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Racial Equity Action Plan
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OFFICE OF EQUITY
COUNTY OF SONOMA

Racial Equity Action Plan

Prepared for:
The County of Sonoma

Prepared by:
Equity First Consulting, LLC
The County of Sonoma Office of Equity
The County of Sonoma Core Team Steering Committee

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Land Acknowledgement

Sonoma County and the County of Sonoma are located within the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary land relationships of the Kashia Pomo and Southern Pomo, Wappo, and Coast Miwok Tribal Nations, which include the federally recognized Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and Lytton Rancheria of California.

The Office of Equity has not adopted a land acknowledgement yet. We recognize that unless there is direction and subsequent allocation of resources for the County of Sonoma, as an institution, to authentically engage with Tribal Nations and members, a land acknowledgement standing alone cannot replace the need for the creation of collaborative and meaningful relationships founded on respect, reciprocity, shared values and agreements, and a deep understanding of Tribal history and sovereignty, grounded in actions intended to heal past and present harm.

Acknowledgements

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- Community based leaders' group

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- Focus group participants and survey respondents
- Department Action Plan Liaisons
- County Administrator Projects, Grants and Special Projects Team
- All of the equity champions within all County departments

Executive Summary

In the summer of 2020, the County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors created the County of Office of Equity, taking a meaningful step to recognize and celebrate our local government's powerful role in unseating racial inequity in our communities and within our internal systems. This decision was grounded on the work that led to the creation of the [Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar of the County's 5-year Strategic Plan](#), which was adopted in 2021, with the goal to "achieve racial equity in County service provision and ensure a workforce reflective of the community we serve." The pillar is made up of specific goals and objectives that will lead to normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing (Bernabei, 2017; Rudiger, 2021) a new way of seeing our challenges, conducting analysis, and implementing new policies to achieve this goal.

Among the work that the Office of Equity has done to embed racial equity within County systems has been the creation and stewardship of Core Team 1.0, a learning community of equity champions from different County departments. Participants worked together for a year and a half to deepen their understanding of racial equity concepts and learn how to operationalize equity in their areas of expertise. While learning how to apply the Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) methodology (Equity and Results, 2023), the Office of Equity and the Core Team 1.0 began to see patterns among Core Team members' experiences, the exit of leaders of color from the County workforce, and the lack of representation of staff of color in leadership positions (as documented by the data on the Central Human Resources [Workforce Demographics](#) dashboard).

Understanding the power of staff's own lived experiences as people of color in the face of these patterns, in 2023, the OOE convened a Steering Committee, made up of Core Team 1.0 members, to create a roadmap to operationalize the strategic guidance of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan pillar. The result is the County's first Racial Equity Action Plan (Action Plan), approved by the Board of Supervisors on May 17, 2024.

Key Questions Addressed by the Racial Equity Action Plan:

1. What are the conditions of well-being that we want County staff to experience?
2. What racial inequities exist within the internal infrastructure of the County that prevent these conditions from occurring?
3. Why do these racial inequities exist and persist?
4. What strategic actions can the County take to disrupt the roots of these inequities?

5. How can the County measure the efficacy of these strategic actions?

Snapshot of the Racial Equity Action Plan

The answers to these questions and the solutions to address them are reflected in the following snapshot of the Racial Equity Action Plan. The rest of this document will explain in more detail the process, methodology and implementation of the Action Plan.

COUNTY OF SONOMA RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN SNAPSHOT

Goal	All County staff, especially staff of color, feel a sense of belonging and are supported to achieve their career goals within the County organization.		
Barriers	County management is not representative of the racial demographics of Sonoma County.	Staff of color report disproportionate dissatisfaction levels with management practices.	
Why	There are few mechanisms supporting managers in hiring and promoting qualified staff members of color to leadership levels.	Management practices do not reflect sufficient capacity, skill sets, and/or interest to contribute to the empowerment of staff, especially staff of color.	The County system values productivity over the impact that working conditions have on people, especially staff of color.
Recommended Strategies	County creates capacity for equity work and expands pipelines for hiring and career advancement.	County offers support and creates accountability for management at all levels to develop an understanding of racial equity principles and practices.	County invests in data collection and reporting systems to drive change that is responsive to staff experiences.
Accountability	• Percentage of staff hired and promoted into management positions	• Percentage of Department Heads, supervisors, and managers implementing anti-racist practices. • Percentage of staff who see management taking new kinds of actions in service of equity.	• Percentages of staff retention and turnover. • Percentage of staff who feel like the County is offering a positive space to support their work and well-being.

Part 1: Rationale

Why a Racial Equity Action Plan for Sonoma County?

Sonoma County's collective well-being and prosperity are impacted by significant inequities, and data shows that the greatest disparities occur along racial and socio-economic lines (Measure of America, 2021). Because racial inequities have been deeply rooted into government systems, policies, and practices, the County has a unique opportunity and responsibility to address these inequities by improving outcomes for County staff and community members who have experienced generational marginalization.

The County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors acknowledged and accepted the County's responsibility to unseat these racial inequities when they included a Racial Equity & Social Justice Pillar in the Sonoma County's Five-Year [Strategic Plan](). This strategic direction informs policies and projects and defines the core commitments that the County wishes to prioritize.

Building on this work, the Racial Equity Action Plan provides an intentional road map, made up of strategies, action steps, and accountability mechanisms focused on our internal systems, which 1) builds on equity work that is already happening within County departments, and 2) seeks to provide additional supports to further advance racial equity through enabling collaboration across County departments and consistency as an organization.

