

Regional Homeless Services Racial Equity and Systems Analysis

REPORT OF FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

PRESENTED BY



Racial Equity Design
& Implementation

APRIL 2023

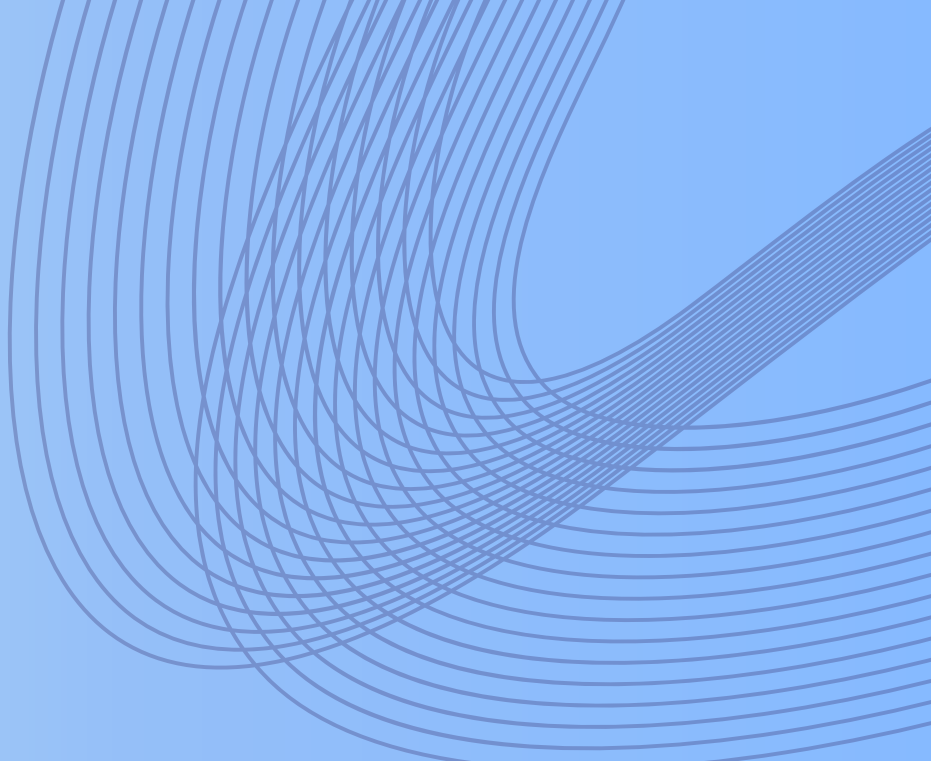


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INTRODUCTION

Every year since 2001, nine local governments and members of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's (COG) Homeless Services Committee have collaborated to hold an annual Point-in-Time enumeration of area residents experiencing homelessness.

During the past two decades, the region has made significant progress in reducing the number of people who experience homelessness on one day in January. But one of the most persistent and challenging aspects to change over the years has been the disproportionate representation of people of color in our systems of care. This is the result of racist policies, discriminatory practices, and a longstanding lack of access to quality housing, schools, jobs, and transportation.

This report's action plan reflects the metropolitan Washington regional Continua of Care's (CoC's) dedication to implementing a racially equitable approach to ending the experience of homelessness. It is also an invitation to learn more about who experiences a housing crisis across the region, how we respond, and how we can work towards a system that does not compound existing inequities and quickly restores someone without shelter to stable housing.

It requires vision and trust to work across city, county, and state lines and think more broadly than just an individual community's emergency housing needs. COG's Homeless Services Committee members believe a coordinated regional response has the potential to transform not only the housing solutions for those who need it most, but the entire system of care to equitably end the experience of homelessness across all the region's communities.

Working with C4 Innovations has deepened our understanding of each community's unique needs and assets. It has brought us closer to a true regional response than ever before, setting us on a path to change the trajectory of our efforts positively and meaningfully as we begin the next phase to implement recommendations in this report.

This plan would not have been possible without the significant time and dedicated effort of CoC staff and the Racial Equity Action Council (REAC) participants during an extremely demanding time in the pandemic. We are also enormously grateful for the support of the Greater Washington Community Foundation, in particular Silvana Straw and Jennifer Olney, for making this racial equity systems analysis possible.

Everyone in the region has a role to play and an opportunity to contribute to achieving housing justice for all our neighbors and community members, whether you are a CoC staff member, service provider, policy maker, or concerned citizen. We welcome you to join us in this important work to ensure that everyone—regardless of race—has a place to call home.

Amanda Harris, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
COG Homeless Services Committee Co-Chair

Elisabeth Young, The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, District of Columbia
COG Homeless Services Committee Co-Chair

Tom Barnett, Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development
COG Homeless Services Committee Former Co-Chair

Hilary Chapman, COG Housing Program Manager

Acknowledgements



The C4 REDI team would like to express our sincere appreciation to all those who participated in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' racial equity analysis and planning process to develop the Regional Racial Equity Action Plan.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who invested tireless hours to facilitate each component of the assessment, especially members of the Racial Equity Action Council (REAC) and Regional Data Metrics Workgroup. Over the course of 16 months, each of these working groups met regularly to examine data, identify racial inequities, and interrogate the policies, practices, and structures across the homeless response system that could be reinforcing these inequities. Together, and in partnership with people with lived experience of homelessness, they have developed the Regional Racial Equity Action Plan included in this report.

Additionally, we would like to thank the COG Homeless Services Committee, its Co-Chairs and staff, and the Human Services Policy Committee members who provided support to this initiative through ongoing coordination, advocacy, and sustainability planning. The Plan reflects a shared vision for a more equitable homeless response system across the region, and it provides a path forward that can improve access and outcomes for Black, Indigenous and communities of color who are most disproportionately impacted by homelessness. The map of the participating CoCs and names of contributors across the region that follows, demonstrates the extensive involvement of dedicated members across metropolitan Washington.



COG HOMELESS SERVICES COMMITTEE

Committee Leadership

Amanda Harris, Co-Chair
Chief of Special Needs Housing
Montgomery County, Dept. of Health & Human Services

Elisabeth Young, Co-Chair
Deputy Chief of Policy and Programs
The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP)

Virginia

- Ahmad Haj Ali: Arlington County, Dept. of Human Services, HMIS Administrator
- Tom Barnett, (Co-Chair, 2020-2022): Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, Deputy Director
- Stefan Caine: City of Alexandria, Dept. of Community & Human Services, CoC Lead Administrator
- Stephanie Carl, Co-Chair, Regional Case Coord. LC: Fairfax County, DHCD, Office to Prevent & End Homelessness, Coordinated Entry System Manager
- Alison Coleman: City of Alexandria, Dept. of Community & Human Services, Director, Office of Community Services
- Jamie Ergas *leaving Fairfax County 9/16/22: Fairfax County, Office to Prevent & End Homelessness, Continuum of Care Lead Manager
- Alicia La Patra, Co-Chair, Regional Data Metrics WG: Prince William County DSS, Senior Business Systems Analyst (HMIS lead)
- Oliver Reid: Prince William County DSS, Human Services Program Manager
- Clara Roberson: City of Alexandria, Dept. of Community & Human Services, Homeless Services Coordinator
- Tony Turnage (Co-chair, 2018-2020): Prince William County DSS, Assistant Director of the Homeless Services Division
- Nikki Thomas-Campbell, Co-Chair, Regional Data Metrics WG: Fairfax County, DHCD, Office to Prevent & End Homelessness, Information Systems Manager
- Triina Van: Arlington County, Dept. of Human Services, Homeless Services Coordinator
- Cesar Watts: Loudoun County, Dept. of Family Services, Information and Referral Program Manager
- Corinne Wyss: Loudoun County, Dept. of Family Services, Continuum of Care Coordinator

