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FOR A FAIR AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON
RACE & EQUITY

I. Title/Date

SUBMISSION to UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent
January 2015

II. Reporting Organization

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. Across the country, governmental jurisdictions are:

- Making a commitment to achieving racial equity
- Focusing on the power and influence of their own institutions, and
- Working in partnership with others

When this occurs, significant leverage and expansion opportunities emerge, setting the stage for the achievement of racial equity in our communities.

GARE provides a multi-layered approach for maximum impact by:

- Supporting a cohort of jurisdictions that are at the forefront of work to achieve racial equity. A few jurisdictions have already done substantive work and are poised to be a model for others. Supporting a targeted cohort of jurisdictions and providing best practices, tools and resources is helping to build and sustain current efforts and build a national movement for racial equity.
- Developing a "pathway for entry" into racial equity work for new jurisdictions from across the country. Many jurisdictions lack the leadership and/or infrastructure to address issues of racial inequity. Using the learnings and resources from the cohort will create pathways for increased engagement and expansion of the Alliance.
- Supporting and building local and regional collaborations that are broadly inclusive and focused on achieving racial equity. To eliminate racial inequities in our communities, developing a "collective impact" approach firmly grounded in inclusion and equity is necessary. Government can play a key role in collaborations for achieving racial equity, centering community and leveraging institutional partnerships.

To find out more about GARE, visit www.racialequityalliance.org.

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III. National or Local

The focus of this submission is on the local or municipal level of government, including city and county government, and even Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

IV. Issue/s Statement and Summary

This submission focuses on the role of local government in the production and disruption of structurally inequitable outcomes for communities of color, especially people of African descent.

Background & Issue Statement

From the inception of our country, government at the local, regional, state and federal level has played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequity, including everything from determining who is a citizen, who can vote, who can own property, who is property, and where one can live, to name but a few. Governmental laws, policies and practices created a racial hierarchy and determined who benefits and who is burdened based on race.

For us to achieve racial equity, the fundamental transformation of government is necessary.

Current inequities are sustained by historical legacies and structures and systems that repeat patterns of exclusion. The Civil Rights movement was led by communities, and government was frequently the target. One of the many successes of the Civil Rights movement was making racial discrimination illegal. However, despite progress in addressing explicit discrimination, racial inequities continue to be deep, pervasive, and persistent across the country. Racial inequities exist across all indicators for success, including in education, criminal justice, jobs, housing, public infrastructure, and health, regardless of region. In 2010, for example, African Americans made up 13% of the population but had only 2.7% of the country's wealth. Additionally, the median net worth for a white family was $134,000, while the median net worth for a Hispanic family was $14,000, and for an African American family it was $11,000.[1]

Good Practice

Across the country, we have seen the introduction of many policies and programmatic efforts to advance racial equity. These individual approaches are important, but are not enough. To achieve racial equity, implementation of a comprehensive strategy is necessary.

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[1] https://www.raceforward.org/videos/systemic-racism

We have seen success with advancing racial equity and government transformation with the following six strategies:

1. **Use a racial equity framework**. Jurisdictions need to use a racial equity framework that clearly names the history of government and envisions and operationalizes a new role; and utilizes clear and easily understood definitions of racial equity and inequity, implicit and explicit bias, and individual, institutional, and structural racism.

2. **Build organizational capacity**. Jurisdictions need to be committed to the breadth (all functions) and depth (throughout hierarchy) of institutional transformation. While the leadership of electeds and top officials is critical, changes take place on the ground, and infrastructure that creates racial equity experts and teams throughout local and regional government is necessary.

3. **Implement racial equity tools**. Racial inequities are not random —they have been created and sustained over time. Inequities will not disappear on their own. Tools must be used to change the policies, programs, and practices that are perpetuating inequities, as well as used in the development of new policies and programs.

4. **Be data-driven**. Measurement must take place at two levels – first, to measure the success of specific programmatic and policy changes, and second, to develop baselines, set goals, and measure progress towards community goals.

5. **Partner with other institutions and communities**. The work of local and regional government on racial equity is necessary, but it is not sufficient. To achieve racial equity in the community, local and regional government must be working in partnership with communities and other institutions.

6. **Communicate and act with urgency**. While there is often a belief that change is hard and takes time, we have seen repeatedly, that when change is a priority and urgency is felt, change is embraced and can take place quickly. Building in institutional accountability mechanisms via a clear plan of action will allow accountability. Collectively, we must create greater urgency and public will to achieve racial equity.

V.   Recommended Questions

We recommend the UN Working Group on People of African Descent ask the following questions of local government during your visit:

- Do current decision-making processes (such as budget review or policy analysis) take into account potential disparate impacts on people of African descent?
- Are there any programs or initiatives that currently seek to explicitly eliminate race as a predictive factor of life outcomes?
- Are government staff currently encouraged or supported to deepen their understanding of the historical roots of racial inequality or the current structural dynamics that perpetuate and exacerbate disparities?

VI. Suggested Recommendations

To institutionalize racial equity within the public sector, local government leaders need to take action on three different fronts. They must **normalize** racial equity as a key priority with a shared language and definitions, such as through promoting open discussions about racialized impacts and through publicly affirming racial equity goals. They must **operationalize** efforts so that racial equity is not just another item on the to-do list but ingrained in government operations in the policymaking process and through the use of data to measure and track progress. Finally, they must also **organize** both internally via staff trainings and organizational infrastructure as well as externally through community partnerships with residents of color, community based organizations, and other stakeholders.

More specifically, GARE recommends local governments take the following actions:

1) **Clearly articulate a racial equity mission, vision and goals.** Local government leaders need to put a stake in the ground declaring racial equity as a priority for their internal and external operations. Racial equity needs to not only be defined but publicly and formally elevated as a clear north star to guide all government operations. A clear articulation of racial equity as a government priority would also include the setting of specific goals, such as equitable service delivery, a diverse and representative government workforce, or a commitment to equity in all government decision making. This clear prioritization significantly supports the normalization of racial equity.

2) **Systemically consider the disparate racial impacts in government decision making.** Too often, policies and programs are developed and implemented without thoughtful consideration of racial equity. When racial equity is not explicitly brought into operations and decision-making, racial inequities are likely to be perpetuated. For racial equity efforts to be most effective, local governments need to explicitly consider the racialized impacts of all decisions, including policies, programs, practices, and budgets. The use of racial equity tools that facilitate this consideration are an important step in operationalizing equity. For more details about how to build or use racial equity tools, see this resource from GARE: http://racialequityalliance.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf

3) **Organize and participate in staff racial equity trainings.** An early step in the long-term transformation of local government is the investment in staff capacity and understanding of the historical roots and structural causes of current racial inequality. Racial equity trainings not only provide staff a shared language and a shared understanding of core concepts such as institutional and structural racism, they also provide staff with the tools and strategies to incorporate racial equity goals into their own daily practice. Trainings are an important early step in organizing internally for racial equity in government.

<u>Additional resources:</u>

Resource Guides
- [Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action](#) (October, 2015)
- [Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity](#) (October, 2015)

Issue Papers
- [Contracting for Racial Equity: Best Local Government Practices that Advance Racial Equity in Government Contracting and Procurement](#) (November, 2015)
- [Public Sector Jobs: Opportunities for Advancing Racial Equity](#) (June, 2015)