Our Approach to Research and Plan Development

Strengthening Equity by Starting from Within
Building a strong foundation starts from within (Equity in the Center, 2019; Nelson & Tyrell, 2015). This strategic approach recognizes that County staff are integral members of the Sonoma County community and represent the broad range of experiences and identities of the communities we serve. By establishing the foundations to advance racial equity work within our organization, we create a strong backbone for generating transformative change in the broader community in the following ways:

(1) Modeling and refining anti-racist leadership: The way we support the County workforce, especially staff and leadership of color, can serve as a model for how we

approach solutions to greater inequities experienced by Sonoma County communities, both by refining strategies internally before scaling externally, and by positioning co-leadership between communities of color and County leaders as a critical practice for change in Sonoma County.

(2) Creating more nuanced and contextualized policy recommendations: Research shows that greater diversity among leadership leads to more equity-driven decisions and policies (Cook & Glass, 2015). Creating the conditions for diverse leadership (which includes shifts in workplace culture and policies related to hiring, promotion, and advancement) will allow the County to shift policies and practices to better address the barriers that communities of color face with the solutions that will work for them.

(3) Creating capacity to connect with communities experiencing marginalization: One of the ways in which diversity in leadership positions can impact external policy is the ability to connect with members of the communities most impacted by systemic inequities who are outside of the County structure. The community engagement work sponsored by the County throughout 2023 showed that folks in these communities are better able to connect and engage with County staff and leaders who can use their bicultural and institutional knowledge to bridge the gap between the institution and the community (Sonoma County Office of Equity, 2024).

(4) Minimizing staff turnover: Public service is exhausting work for people from all backgrounds (Noblet & Rodwell, 2008; Ruble, 2022). Research (Humphrey, 2021; Manning, 2021; Ruble, 2022) and the data analyzed for this plan show that staff of color do more emotional labor (on top of their public service work) than their White peers in the County of Sonoma. This additional labor creates a less sustainable working environment, which increases burnout and the likelihood of staff turnover (Bloomberg, n.d.; Jeung et al, 2018). Additionally, research shows that turnover rates are lower for Black women when there are more Black women on their team (Linos, 2023). Creating the conditions for psychological safety at work has the opposite effect, minimizing burnout and turnover (Kerrissey et al, 2022; Lindzon, 2021), so that staff can thrive, and the County can get the desired return on investment from training, developing, and retaining staff. In other words, everybody wins.

Designing-to-the-Margins in Order to Expand the Center

This Action Plan recognizes that "the creation and perpetuation of racial inequities has been baked into government" (GARE, n.d.), and that institutions are not designed to capture or respond to community wisdom equitably (Gonzalez, 2021). Existing data demonstrates that the needs and wisdom of people of color in Sonoma County are still not

reflected in our work, staff or community outcomes (Sonoma County HR, 2023; Measure of America, 2021), despite best intentions. This is why this Action Plan focuses on systemic levers.

A Design-to-the-Margins framework centers the most impacted and marginalized community members in all stages of policy and program design, from imagination to implementation. This prioritization begins with race, and includes a range of intersecting identities, such as primary language, documentation status, wealth and income, gender, etc., which impact the extent to which people are likely to have equitable access to decision-making power and/or experience harm perpetuated at the systems level (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw 2017; GARE, n.d.). The Design-to-the-Margins framework recognizes that the people who are "closest to the problem are closest to the solution" (Martin, 2017), and that the people living on the margins have a unique vantage point from which to envision and create, yet they are often simultaneously furthest from institutional power (hooks, 1984). By placing loving focus on historically marginalized communities and their perspectives, this framework seeks to create equitable outcomes from which the broader community can benefit.

Applying the County of Sonoma's Theory of Change

Creating a world where daily processes and actions naturally generate equitable outcomes will require ongoing and intentional interventions. The Office of Equity follows the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) strategic approach to advance racial equity within County institutions by 1) normalizing, 2) organizing, and 3) operationalizing racial equity work (Bernabei, 2017; Rudiger, 2021).

Strategic Stages	What this means	What this looks like at the County of Sonoma
Normalize	- Use a racial equity framework - Operate with urgency and accountability	- Strategic Planning Pillar - Establishment of the OOE - County declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis
Organize	Build organizational capacity	- Creation of Core Team 1.0 and Racial Equity Learning Program - Creation of the Core Team

		Steering Committee
	● Partner with other organizations and communities	● Cross-departmental alignment and coordination ● Racial Equity 101 and Anti-racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) Trainings ● Collaborations around the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Community Resilience Programs
Operationalize	● Implement racial equity tools ● Be data-driven	● Racial Equity Analyses for significant Board items ● Anti-racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) Trainings ● Development of a Racial Equity Action Plan (Action Plan)

Strategic Stages of Institutionalized Equity Work at the County of Sonoma

Year 6-7
(2023-24)

Steering Committee Works to Identify & Address Racial Inequities
- Leadership training
- Research/engagement phase
- Development of Racial Equity Action Plan

County declares racism a Public Health Crisis

Year 3-4
(2020-21)

Strategic Prioritization of Equity

- County of Sonoma Office of Equity is approved and established
- Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar is adopted as part of the County's 5 year Strategic Plan

Year 4-5
(2021-22)

Core Team 1.0 Convenes & Learns
- Racial Equity Foundations
- Affinity and Multiracial Space
- Train the Trainer Workshop
- Anti-Racist Results-based Accountability Training

Year 1-2
(2018-19)

Equity Work Begins
- 13 departments participate in GARE (Government Alliance on Race and Equity) Learning Cohort

Part 2: Methodology

The process for developing this Racial Equity Action Plan was phased as follows:

Phase 0: Creating a Space Built on Trust, Reciprocity, and Accountability

Core Team 1.0 spent nearly a year working first in affinity space and then as a multi-racial group, developing a collective understanding of racial equity foundational principles and patterns and building the trust to step into brave spaces and lean into discomfort. Core Team 1.0 participants then had the option to participate in learning to (a) facilitate conversations about racial equity, and/or (b) use the Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) methodology in their work, eventually creating a collective vision for eliminating racist outcomes in County systems.