Maryland

- Kim Ball (Co-Chair 2018-2020): Montgomery County, Dept. of Health & Human Services, Homeless Services Administrator
- Stephen McCoy: City of Frederick, Senior Assistant Director
- Michelle Ott: Frederick Community Action Agency, Supervisor of Administrative Services
- Renee Ensor Pope: Prince George's County DSS, Assistant Director, Community Services Administration
- Ashley Richards: Montgomery County, Dept. of Health & Human Services, Data & Research Mgr (HMIS lead)
- Jaye Summerlot (Co-Chair, Regional Case Coord. Learning Collaborative): Prince George's County, DSS, Coordinated Entry Program Manager

District of Columbia

- Michael Ferrell: Coalition for the Homeless, Executive Director (Chairman 2005 -2018)
- Theresa Silla: Interagency Council on Homelessness, Executive Director

Other Partners / Participants

- Belinda Fadlelmola: HUD DC Field Office
- Marvin Turner: HUD DC Field Office Director
- Virginia Williams: Virginia Dept. of Veterans Services



DATA LEADS + REGIONAL DATA METRICS WORKGROUP

Workgroup Leadership

Alicia La Patra, Co-Chair (2021-present)
Senior Business Systems Analyst (HMIS lead)
Prince William County DSS

Nikki Thomas-Campbell, Co-Chair, Regional Data Metrics WG (July 2022-present)
Information Systems Manager
Fairfax County, DHCD, Office to Prevent & End Homelessness

Workgroup Members

Ahmad Haj Ali	Arlington County, Dept. of Human Services, HMIS Administrator
Andrew Dubin	Arlington County, Dept. of Human Services, Business Analyst
Patrice Guyton	The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP) / DC
Asif Karim	Loudoun County, Dept. of Family Services
Ashley Richards (former Co-Chair 2021-2022)	Montgomery County, Dept. of Health & Human Services, Data & Research Mgr (HMIS lead)
JC Severt	City of Alexandria, HMIS Administrator
Keli Sobers	Prince George's County Dept. of Social Services (Contractor)
Terri Woods* started Aug. 2022	City of Frederick, Dept. of Human Services, HMIS lead
Corinne Wyss	Loudoun County, Dept. of Family Services, Continuum of Care Coordinator
Elisabeth Young (former Co-Chair 2020-2021)	The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP), Deputy Chief of Policy and Programs (former WG Co-Chair/current full committee Co-Chair)

Additional Participating CoC Data Leads

Jurisdiction	Data Lead
District of Columbia	Kelly Patton (HMIS Lead) Tom Fredericksen
City of Frederick	Jessica Handoko Department of Housing and Human Services Data Administrator (until April 1, 2022) Stephen McCoy (interim)
Prince George's County	Robin Gray, HMIS Admin.



RACIAL EQUITY ACTION COUNCIL (REAC) TEAMS BY COUNTY



BACKGROUND

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (“COG”) is the regional organization of the Washington area's 24 major local governments and their governing officials, plus area members of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures and the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

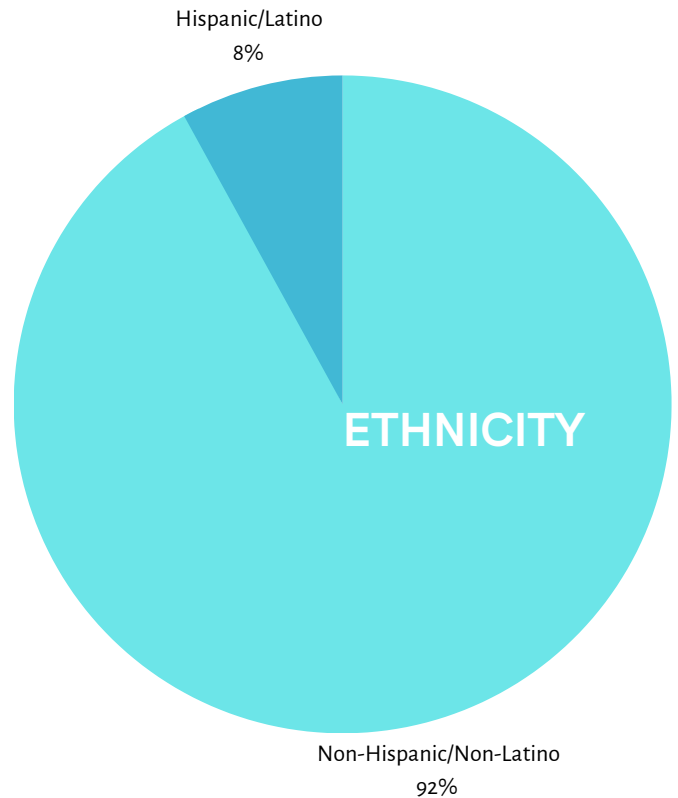
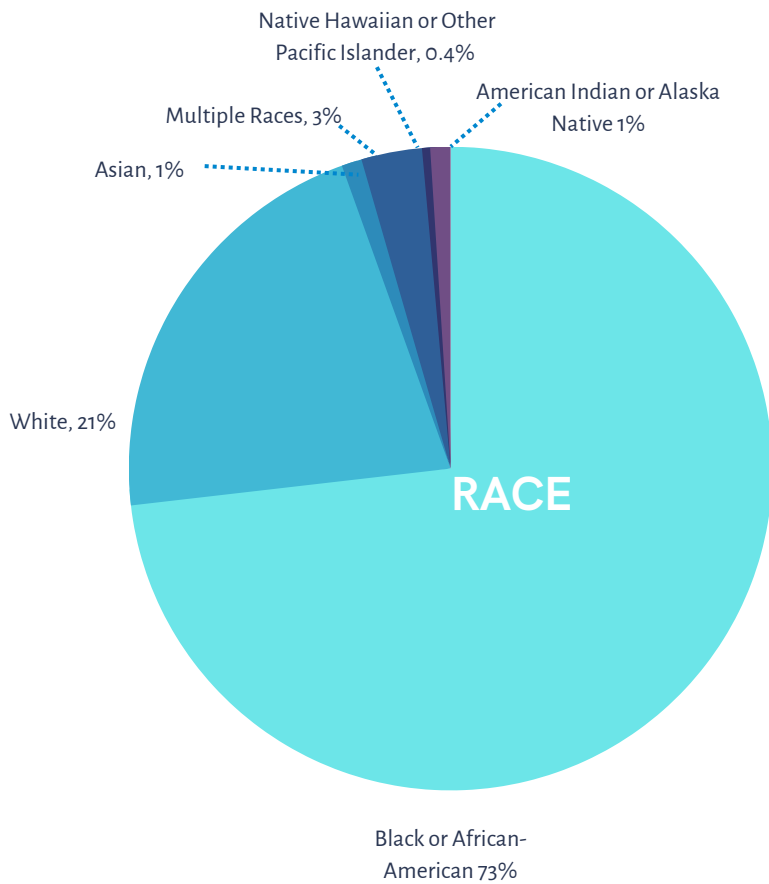
COG provides a focus for action on issues of regional concern such as comprehensive transportation planning, air and water quality management, environmental monitoring, tracking economic development and population growth and their effects on the region, coordinating public safety programs, promoting child welfare and housing affordability for the region and collaborating to end the experience of homelessness.

