, where do we have data, and where are the gaps? What data gaps would be the top priorities for enabling us to identify racial inequities, prioritize actions, and monitor change?

- The recommendations we are making will divert people from incarceration regardless of race.
- Are there disparities in who is engaged in behavioral health services?
- Need a system by which progress would be evaluated. Recommendations about having good data and a data dashboard are a start.
- The intended outcomes are vague. Just having data doesn't get us there. How are the outcomes measured? Who measures/monitors progress? Who says it is adequate?

- Engage communities of color in the evaluative/interpretive analysis about whether we have achieved the outcomes.
- Ensure there is accountability to making progress. The system of accountability is an iterative process, looking at progress we think we have made and then making adjustments.

RET #3: Community Engagement – What community-based organizations do we need to partner with to advance racial equity in our 19 priorities? Where are the juncture points that you think engagements will be most critical?

- The focus on community-based organizations might be off. Different communities have different needs and preferences for engagement.
- How do people who aren't part of the org. get their voices heard?
- Could reach out to communities of color that SAC members are affiliated with (for example, the recovery groups Teresa meets with).
 - An effective way to reach out to people in substance use disorder treatment is to go through treatment providers who could encourage clients to share their perspectives.
- Should we get more grassroots rather than going through orgs.? How helpful will grassroots feedback be?

RET #4: Analysis and Strategies – When you look at the 19 priorities, what possible adverse impacts or unintended consequences should we be aware of? How might those be addressed?

- We don't have the data to know whether some of our recommendations will reduce racial disparities and be more equitable. We don't know if there are disparities in who accesses behavioral health services. Are there racial biases in the services/systems we are putting people into? If so, we won't be successful.
- We haven't pulled apart *why* people of color are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated. How are we going to measure and monitor change? What is our theory of change?
- Two issues: 1) Can we stop incarcerating people who can be dealt with another way? 2) Are we treating people fairly/equitably on a racial basis?

RET #5: Implementation – When you look at the 19 priorities, where do you see the potential barriers for implementation, and how do you think those barriers can be overcome? Where are the greatest opportunities for near-term changes?

- Our county has a history of racism. Between that and the current political climate, people of color are hurt, angry, lacking trust in our government and systems. Need to acknowledge historical disempowerment of so many people, and the embedded racism in current "lock 'em up" views. Address the fact this will have to be a long-term process of healing. Changes in carceral, law enforcement, and treatment systems are long-term but have to be made for community health.
- Opportunities for near-term changes: Put more money into those programs we know are having a positive effect. Expand these programs' capacity rather than putting people in jail.

Action Steps:

- **Mardi** will ask Perry/Jackie about data on racial disparities in access to BH services.
- **Stephen** will ask Mike Parker about racial disparities in access to homeless services.
- **Holly & Mardi** will write up these meeting notes & recommendations and email to committee to refine our thinking. If we need to meet again, we will.

Racial Equity Assessment Worksheet

Based on the [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) from the [Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) for the SAC Subcommittee

1) **Proposal:** When considering the 19 priority *Needs/Gaps, Recommendations, and Intended Outcomes* through a racial equity lens, **what results do you think we should be aiming for?**

2) **Data:** In relationship to each of the 19 priorities, where do we have data, and where are the gaps? **What data gaps would be the top priorities** for enabling us to identify racial inequities, prioritize actions, and monitor change?

3) **Community Engagement:** What community-based organizations do we need to partner with to advance racial equity in our 19 priorities? **Where are the juncture points that you think engagements will be most critical?**

4) **Analysis and Strategies:** When you look at the 19 priorities, what possible adverse impacts or unintended consequences should we be aware of? **How might those be addressed?**

5) **Implementation:** When you look at the 19 priorities, where do you see the potential barriers for implementation, and **how do you think those barriers can be overcome? Where are the greatest opportunities for near-term changes?**

6) **Accountability and Communication:** How will we ensure accountability? **Who will be monitoring and communicating whether racial inequities are being addressed, and changing over time?**