In year two, communication went out to Core Team 1.0 members, inviting people who had the desire, capacity, and skills to apply to join the Core Team Steering Committee, which would be charged with creating a Racial Equity Action Plan for the County of Sonoma. The Office of Equity and consulting team were intentional about creating a space of trust, mutual accountability, and shared humanity for Steering Committee members. This team-building time and work became crucial to creating the conditions to launch into complex work in later stages.

The strategies engaged in this phase included:
- Prioritizing relationship- and community-building and repairing harm even in the face of urgency.
- Person-centered working spaces including deep check-ins to start meetings and reflection surveys at the end to help shape working spaces and relationships.
- Flexible working groups, including a mix of affinity and multiracial space and task-specific committees.
- Building capacity and identifying and removing barriers to meaningful participation

Phase 1: Research and Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability

In the spirit of community engagement and to integrate and amplify the wisdom shared with the County of Sonoma in the past, the Steering Committee Research Team reviewed existing data from various reports, surveys, and demographic data sets to assess the state of race equity within the County of Sonoma. Steering Committee members then identified a list of key themes that emerged frequently and throughout the organization. Based on

this data, the Steering Committee collectively made the decision to focus further data collection and AR-RBA analysis efforts internally on the experience of County staff.

Antiracist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) begins with impact and backs into solutions to ensure that solutions are selected with a focus on the root causes of the racial inequity. It requires organizations to deeply consider the answer to the question, how will we know that people are better off as a result of our work? (Equity and Results, 2023).

Using the Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) methodology and completing a root-cause analysis, the Steering Committee developed an understanding of root causes of inequities impacting the County, identified why these inequities persisted, developed strategies that address the root causes, and performance and better-off measures that hold the County accountable to whether people, especially people of color, are truly better off because of them. The two major themes identified in this process were: 1) increasing the sense of belonging for County staff and 2) supporting career advancement for County staff, especially staff of color.

Phase 2: Engagement with County Staff and Community-Based Leaders

After the Research Team made significant progress on the AR-RBA analysis, the Engagement Team planned focus groups with staff, with the following goals: (1) to present the AR-RBA analysis results and gather perspectives on whether the proposed strategies resonated with staff and community-based leaders, (2) to gather more data to help expand strategies, and (3) to find out if anything was missing. Participants across County departments, job types, experiences, and racial identities shared their thoughts and experiences with the Steering Committee. All participants were provided with the strategies and terminology before the focus group, to allow for additional reflection time.

To recruit participants, the Steering Committee presented at a County of Sonoma Department Agency and Head Association (DAHA) meeting and asked department leaders for nominations for liaisons within each department, whose first assignment was to help select participants for the focus groups. The Steering Committee stressed the importance of hearing from both management (Supervisors/Managers/Division Directors) and front-facing staff in this process. With the support of departmental liaisons, at least two staff members from each department, representing those two categories, were invited to participate in the focus groups. Two meeting opportunities were offered for each job category to promote honest answers and a safe space for sharing. The Steering Committee

also invited the participation of Core Team members in Affinity groups (Black Affinity, Non-Black People of Color Affinity, White Affinity). During this engagement phase, 60 staff members participated in the focus groups. Relevant demographic information from focus group participants includes:

Racial Identity

Percentage	Racial Identity
40.70%	Hispanic or Latine/x
30.00%	White
9.30%	Asian
9.30%	Prefer to self-describe
7.40%	Native American/Indigenous Peoples/First Peoples (American Indian) or Alaska Native
7.40%	Black or African American
3.70%	Middle Eastern or North African
3.70%	Prefer not to say

Role within the County

Percentage	County Role
38.20%	Supervisor or Manager
30.90%	Front-facing staff, client-facing (ex: front desk/ receptionist, social worker, eligibility worker, community health worker, community engagement person, etc.)
14.50%	Administrative staff, non-client facing, non-managerial (ex: operations, financial, etc.)
10.90%	Executive Leadership (Department Head, Division Manager within a Department)

5.50%	Prefer to self-describe

The Steering Committee also held two focus groups, one in English and one Spanish, with community-based leaders to gather external community perspectives about the draft of the Racial Equity Action Plan. Community-based leaders responded to content and questions that were adapted from what was shared during the focus groups with staff.

Phase 3: Analysis of Engagement and Incorporation into the Draft Action Plan

After the focus groups, the engagement team analyzed the additional data obtained to find common themes and feedback around the presented strategies. The Writing Team incorporated the feedback and adapted the draft strategies in response to the data gathered during the focus group process.

Phase 4: Strategy, Reflection, and Assessment of Capacity and Needs

Once the draft Action Plan strategies were revised to include data from the focus groups, the Steering Community Strategy Team held reflection sessions with staff in the Spring of 2024 to ensure that wisdom shared was accurately reflected in the revised strategies, as well as to understand what would be needed to set the Action Plan up for success. The Strategy Team facilitated two reflection sessions with prior focus group invitees, including breakouts by race affinity and management level, which had a total of 33 participants. They also sought feedback on the Action Plan from the County Administrator, the Central Human Resources Director, County Counsel, and additionally gave presentations to the Safety Net Collaborative, the Department Head and Agency Association, and offered all Department Heads an optional 1:1 meeting to discuss the Action Plan. Finally, the Office of Equity held board briefings with the Board of Supervisors in advance of the Board presentation. The Strategy Team also met with community members engaged in the prior focus groups to follow up and present the draft Racial Equity Action Plan.

Phase 5: Finalizing the Racial Equity Action Plan

In Phase 5, the Steering Committee revised the Action Plan's strategies according to the feedback received during the Reflection Sessions and finalized this document. In May of 2024 the Board of Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the Draft Racial Equity Action Plan and directed staff to implement the strategies in the Action Plan.