The region began coordinating to conduct an annual census of people experiencing homelessness in 2001, prior to the requirement by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to do so. This platform has allowed the nine participating Continuums of Care to collaborate across jurisdictions to ensure that the experience of homelessness in metropolitan Washington is brief, rare, and non-recurring. The participating jurisdictions include the District of Columbia, and in Maryland, Prince George’s County, Montgomery County, and Frederick City, and in Virginia, the City of Alexandria, Arlington County, Fairfax County, Loudoun County and Prince William County.

Demographic data from the results of the regional 2020 annual Point-in-Time count demonstrates the ongoing impacts of structural racism in the metropolitan Washington region. These data show a disproportionate representation of Black or African American residents experiencing homelessness. Regionally, 25 percent of the region’s residents are Black or African American. Single adults experiencing homelessness on the night of the count in January 2020 were 73 percent Black, and 86 percent of adults in homeless families were Black.

Racial disparities differ across the region, however; for example, in the City of Frederick, whites experience homelessness at higher rates than in surrounding jurisdictions, and in Prince George’s County, the population is majority Black or African American, and this context requires a nuanced analysis to identify racial inequities within the homeless services response.

REGIONAL HOMELESS SINGLE ADULTS DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE



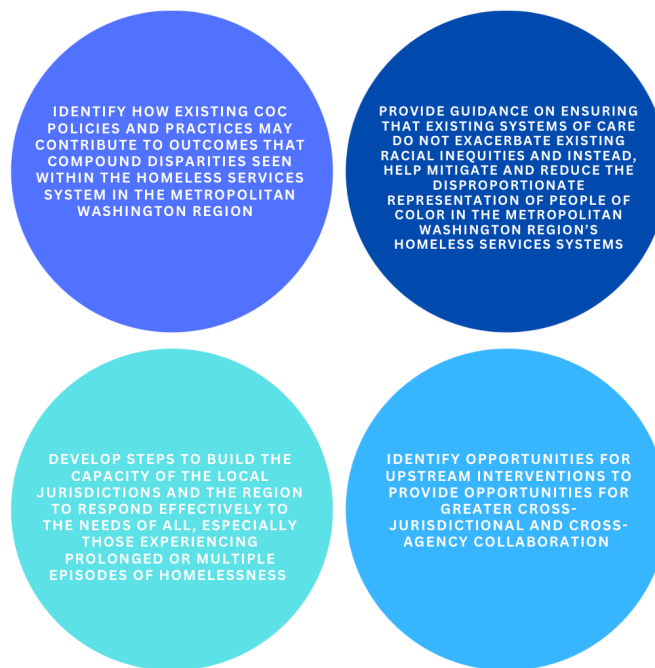
Source COG 2020



Project Overview and Scope of Work

The COG Homeless Services Committee sought recommendations to align systems of care across jurisdictions to prevent and end homelessness with a primary focus on racial equity. The participating jurisdictions determined that, given the metropolitan Washington region's shared housing markets, transportation system, and job centers, a multi-jurisdictional analysis with coordinated goals and strategies centered on racial equity would strengthen local actions within each Continuum of Care ("CoC") and deepen the impact of local strategic plans to prevent and end homelessness. Centering racial equity in the regional effort to end the experience of homelessness would be the foundation of creating a holistic and integrated system.

The recommendations have four overarching goals:



C4 Innovations (C4) was selected to guide local work groups in examining their system and deepening their knowledge and practice of racial equity, provide racial equity analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and co-create a dynamic roadmap that could evolve as the homelessness landscape of the jurisdictions and regions changed.

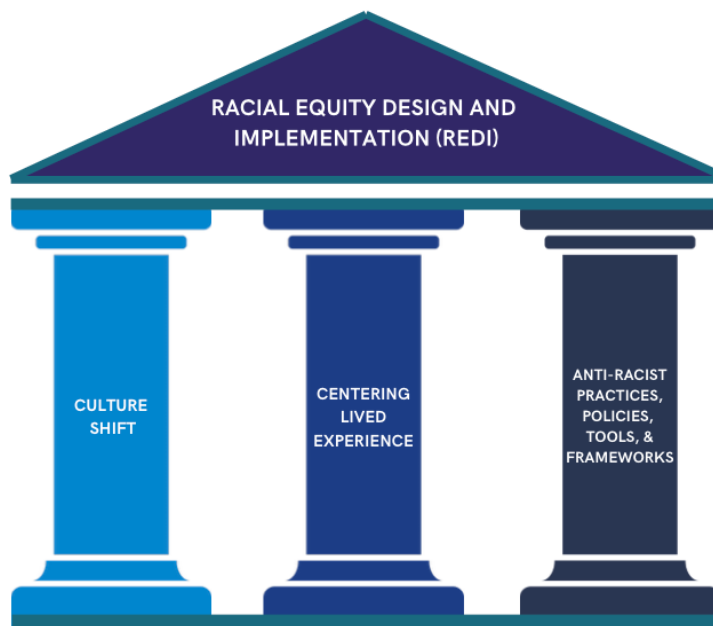
Methodology



A. Process and Guiding Principles

C4 specializes in working with community partners to identify, analyze, and transform the practices, policies, and programs that oppress and discriminate against people with marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender identities. We lead with *racial* equity because racism permeates every institution and system, denying millions the right to a fair and just society where they can thrive and prosper.