Part 3: Internal Indicators

The initial research phase of the Racial Equity Action Planning process identified two major internal indictors or Barriers, each of which was supported by the engagement phase. While many factors contribute to these outcomes, the research team used the Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) root cause analysis to identify what are known as Hot Roots of inequities, which are (1) race-explicit levers, (2) within the purview of the County to shift, and (3) if disrupted, could have an outsized impact on the County's structural dynamics and change racial outcomes for the better.

Internal Indicator (Barrier) 1: County Management is not representative of the racial demographics of Sonoma County.

Data from the County of Sonoma Workforce Demographics Dashboard from 2022 shows White employees are overrepresented in great numbers in the County of Sonoma workforce compared to the available labor force, while most other racial/ethnic groups remain underrepresented.

Racial Demographics: County Workforce vs. Available Labor Force 2022
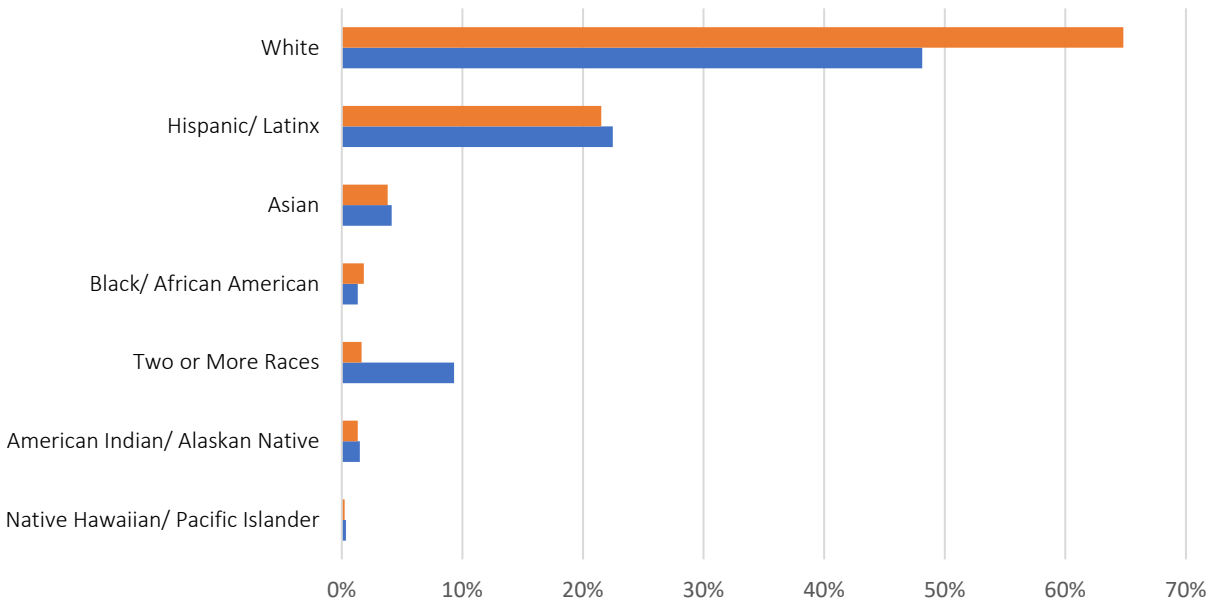
	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Two or More Races	Black/ African American	Asian	Hispanic/ Latinx	White
■ County Workforce	0.23%	1.33%	1.64%	1.83%	3.81%	21.52%	64.81%
■ Sonoma County Labor Force	0.34%	1.50%	9.31%	1.33%	4.14%	22.47%	48.13%

■ County Workforce   ■ Sonoma County Labor Force

This trend worsens higher up the organizational hierarchy, with the percentage of White people on staff rising (and conversely, the percentage of people of color decreasing) at each leadership tier.

Race/Ethnicity by Leadership Level 2024

	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Two or More Races	Black/ African American	Asian	Hispanic/ Latinx	White
Individual Contributor	0.32%	1.40%	1.91%	1.75%	3.99%	25.56%	58.01%
Supervisor	0.00%	1.46%	0.97%	1.46%	3.16%	22.14%	68.13%
Managers	0.25%	1.01%	1.27%	2.78%	4.30%	10.13%	75.95%
Executive	0.00%	0.00%	1.49%	1.49%	2.99%	4.48%	86.57%

Leadership Level

Individual Contributor   Supervisor   Managers   Executive

Hot Root (Why): There are few mechanisms supporting managers in hiring and promoting qualified staff members of color to leadership levels.

Staff surveys across County departments show that staff of color do not have equitable access to career advancement pathways, including opportunities to join leadership development programs, gain experience with assignments that expand staff's current skill level or expertise, informal leadership opportunities, and opportunities to advance within their department upon completion of professional development programs. Staff of color report having to work twice as hard to feel valued at work and are less likely than their White counterparts to report that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work is valued or sufficiently staffed or resourced in their department.

Staff, in particular staff of color, have also reported patterns of "ingroup bias," where County managers, the majority of whom are White, tend to favor candidates or staff who are similar to them. Studies on supervisor favoritism suggest that these instances create costly outcomes to the organization and among staff, including "negative emotions toward the organization, less loyalty to the company, less job satisfaction, stronger intentions to quit the job, less work motivation, and more emotional exhaustion" (Li, 2018). Additionally, employees who are not favored receive "less coaching, feedback or opportunities, which directly impedes talent development within the organization" (Li, 2018). Managers have also reported needing additional supports to understand "where to start" their anti-racist leadership journey, including training and coaching, which this Action Plan addresses.

Hiring and promotion practices have not yet been sufficiently examined to root out gatekeeping mechanisms resulting in organizational inequities. However, the Central Human Resources department is beginning a process to remove barriers to employment, including updating class specifications to remove artificial barriers related to education and experience, expanding the talent acquisition pipeline, and several other initiatives in alignment with this Racial Equity Action Plan (Sonoma County Human Resources, 2024).

Internal Indicator (Barrier) 2: Staff of color disproportionately report dissatisfaction levels with management practices.

Diversifying the staff is only one piece of the puzzle, however. Satisfaction levels for staff of color are lower than their White counterparts. This is important on a human level, and for purposes of retention. Staff surveys show that staff of color disproportionately report considering leaving their departments and/or the County as a whole due to feeling undervalued, experiencing burnout (especially bilingual staff), having fewer opportunities for advancement, and in some cases experiencing racial microaggressions and overt racism. Survey participants shared that they did not see sufficient response from Departments or the County to these instances.

Hot Root (Why): Management practices do not reflect sufficient capacity, skill sets, and/or interest to contribute to the empowerment of staff, especially staff of color.
There is an overarching sense that the County is not sufficiently equipped to deal with racial equity issues in ways that are effective and promote staff well-being. Staff and leaders report not having the time or capacity to deepen their understanding of racial equity work. Many employees who have gone through trainings report that while their understanding of the issues has deepened, their confidence in their ability to intervene in meaningful ways is lagging.

Robust training, especially for managers and supervisors, coupled with County-wide performance management mechanisms (including evaluation through a growth-mindset lens (Han & Stieha, 2020) and using AR-RBA to identify and address root causes of issues), can move the needle on this.

Hot Root (Why): The County system values productivity over the impact that working conditions have on people, especially staff of color.

The County of Sonoma dedicates resources to service provision and operations, but as demonstrated earlier in this section, when demand for service is so critical, productivity often comes at the expense of staff well-being, particularly for staff of color. Staff, and especially staff of color, report that their workplace experience is a harmful one and that the County has not dedicated sufficient resources to learning about this experience or responding to it.

This matters because as the biggest employer in the County, the impact that we have as an organization in our workforce is both a part and a reflection of the impact we have on the community at large. Valuing productivity over people also impacts the ways in which we make decisions as a County and by extension the way our clients experience our services. Finally, it is costly for the County, both as an employer and a government organization, not to safeguard the wellbeing of its staff. When staff feel insufficiently supported, it can lead to burnout and turnover, which signify losses in investments and knowledge (Bloomberg, n.d.; Hall, 2019; Jeung et al, 2018; Kihlstrom, 2019; McFeely & Wigert, 2019) and challenges around adequate service provision.

Part 4: A Racial Equity Action Plan for the County of Sonoma

The Steering Committee and the Office of Equity looked at the findings presented in Part 3 and identified the following result statement (or goal) for the Racial Equity Action Plan: ***All County staff, especially staff of color, feel a sense of belonging and are supported to achieve their career goals within the County organization.***

With this as the ultimate goal, we continued the AR-RBA process to address the underlying root causes of the issues identified in the findings and move towards better outcomes for County staff. In the table below, we present the framework that responds to the findings

and hot roots listed in Part 3, and that in the end, should move the County towards achieving the goal (result statement) of the Racial Equity Action Plan.

As you read through the Action Plan and implementation tables, consider the following definitions:

Result Statement (Goal): The long-term, end goal of the Racial Equity Action Plan's full implementation.

Internal Indicators (Barriers): The internal County data that can be tracked overtime and disaggregated by race, which helps us see racial disproportionality.

Hot Roots (Whys): The key underlying systemic causes of the internal indicator that are both within the County's power to shift and will create meaningful change.

Recommended Strategies (Headline strategies and sub-strategies): The headline strategies are designed to address the hot roots of inequities. The sub-strategies are the headline strategies broken down into its component parts.

Performance Measures: You will find the measures outlined in the implementation tables only. They will hold the County accountable to the implementation of the sub-strategies intended outcomes by telling how much and how well they are working. If pieces of the Action Plan are less effective than we believe they will be, these measures will support us in understanding where the shift needs to occur.

Headline Better-Off Measures (Accountability): These measurements are directly connected to the internal indicators. They measure the extent to which all strategies and sub-strategies achieved whether people, especially people of color, are truly better off because of them.

COUNTY OF SONOMA RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Result Statement (Goal)	All County staff, especially staff of color, feel a sense of belonging and are supported to achieve their career goals within the County organization.		
Internal Indicators (Barriers)	County management is not representative of the racial demographics of Sonoma County.	Staff of color report disproportionate dissatisfaction levels with management practices.	
Hot Roots (Whys)	There are few mechanisms supporting managers in hiring and promoting qualified staff members of color to leadership levels.	Management practices do not reflect sufficient capacity, skill sets, and/or interest to contribute to the empowerment of staff, especially staff of color.	The County system values productivity over the impact that working conditions have on people, especially staff of color.
Strategies & Sub-Strategies	**Strategy 1: County creates capacity for equity work and expands pipelines for hiring and career advancement.** **a.** Department Heads create staff capacity to operationalize equity work by: 1) Designating a Core Team 2.0 Liaison, and 2) Creating equity positions, or 3) Redirecting capacity of existing staff. **b.** OOE creates and convenes Core Team 2.0 to lead the implementation of the Plan across departments. **c.** Department Heads support and include in annual operational budgets resources to support professional and leadership development opportunities to reach all staff, especially staff of color. **d.** Central HR conducts an assessment of County job descriptions and hiring practices, and engages in a codesign process to remove barriers and elevate the value of lived experience.	**Strategy 2: County offers support and creates accountability for management at all levels to develop an understanding of racial equity principles and practices.** **a.** All managers actively participate in learning and training spaces about racial equity principles and practices. **b.** Department Heads, supervisors, and managers are evaluated on their competencies on racial equity principles and practices.	**Strategy 3: County invests in data collection and reporting systems to drive change that is responsive to staff experiences.** **a.** Central HR publishes disaggregated data on recruitment, hiring, promotions, and turnover rates of employees. **b.** Central HR conducts a standard employee survey that consistently collects data on staff experiences, in particular around belonging and career advancement. **c.** All Managers learn how to apply Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) methodology to address racial inequities from survey data. **d.** County institutionalizes spaces for healing, belonging, and connection.
Headline Better-Off Measures (Accountability)	• Percentage of staff hired and promoted into management positions.	• Percentage of Department Heads, supervisors, and managers implementing anti-racist practices. • Percentage of staff who see management taking new kinds of actions in service of equity.	• Percentages of staff retention and turnover. • Percentage of staff who feel like the County is offering a positive space to support their work and well-being.