The C4 Racial Equity Design and Implementation (REDI) Team has developed a framework for racially equitable systems change that starts with acknowledging that every system in this country has been built on the foundation of white supremacy ideology, designed to advantage White individuals, while systematically disadvantaging Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. The long-lasting and intergenerational damage caused by this faulty foundation can be seen in the racial disparities that exist across health, education, employment, justice system, and housing outcomes. The REDI framework has three major pillars that shape our approach. Across all three, we ask, *“How can CoCs de-center whiteness and explicitly center the Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) they aim to serve?”*



- 1. Culture Shift:** There must be a seismic shift away from White Supremacy Cultural (WSC) Characteristics in order to move to a more inclusive and anti-racist culture. The foundation must be examined, torn apart/broken down, and rebuilt based on shared values that promote equitable outcomes for all. The REDI framework creates space for exploration and processing through a series of foundational learning sessions as well as opportunities for continued learning and self-reflection. During this project, community members across the nine participating CoCs and regional stakeholders attended a series of foundational learning sessions to build a shared language, examine the historical and current conditions that have led to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) experiencing homelessness at higher rates, and disrupt implicit biases. This not only helps to build commitment towards designing a more equitable homeless response system, but it also ensures that any resulting changes can be sustained. As part of this culture shift, it is important to recognize that leadership and decision-making roles cannot continue to be reserved for those in powerful positions. Power must be given back to community, and the people who will be most impacted by policies must be involved in driving and sustaining system change.
- 2. Centering Lived Experience:** To develop community-driven solutions that are sustainable, it is necessary to authentically engage and partner with those who have the best vantage point and most relevant expertise at decision-making tables. Each CoC was provided with coaching and support to convene a local Racial Equity Action Council (REAC) made up of stakeholders who were racially and ethnically representative of those most disproportionately impacted by homelessness in their community and inclusive of partners with lived experience of homelessness, frontline staff, and system leaders. The nine teams met biweekly for five months to analyze quantitative and qualitative data and keep the experiences of people who are using the homeless response system at the center of strategy development. They identified racial inequities, envisioned a desired end result for regional change, and worked to develop strategies that can impact the policies, mental models, and structures that have led to these disparities.
- 3. Implementation of Anti-Racist Practices, Policies, Tools, and Frameworks:** Undoing racist structures requires that communities move from awareness of inequities to action. The foundation must be rebuilt, brick by brick, to ensure an equitable homeless response system. This is a long-term commitment that requires intentionality, action, and shared accountability. The REDI framework supports community members to operationalize what they have learned and apply their knowledge in ways that will lead to improved outcomes for those most disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Participants build the capacity and skills to interrogate every part of the homeless response system and integrate racial equity into processes such as system mapping and a review of policies and procedures. Throughout the course of the project, REAC team members began to move away from “business as usual,” engaging community members in the planning and decision-making process who, historically, have been excluded and strengthening commitments from system leaders to ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of their local and regional racial equity action plans.

There are inevitable challenges in shifting culture and working to achieve racial equity. Frederick Douglas said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the roar of its mighty waters. The struggle may be a moral one or

it may be a physical one, or it may both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.”

The work of dismantling racist structures, practices, and policies is demanding. It is a long-term commitment that requires continued learning, participation from all stakeholders across the homeless response system, and a sustainable infrastructure. The REDI framework ensures that equity is as much a part of the process as it is the intended outcome. Partners are supported to implement equity principles from the beginning and work through technical and adaptive challenges as they arise.

B. Racial Equity Action Council Membership

At the start of the project, each CoC assembled a Racial Equity Action Council (REAC), a working group comprised of system leaders, frontline providers, and partners with lived/living experience (LE). REAC teams from across the region met biweekly to build the necessary knowledge, skillsets, and capacity that would empower them to:

- conduct a racial equity analysis of their homeless response system;
- act as ambassadors for racial equity by centering lived experiences of homelessness, sharing information with community members, and building shared accountability for equitable results;
- develop recommendations for actions based on their findings

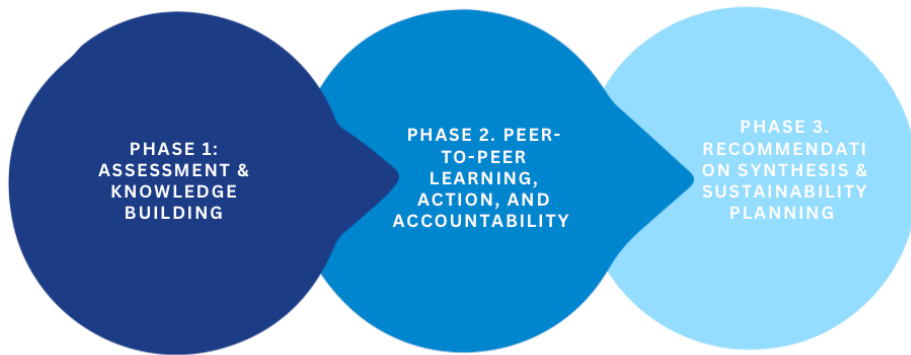
REAC leads and co-leads were identified to ensure partners with lived and living experience were compensated and teams were intentional about building inclusive membership that centered the perspectives of the Black and Brown community members most disproportionately impacted by homelessness within their region. Developing this infrastructure took time and resulted in delays in the initial timeline. REAC members received coaching on authentic partnerships with people with LE in which power and decision-making are shared and all members have the supports necessary to participate fully.

REAC members across the nine participating CoCs provided regular feedback and shared their challenges and successes in real time. Fully inclusive membership was not achieved by every community during the initiative, but every REAC team centered lived experience in their action planning and many communities were, later, able to secure funding for partners with LE because of their continued efforts. The C4 team responded to community challenges by working to understand the unique circumstances, varying capacity, and specific resources in each community and refining our approach to provide responsive technical assistance and coaching. REAC members and regional partners demonstrated an unyielding commitment to racial equity principles from the initial phases of assessment through the action planning process. They built a shared understanding of challenges, needs, system gaps, and diverse perspectives and created an environment in which all participants felt seen, heard, and valued.

C. Approach

C4 used a three-phased approach to support COG and the nine participating CoCs in identifying racial disparities and developing a set of recommendations with actionable steps that can be implemented at both the local level, and collectively as a region, to achieve a more racially equitable approach to ending homelessness.

The three phases are summarized below:



Phase 1. Assessment and Knowledge Building

Activities included:

- Initial convening and orientation of REAC teams
- Survey-based assessments followed by level-setting sessions to build foundational knowledge and facilitate discussion
- Skill-building to conduct system mapping of each CoC's continuum of services and housing interventions
- Analysis of CoC data
- Two listening sessions with frontline providers
- Three listening sessions with people with lived experience

Each CoC received a quantitative data analysis report specific to their system performance measures and based on data that was disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Qualitative data was collected through combined listening sessions, across the region, and was not CoC specific. (Links to each CoC's quantitative data report and the regional qualitative data report can be found in Appendix A).