Part 5: Implementation Plan for the Action Plan

With the overarching picture described above, the following implementation plan serves to illuminate action steps that, if adopted by the Board of Supervisors, and fully implemented by departments in collaboration with the Office of Equity, will move the County of Sonoma further in its organizational anti-racist journey.

In alignment with Goal 3, Objective 2 of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan pillar, this Action Plan establishes yearly and publicly available reporting on the County's implementation of the Action Plan strategies. The implementation tables below provide a recommended timeline, with the understanding that different departments are starting their anti-racist journey in different places and the rate of progress may look different across departments.

Area of Focus 1: Hiring, Retention, and Staff Development and Support Process.

An anti-racist County of Sonoma would have racially diverse leaders at all levels in the organization, supported by hiring practices and promotion mechanisms that recognize and reward a wide variety of experience and skills; by the institutional validation and compensation of equity work; and by the intentional ongoing implementation of a Racial Equity Action Plan.

While demographic shifts are slowly taking place and some communities of color are represented in the workforce close to alignment with the available labor force, the data shows us that the higher up in the organizational hierarchy we look, the higher the representation of White staff (Sonoma County HR, 2023). This is not the case for any other racial or ethnic community. Which begs the question: What is going on? While laws and policies, such as California's Proposition 209, prevent the use of race as a decision-making criterion in public employment, data shows that hiring processes still result in racialized outcomes favoring White people. This requires a thoughtful and intentional strategy to identify what is leading to disparities in hiring, retention, and promotion.

The following are the sub-strategies, action steps, recommended timeline, and performance measures that will aim to create leadership and staff capacity to operationalize equity in the County of Sonoma.

Headline Strategy 1: County creates capacity for equity work and expands pipelines for hiring and career advancement.

Sub-strategies	Action Steps	Timeline (Recommended)	Performance Measures
1a. Department Heads create staff capacity to operationalize equity work by: 1) Designating a Core Team 2.0 Liaison, and 2) Creating equity positions, or 3) Redirecting capacity of existing staff.	**1a-1:** Dept. heads work with OOE to identify a liaison to Core Team 2.0 based on OOE guidance and parameters	Year 1	% of departments with active Core Team 2.0 participants % of departments with sufficient racial equity FTE allocations % of departments with hired equity staff
	1a-2: Liaison works with OOE to assess current Equity allocations in their departments and create a plan moving forward.	Year 1/2	
	1a-3: Dept. heads implement the plan, including hiring and supporting staff, allocating time and/or resources, etc.	Year 2	
	1a-4: Liaisons and Dept. Heads evaluate and report on the impacts of the plan with OOE support.	Year 3	
1b. OOE creates and convenes Core Team 2.0 to lead the implementation of the Plan across departments	**1b-1:** OOE contracts with a consultant to help facilitate Core Team 2.0	Year 1	% of strategies and actions implemented by CT 2.0 in their departments
	1b-2: Department Heads allocate time and resources for liaisons to actively participate in Core Team 2.0 and implement the Racial Equity Action Plan in their departments.	Year 1	
	1b-3: Core Team 2.0 participates in facilitated meetings and creates	Year 1	

	protocols for progress tracking and reporting, to both track the implementation and impact of the Plan and to ensure transparency.		
1c. Department Heads support and include in annual operational budgets resources to support professional and leadership development opportunities to reach all staff, especially staff of color.	**1c-1:** Liaisons work with the OOE to identify current County-wide and department-specific professional and leadership development opportunities.	Year 1/2	% of staff who participate in existing or new professional development programs

% of Department Heads investing and/or improving professional development outlets for staff, especially staff of color |
	1c-2: Liaisons, supported by OOE and Central HR, recommend changes to better meet the professional development needs of staff, especially staff of color.	Year 1/2	
	1c-3: Department Heads implement recommendations.	Year 2/3	
	1c-4: Liaisons and Dept. Heads evaluate and report on the impacts of the recommendations with OOE support.	Year 2/3	
1d. Central HR conducts an assessment of County job descriptions and hiring practices, and engages in a codesign process to remove barriers and elevate the value of lived experience.	**1d-1:** OOE, Central HR, Core Team 2.0, and Steering Committee develop a plan for evaluating job classifications and descriptions and through an anti-racist lens.	Year 2	#/% of management and leadership level job descriptions that were evaluated by Central HR

#/% of job descriptions with |
| | **1d-2:** Core Team 2.0 works in collaboration with | Year 1/2 | |

	Central HR to identify additional anti-racist hiring practices to pilot within departments.		changes made that are aligned with anti-racist recommendations from (CT 2.0)
	1d-3: Liaisons from departments implement pilots and evaluate progress.	Year 2/3	

Headline Better-Off Measure 1: Percentage of staff hired and promoted into management positions.