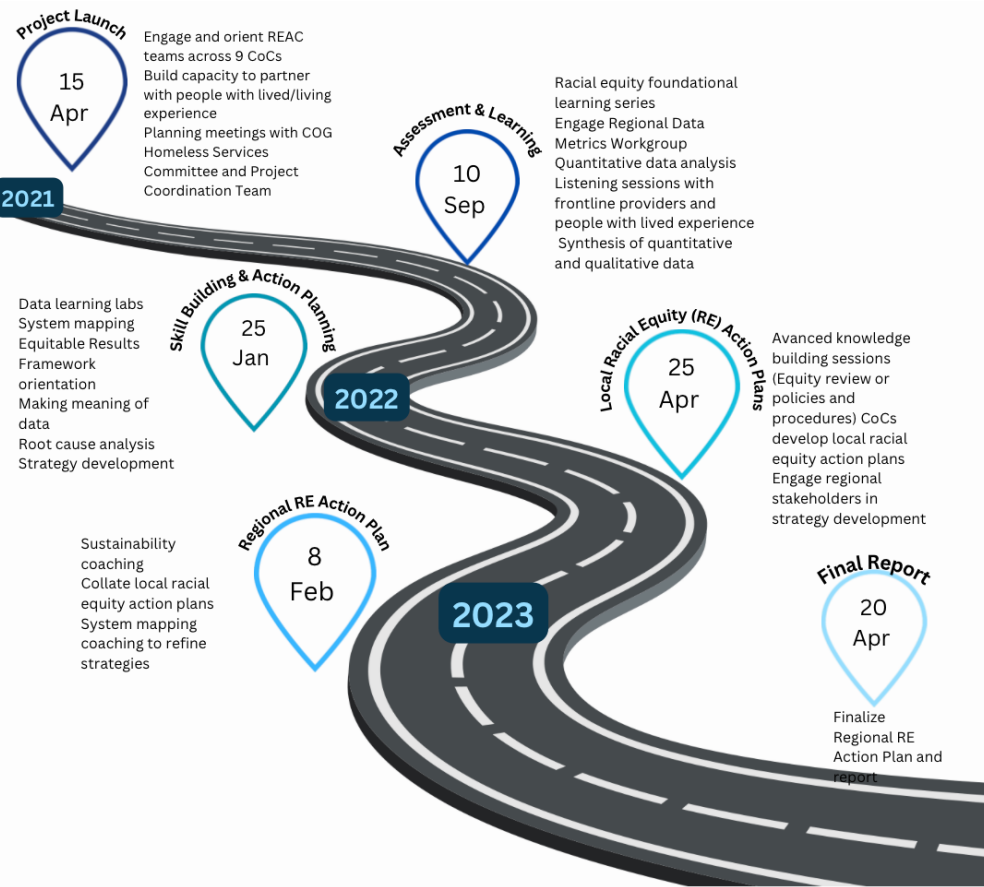
Phase 2. Peer-to-Peer Learning, Action, and Accountability

C4 supported REAC teams as they moved from assessment, learning, and preparation through a transformative process of community engagement and results-based planning. During Phase two, C4 facilitated advanced knowledge building sessions to support project participants in their application of racial equity principles. Project participants developed capacity to review and revise policies and procedures documents with a racial equity lens. The Regional Data Metrics Workgroup participated in data learning labs to embed equity into their data processes. Biweekly working sessions with REAC teams created space for meaningful dialogue, shared resources, and peer-to-peer learning. REAC teams worked, both across the region, and within their local communities, to build an understanding of the data from the racial equity analysis. They examined the root causes of identified inequities and developed strategies to address racial disparities within the homeless response system. REAC teams continuously worked to authentically engage those who would be most impacted by any changes in policies, processes, resource allocation, etc. Some teams conducted additional listening sessions with partners with LE to seek recommendations specific to their communities. Each REAC team produced a local racial equity action plan that was presented to their CoC Board for approval.

Phase 3. Recommendation Synthesis and Sustainability Planning

Drawing from the work of the nine CoC teams, C4 synthesized results from the initial analyses and local racial equity action plans to draft a set of regional recommendations for actionable next steps and opportunities for upstream interventions that center racial equity in the work to prevent and end homelessness. The draft Regional Racial Equity Plan was shared with REAC members for feedback. The input they shared was thoughtful and solution oriented. A main concern was that the recommended strategies did not reflect the nuances and unique challenges within the various CoCs. To address this issue, C4 revisited the system mapping activity that most communities had not fully completed. The C4 team provided additional coaching to REAC members and a streamlined process to examine specific policies, gaps in services, and resource allocation that may be perpetuating or reinforcing inequities in their communities. The additional strategies and recommended action steps are listed throughout the Regional Plan, coded by blue text. During Phase 3, C4 continued to engage members of the COG Homeless Services Committee and the Human Services Policy Committee in coaching and working sessions to develop regional strategies, prepare for implementation, and plan for sustainability of the Regional Racial Equity Plan.

A timeline of the activities and deliverables across all three phases can be seen here.



One of C4's primary facilitation goals was capacity building. The C4 team provided resources, training, technical assistance, tools, and coaching throughout the engagement to ensure that each community had an increased capacity and strengthened infrastructure to plan and drive change in inclusive, equitable, and sustainable ways. REAC members and regional stakeholders learned to challenge white supremacy cultural characteristics such as the sense of urgency, either or thinking, belief in one right way, and the assumption that making progress is more valuable than the quality of our relationships. Participants gained many skills and developed a process for cross-community learning that will support their long-term efforts to advance racial equity within their CoCs and across the region.



D. Regional Systems Analysis: Findings and Opportunities

The Process

Systematic data collection and analytics have been used throughout history, at times both intentionally and unintentionally, to cause harm to communities of color. Although data is often perceived as neutral, racial bias can impact how data is collected, reported, and misinterpreted. Without the historical and present-day context that details conditions leading to racial disparities, data can dangerously drive false narratives about different demographic groups which reinforce and maintain power imbalances. For these reasons, community-based data collection and analysis require an anti-racist lens.

During the assessment and discovery phase of this project, quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed to establish a comprehensive understanding of the regional homeless response system at its baseline. Communities were supported to embed equity principles and practices in the following ways.

- Consider quantitative data (which refers to a collection of numerical data, such as average length of time homeless) only as a starting point and utilize qualitative data (which refers to a collection of non-numerical data, such as people's experiences) to see the full picture

- When engaging participants for listening sessions, promote community self-determination and foster safety:
 - provide transparency around the objectives of data collection
 - seek consent
 - ensure confidentiality
 - compensate participants for their time
- When interpreting data, work to create an inclusive process that disrupts internal biases:
 - promote a mutual learning environment among everyone involved (i.e., make meaning of the data in community with others, specifically with Black, Indigenous, and people of color and those with lived and living experience of homelessness who are represented in the data)
 - look at trends over time and consider local community context in terms of racial and ethnic dynamics – demographics, geographies, pandemic-related realities, racial trauma in the broader community, etc.
 - be curious and inquisitive and ask questions rather than jumping to conclusions
- When sharing findings within local CoCs and across the region, strive to humanize the data:
 - keep your audience in mind and use language that is accessible to all
 - name the data gaps and limitations
 - use person-centered data labels
 - make visible both the challenges and strengths of the community

Quantitative Data Analysis

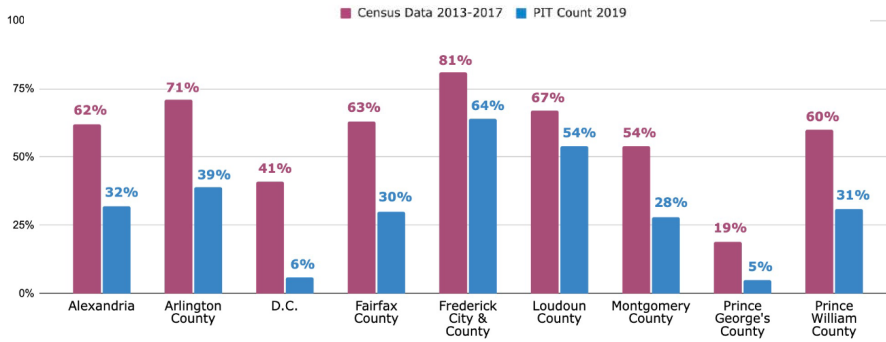
Each of the nine participating CoCs submitted data from their jurisdiction’s homeless management information system (HMIS). Communities pulled HMIS data from FY 2018, FY 2019, and FY 2020 on several system level and coordinated entry performance measures, all disaggregated by race and ethnicity. They also analyzed Census and Point-in-Time (PIT) Count data from 2019 using the publicly available HUD CoC Analysis Tool: Race and Ethnicity (<https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5787/coc-analysis-tool-race-and-ethnicity/>).

Each CoC was provided with a quantitative data analysis report that was specific to the demographics of people experiencing homelessness and system performance metrics within their CoC region. Links to data reports for each individual CoC can be found in the appendix. (folder where you can find all of the [quantitative data reports](#)) The findings presented in this report represent regional commonalities across all jurisdictions.

Quantitative Data Analysis Findings

In comparing the census data to the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count data, REAC members were able to examine the disproportionality between the demographic makeup of people living in their community and the demographic makeup of people who are experiencing homelessness in their community. In every CoC, white households were underrepresented in homelessness when comparing the racial and ethnic population distributions in Census data to Point-in-Time (PIT) count data from 2019. In other words, White households are less likely to experience homelessness when compared to other demographic groups in each community's general population.

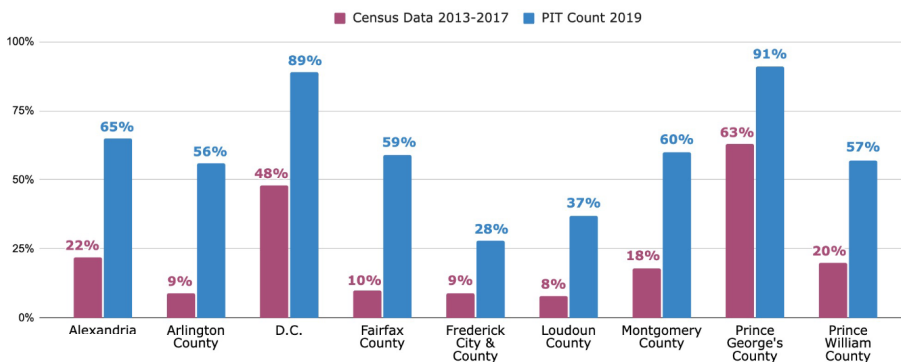
Census Demographics vs. 2019 PIT Count Rates for White Households



In contrast, across every CoC, Black or African American households are overrepresented in homelessness when comparing the racial and ethnic population distributions in Census data to Point-in-Time (PIT) count data from 2019. In other words, all communities in the COG region have disproportionate numbers of unhoused Black or African American households when compared to the demographics of each general population. This overrepresentation can even be seen in communities with higher distributions of Black or African American households. This is how that breaks down per community.

- In the City of Alexandria, Black households are almost **3** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Arlington County, Black households are over **6** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In D.C., Black households are **1.9** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Fairfax County, Black households are almost **6** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Frederick City and County, Black households are over **3** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Loudoun County, Black households are over **4.6** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Montgomery County, Black households are **3.3** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Prince George’s County, Black households are **1.4** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population
- In Prince William County, Black households are **2.9** times more likely to show up in the PIT count when compared to the general population

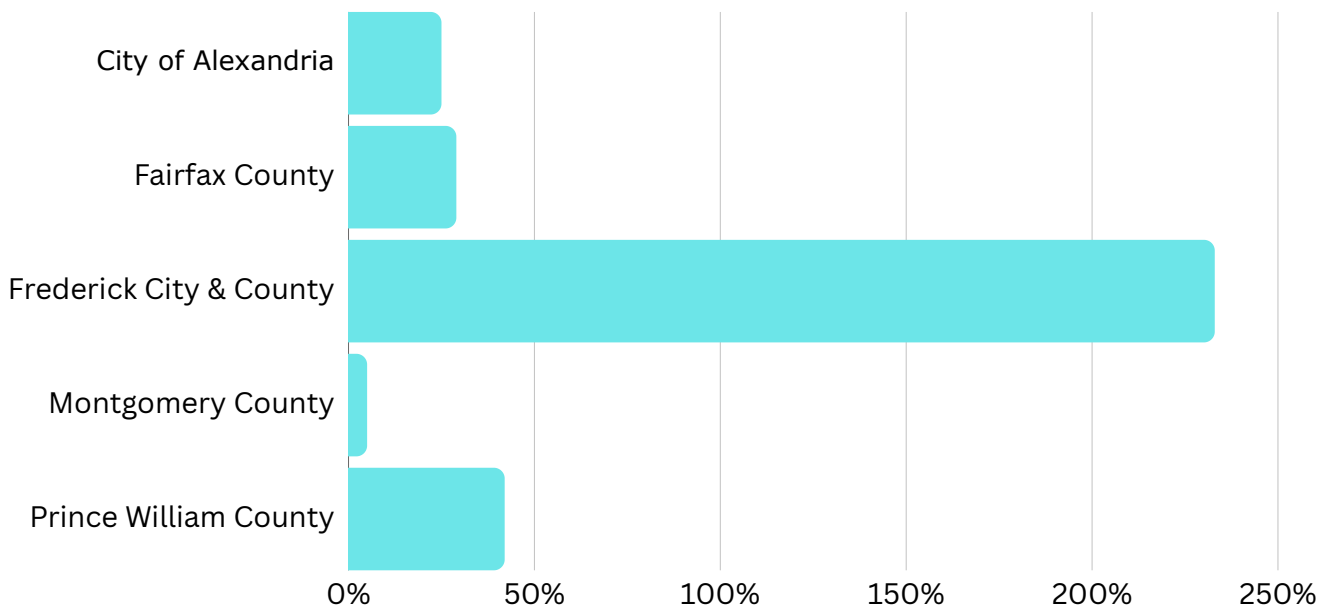
Census Demographics vs. 2019 PIT Count Rates for Black Households



In addition to disproportionality data, communities looked at an array of system performance measures, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, to identify where the greatest inequities lie. In looking for trends across all nine regions, another common inequity that stood out revealed that in five out of the nine CoCs, the average length of time that Black or African American households experienced homelessness (LOTH) increased from FY 2018 to FY 2020.