Area of Focus 2: Manager Training, Support, and Accountability

The County's organizational commitment to an anti-racist workplace must be driven by adaptive leaders who can connect data (surveys, focus groups, interviews) to the lived experiences of staff, implement the strategies listed in this Plan, and hold themselves accountable to realizing a vision of an anti-racist workplace for and with their staff (Bernabei, 2017; Gonzalez, 2021; Livingston, 2020).

Currently, the data reveals that County staff of color have disproportionately reported dissatisfaction with management practices compared to their White colleagues. That data tells a human story about the experiences of "othering" that staff of color go through, even when the people in positions responsible for organizing and supporting our best work have good intentions. Good intentions do not create systemic impact, intentional, measurable efforts do. However, data reveals that, in the County, there are few mechanisms in place to support leadership, people in supervisory roles, and staff in learning how to apply anti-racist principles in their jobs.

This Plan resources managers and supervisors with training in racial equity skills to empower County leaders to drive systems transformation and to effectively support the well-being of the people they supervise, who are at the front line of delivering government services. The following sub-strategies, action steps, recommended timeline, and performance measures will support managers at all levels to implement anti-racist principles and practices.

Headline Strategy 2: County offers support and creates accountability for management at all levels to develop an understanding of racial equity principles and practices.			
Sub-strategies	**Action Steps**	**Timeline** (Recommended)	**Performance Measures**
2a. All managers actively participate in learning and training spaces about racial equity principles and practices.	**2a-1:** OOE, Central HR, and Department Heads, identify staff (job classes) for whom training may be required and assign training plans.	Year 1	% of managers participating in learning and training spaces % of staff who see managers taking new kinds of actions in service of equity % of managers implementing anti-racist practices
	2a-2: OOE and Central HR work together to identify the cadence of training and tracking processes.	Year 1	
	2a-3: OOE and Central HR develop an assessment process to evaluate how staff are applying knowledge and skills acquired during training.	Year 2	
2b. Department Heads, supervisors, and managers are evaluated on their competencies on racial equity principles and practices.	**2b-1:** OOE and Central HR work with Core Team 1.0, 2.0, and the Steering Committee to assess existing processes and make recommendations on the evaluation of racial equity core competencies.	Year 2	% of Department Heads, supervisors, and managers who support and create expectations for their staff to implement anti-racist practices % of management whose performance evaluations include racial
	2b-2: Central HR and OOE take steps to begin implementation with relevant stakeholders.	Year 2	
	2b-3: OOE and Central HR work with department HR liaisons to develop a	Year 2	

	communication strategy and implement the new evaluation processes.		equity
	2b-4: OOE, Central HR, and CAO, work to establish a departmental baseline and reporting process for the implementation of the Action Plan.	Year 3	

Headline Better-Off Measures 2: Percentage of Department Heads, supervisors, and managers implementing anti-racist practices; Percentage of staff who see management taking new kinds of actions in service of equity.

Area of Focus 3: Data Collection, Analysis, and Response

An anti-racist system for data collection and analysis must center the stories that have been left at the margins, making them visible and understood by the people who make decisions that impact our community, so that these decisions can be made with equity at the core (Equity and Results, 2023; Our Identities, Ourselves, 2021).

County systems generate a massive amount of data. Oftentimes, the decisions that have the most impact on County residents are based on data. And other times, data is collected and is simply stored. There are countless stories told by community members and our workforce sitting in spreadsheets still waiting to be told. Some of these stories are simplified into a chart or graph, often removing important context, such as race, gender, age, ability, language, or socioeconomic status, which results in one person's story, generally a person from an underrepresented community, masked by another's.

The following sub-strategies, action steps, recommended timeline, and performance measures will support the County to engage in robust data collection, analysis, and response.

Headline Strategy 3: County invests in data collection and reporting systems to drive change that is responsive to staff experiences.			
Sub-strategies	**Action Steps**	**Timeline** (Recommended)	**Performance Measures**
3a. Central HR publishes disaggregated data on recruitment, hiring, promotions, and turnover rates of employees.	**3a-1:** Central HR, OOE, and CT 2.0 identify an expanded set of data to collect and cadence/strategy for reporting.	Year 1	# of times that the data is updated on the website yearly #/% of times Core Team 2.0 uses this data to bolster the case for a strategy
	3a-2: Data is disaggregated, published, and moved into the action planning stage (See strategy 3c).	Year 1	
	3a-3: Central HR presents a data report on a yearly basis to the Board of Supervisors.	Year 2	
3b. Central HR conducts a standard employee survey that consistently collects data on staff experiences, in particular around belonging and career advancement.	**3b-1:** Central HR in collaboration with the OOE, and Steering Committee (SC) develop County-wide survey questions and implementation cadence.	Year 1	# of times the survey is conducted and data is published # of departments participating in survey % of employees participating in the survey
	3b-2: Central HR, CAO, and OOE develop a communication and implementation strategy to ensure maximum staff participation in the survey.	Year 1	
	3b-3: Survey report is publicly shared.	Year 2	

	3b-4: Board of Supervisors institutionalize periodic staff survey implementation and reporting.	Year 2/3	
3c. All Managers learn how to apply Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) to address racial inequities from survey data.	**3c-1:** Managers go through AR-RBA Training.	Year 1	% of managers trained and using AR-RBA in their work (survey response)

% of managers seeking technical assistance to use AR-RBA in their work

% of managers who reference survey data when requesting resources to address staff needs

% of managers who address survey responses by using AR-RBA |
| | **3c-2:** OOE works with departments to establish a Plan to respond to survey findings through the AR-RBA process, including establishing support spaces for Department Heads and managers applying AR-RBA. | Year 2 | |
| **3d.** County institutionalizes spaces for healing, belonging, and connection. | **3d-1:** The OOE, in partnership with Core Team 1.0, 2.0, and Steering Committee, will outline and communicate the purpose, best practices, and parameters for establishing spaces for belonging, healing, and connection. | Year 1 | % of employees who feel they have their experiences validated

% employees who feel a sense of belonging and connection |

	3d-2: The OOE will work with Central HR to identify and vet a list of pre-approved facilitators/consultants supporting equity work and assess consultant performance based on equity principles set forth with the Steering Committee, and Core Team 1.0 and 2.0.	Year 1/2/3	% of employees who feel safe to express themselves in these spaces % of employees who feel these spaces support their professional development
	3d-3: The Board of Supervisors funds and supports spaces for belonging, healing and connection.	Year 1	
	3d-4: OOE and Central HR engage in ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of these spaces with the guidance and support of the Steering Committee and Core Team 1.0 and 2.0.	Year 2	

Headline Better-Off Measures 3: Percentage of staff retention and turnover; Percentage of staff who feel like the County is offering a positive space to support their work and well-being.