- In the City of Alexandria, the average LOTH for Black or African American households increased by 25%
- In Fairfax County, the average LOTH for Black or African American households increased by 29%
- In Frederick City and County, the average LOTH for Black or African American households increased by 233%
- In Montgomery County, the average length of time homeless for Black or African American increased by 4%
- In Prince William County, the average length of time homeless for Black or African American households increased by 42%

Percent Increases in Average Length of Time That Black or African American Households experienced homelessness FY 2018 - FY2020



A bright spot in this data set showed that in two CoCs, Black households experienced decreases in their average LOTH over the three years. In the District of Columbia, the average LOTH decreased for all groups due to an increased number of permanent housing and rapid rehousing units becoming available. For Black households there was a 57% decrease in LOTH. In Loudoun County, there was a 43% decrease in LOTH for Black households across the three years.

Qualitative Data Analysis

In addition to analyzing quantitative data, C4 Innovations engaged community members to collect qualitative data across the region. An online survey was sent out to CoC system leaders and invested

partners who had working relationships across any of the nine homeless response systems to provide valuable insight into:

- What is working and not working to coordinate racial equity transformation across the CoCs/homeless response systems (HRS)
- The level of support and buy-in for various targeted racial equity strategies across the CoCs/HRS
- Initial recommendations for strategies that could potentially reduce racial disparities in the HRS

One hundred and ninety-seven individuals responded, and there was participation from every jurisdiction. For the open-ended survey items, the C4 team conducted a thematic analysis to identify common themes. The majority of responses demonstrate that the regional stakeholders have nuanced perspectives on how to advance racial equity in their organizations and CoC, and the depth and breadth of responses highlight the importance of those in leadership and decision-making positions to provide opportunities for frontline staff and people with lived experience to share their perspectives and drive decisions around policy and system planning.

Survey Findings

The findings show an acknowledgement of the disproportionate impact of homelessness on Black and Hispanic communities across the region, but also speak to the lack of a coordinated systemic response that can actively address racial inequities.

The challenges and barriers to advancing racial equity in the CoC/HRS fell into three categories: Practice-Level Challenges, Organizational-Level Challenges, and System-Level Challenges.

Practice-Level Challenges:

- Outreach efforts need to be improved as providers and messages may not be reaching people of color.
- Language and translation services are a major concern, specifically a lack of translated materials for the Spanish-speaking population.
- There is a need for better, deeper data work, including focus groups with sub-populations among people of color experiencing homelessness, and using data to develop specific strategies to improve racial equity.
- Lack of housing providers who accept undocumented folks in their programs.
- Elderly and disabled folks continue to be a population of concern.

Organizational-Level Challenges:

- There is a lack of funding and billable time to engage in long-term transformational equity work.
- Staff bandwidth is limited, and capacity for long-term work is diminished when teams are in crisis response mode, which is reinforced by leadership.
- Racial equity trainings and principles have been rudimentary without a practicable application or clear path for operationalizing racial equity transformation. Strategy sessions stay at the discussion stage, with minimal follow-up or enforcement of values and improved practices.
- Leadership may say things about advancing racial equity but not know how to operationalize or demonstrate racial equity in action.

- Diversity is lacking at the leadership and policy-making level; better representation of Black and Hispanic system leaders is needed. There is also a lack of staff representation of people with lived expertise.
- Overall, there may be a lack of staff buy-in for racial equity.
- There is limited opportunity for input from case workers and direct service workers; staff feel uncomfortable having conversations around racial equity and need shared language and safe spaces to discuss racial equity and share power.

System-Level Challenges:

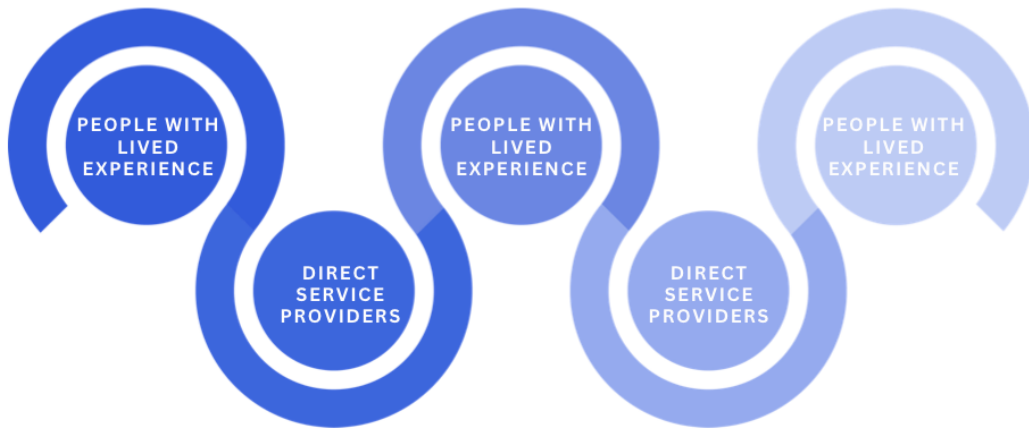
- Agencies are operating in silos with poor inter-agency communication and collaboration.
- There may be a general feeling of content with the status quo.
- Without increased government funding and policy change, transformation is elusive.
- The system is using unfair, biased tools to select clients for housing opportunities.
- Homeless services intersect with numerous racist systems that share responsibility and authority in decision making.

Survey participants were also asked what supports they needed to successfully advance racial equity in their CoC/HRS. They identified several areas of opportunity and recommendations.

Opportunities Identified by Survey Participants

- There should be broadened partnerships and better collaborations and accountability beyond the CoC/HRS for upstream solutions with concrete measures in place; a “collective impact” approach should be taken.
- Additional training on racial equity should establish a shared language, have action steps, and develop strategies for operationalizing racial equity in communities.
- Organizations need to have better representation of different cultures and languages on staff, at all levels but especially at the leadership level.
- There is a need for staff positions that are dedicated to racial equity, as well as a need for (executive level) subcommittees to keep the work on track.
- Writing language into future contracts that requires a focus on equity will help to concretize and enforce equity action steps.
- Building local and regional collaborations that are broadly inclusive and focused on achieving racial equity will create wider, system-level change.
- CoCs and organizations would benefit from third party consultation and support for racial equity work, including strategic planning and training.
- More funding should be directed to community involvement in equity work, affordable housing, outreach and education, nonprofits and low-barrier accessible housing across the county, translators and interpreters, and better, more inclusive language access, and funds to allocate for direct racial equity action work.
- There should be more emphasis on formal equity assessments and continuous quality improvement using data, with open forums and town halls held for reviewing, discussing, and addressing inequities in the county.
- Organizations and CoCs should create opportunities for staff to examine, discuss, and address racial equity issues openly and without fear of repercussions.