Part 6: Setting the Racial Equity Action Plan up for Success

A Racial Equity Action Plan is only as effective as the accountability mechanisms and institutional commitments that support its implementation. Funding, evaluation, reflection, and the dedication to long-term refinement and implementation are all key to success.

Threading Accountability and Sustainability Throughout

Through the adoption of the Strategic Plan Racial Equity and Social Justice pillar, the Board of Supervisors accepted the County's responsibility as local government to "achieve racial equity in County service provision and ensure a workforce reflective of the community we serve." As the largest employer in the region, the County has the opportunity to model what it looks like to take steps to become an anti-racist organization. To begin addressing this commitment, the County must first identify the racial inequities perpetuated within the institution and hold itself accountable for resolving them. Within public administration, research suggests that organizations that take on higher levels of accountability generally yield positive results across different functions of the system (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014).

Braided throughout the Racial Equity Action Plan are accountability measures, which are guided by a design-to-the-margins (DTM) framework and operationalized through the Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) process. These frameworks align with an operational principle of the Office of Equity that recognizes that people closest to the identified issues are also closest to the solutions (Martin, 2017), and that the people who have historically held power have a responsibility to historically marginalized communities when taking on change.

The Office of Equity cannot take on this charge alone. It is imperative that there is County-wide support and that department leaders take ownership over particular pieces of this Action Plan in order to effectively implement these transformative practices.

This Action Plan includes the following accountability mechanisms to hold the County accountable to this work and to the people most impacted by it:
- Data collection and Analysis: Through the use of AR-RBA, the Plan attaches performance measures to strategies and action steps to track progress in the short and longer term.
- Transparency and Public Reporting: In alignment with the County Strategic Plan, this Action Plan sets processes in place to establish regular and publicly available reports on racial equity (County Strategy Plan Racial Equity and Social Justice pillar Goal 3/Objective 2).
- Funding prioritization: The Action Plan identifies three key investment areas, reflected by the proposed strategies, where prioritization of funding and resources will be necessary for successful implementation.

- Stewardship and Oversight: The Action Plan identifies parties responsible for the completion of the actions under any given strategy.

Commitment to an Iterative Process

An important part of the County's commitment towards racial equity is the ongoing review of our disaggregated performance metrics to see where we are meeting our target outcomes and where we are falling short. This commitment to ongoing review will help assess and determine which strategies are successful in driving change and which need to be reevaluated, reconsidered, or changed to meet our goals.

Therefore, the Racial Equity Action Plan is by definition a living document based on the recognition that our strategies may need revision. This level of flexibility and adaptive management is responsive to the evolving needs of the organization and staff, and to the reality that change initiatives like this one may result in unintended consequences that need addressing. When a pivot becomes necessary, this Action Plan should continue to center the wisdom of staff of color.

Commitment to Short- and Long-Term Learning, Growing, and Acting

The ability to choose not to continue learning about race and racism is a privilege that people of color do not always have, and so, in an anti-racist institution, the responsibility to learn and grow and act falls on all of us (Blitz & Kohl, 2012; Carreira, 2018).

In alignment with a commitment to an iterative process, the County's understanding of equity issues needs to be flexible in order to take new developments into account. Shifts, even immediate ones, often take time to demonstrate benefit, so giving strategies time to work and evaluating over the long-term is key.

Some strategies can be implemented quickly, but even for these, the County must remain committed to long-term implementation and evaluation, so we are able to accurately determine their efficacy. Strategies that will take longer to implement require a stronger commitment to the long-term, as they will take more time to see the benefits. For example, we will only see the impacts of hiring shifts over time. This is where the Plan's performance and headline better-off measures keep us focused on the impact of shorter-term actions while not losing sight of the long-term vision and desired impact of the strategies.

Assessing Capacity and Scaffolding Up

This Action Plan is meant to meet departments where they are and build a support structure, like the scaffolding of a construction project, to take their work to the next level towards more equitable versions of themselves.

As we set a new baseline, we can look forward to building new structures within County departments to support change and take steps forward in our anti-racist journeys. The Office of Equity looks forward to deepening collaborative relationships with County departments to ensure that the implementation of this Action Plan is supportive of their needs, specific circumstances, and current efforts.

Part 6: Conclusion

Building a sustainable, anti-racist foundation starts from within. By dedicating our efforts to enhance our internal systems and practices, we create a powerful catalyst to drive change in the community at large. County staff constitute integral members of the County organization and also represent the communities we serve, embodying the diverse composition, needs, and disparities present in the broader community. The way we support County staff and leadership of color can mirror our approach to the wider community.

We have the opportunity to be change makers within the County system. Together, we can work to ensure that the voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are heard and respected and that in response to these voices, we collectively develop and support practices that lead to a working ecosystem where everyone feels a sense of belonging and support for career advancement. By establishing the foundations that advance racial equity work within our organization, and accountability measures to track our progress, we establish a strong backbone for generating transformative change externally.

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