The C4 team also conducted five virtual listening sessions with a small but representative sample of individuals from the COG region to assess both progress to-date toward building an equity infrastructure, deepen an understanding of the experiences of people who are using the HRS, and identify the current needs of the CoCs to build sustainable equity strategies going forward.



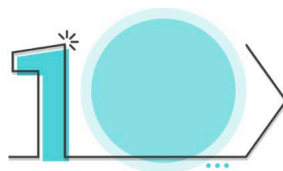
Designed to complement quantitative findings, the team facilitated two sessions with direct service providers and three sessions with people with lived experience including:

- Adults over 25 years old
- Young adults 18-24 years old
- Families or multi-living households with minor children

All groups were racially and ethnically diverse. Most listening sessions had one representative from each community; in some cases, not all communities were represented.

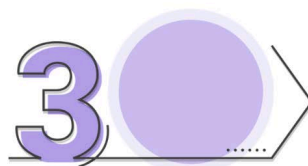
Findings from Listening Sessions

Findings were organized into three categories:



EQUITY AND PERCEPTION OF EQUITY ACROSS THE SYSTEM INCLUDES OVERARCHING PERCEPTIONS, UNDERSTANDING, AND COMMENTS REGARDING RACIAL EQUITY IN THE HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM AND THE C4 TEAM'S READ ON READINESS TO DISCUSS RACIAL EQUITY ISSUES.

SYSTEM BARRIERS TO EQUITY AND SERVICES INCLUDES WHAT'S WORKING AND NOT WORKING BOTH WITHIN THE HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM AND IN ADJACENT SYSTEMS.



ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES, INCLUDING STAFF AND LEADERSHIP INCLUDES OBSERVATIONS ON ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES SUCH AS POLICIES, PRACTICES, OR PROGRAMS THAT MAY BE CONTRIBUTING TO INEQUITIES, AS WELL AS OBSERVATIONS ON STAFF, LEADERSHIP, AND WORKFORCE DYNAMICS THAT MAY NEED IMPROVEMENT.

Equity and Perception of Equity Across the System

For people with lived expertise, equity issues are related to income (especially when folks make too much to be eligible for services), discrimination (by private landlords in particular) against folks with criminal justice or eviction histories or children, and some racial discrimination from frontline staff, especially in wondering if white clients experienced similar barriers to services or scrutiny during assessment/eligibility activities. Some participants reported having experienced racial discrimination, and youth participants in particular found it easy to imagine discrimination based on race, sexual identity, and citizenship status was happening based on personal experience and stories they had heard.

“At one organization, their level of questioning was way too much for what I needed. ... I’m like I don’t even know why you ask all these questions. And if I were white, would you have asked those same questions for those resources?... I didn’t feel it was the same across the board.”

“In my experience, race did play a factor. Landlords discriminate and help some over others... I’m black and have a history of violence...It’s hard, being black, and having bad mental health.”

Providers were reticent to discuss race explicitly; when asked about equity, providers answered broadly, and race was not a readily mentioned factor until probed specifically. Providers believed the system to be equitable but appeared to conceptualize this mostly in terms of eligibility for programs (e.g., not in terms of outreach/access, interpersonal discrimination, or outcomes). There was acknowledgement of a lack of needed resources and housing to address the needs of *everybody in the system* but a reluctance to drill down into how resource allocation tools decision making processes can perpetuate racial inequities. As with PWLE, the link between income and race was recognized as a factor perpetuating inequity: *“Affordable housing is also an issue in DC, pretty sure there is a direct correlation between affordable housing and the racial makeup of people experiencing homelessness.”*

The link between family size and race was also recognized as a factor contributing to discriminatory housing policies, landlord discrimination, and location preference, particularly for Latinx families. Documentation (related to citizenship) and lack of materials in non-English languages and general language barriers were also cited as a barrier to equity. Providers reported seeing Hispanic/Latinx populations distrust services, especially if undocumented, and the need for better collaboration with community services to serve this population. Trans, femme, and elderly folks, as well as those with a criminal justice history were listed as other groups who may be experiencing discriminatory practices, whether in eligibility for services, treatment by the system, or outcomes. Providers also discussed the issue of disproportionate interactions with police, especially for people of color experiencing homelessness, combined with the criminalization of homelessness in the form of trespassing or loitering charges as contributors of inequity. Importantly, the presence of staff bias was also cited as a contributing factor for inequities across the service spectrum.

System Barriers to Equity & Services

People with lived expertise had mixed but generally positive feelings about programs and services: participants recognized and valued the support they have received while articulating areas for improvement in service access and system barriers. Some participants cited experiences with services that were transformational in rebuilding their life (for example, getting a car, rebuilding credit), while

maintaining that navigation of services remains difficult due to general bureaucracy related to wait time, documentation (described as a “spinning hamster wheel”) and the difficult and lengthy processes required to access basic support services, and having to repeatedly tell one’s story of homelessness. Not surprisingly, participants agreed that issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded some of these issues. Again, participants homed in on income as a barrier for services:

“There were organizations that shut the door on me because I “should have known better”. I ended up in a hotel/ car with my kids because shelters were overcrowded. I made too much money income wise.”

“You make too much, or you don’t make enough. It’s really hard.”

For people with lived expertise, barriers to housing and service access included (private) landlord discrimination and negligence, eviction histories, credit, criminal justice history, having children (including occupancy policies), lack of quality, affordable housing, and gentrification were all barriers to housing. Some participants cited experiences with inappropriate and/or unsuccessful services, such as rapid re-housing followed by another episode of homelessness, or Section 8 not accommodating a disability. Experience with location preference was mixed.

“It’s hard—bad mental health, Black, and homeless. With rapid rehousing, it’s just a revolving door.”

Participants with lived expertise articulated additional major system issues, including poor system level collaboration and communication across agencies, insufficient data to be able to provide the best services, insufficient staff training, and limited knowledge and communication of available services. Additionally, specific recommended improvements included same day emergency shelters, places to put people immediately, shelter programs that keep families and couples together, accommodations for mental health and other disabilities, and understanding or treating the whole person, with customized services for everyone’s specific needs.

Provider respondents could readily state which programs, policies, and processes are working well, including new, more streamlined processes under COVID, master leasing, inclusive eligibility, offering multiple programs and services under one roof, cross-sector/system collaboration, wraparound services, and low-barrier services.

“Emergency Housing Vouchers have opened up a lot of opportunities for people who wouldn’t have been eligible (due to background or poor credit). They are helping to eliminate some of the poverty issues.”

Providers cited credit, criminal background checks, lack of language access lines or funding to support non-English materials, and gentrification as major system issues. Providers stated that policies around affordable housing and what developers can do need to be reevaluated, and that discriminatory and restrictive landlord practices are trickling into staff practices. Additionally, the continued criminalization of homelessness perpetuates inequities. It was recommended that “ban the box” initiatives should expand to include credit history or other items that create barriers, and that the system should help people buy a home rather than rent, which keeps people in poverty, prevents them from building wealth, and disproportionately impacts BIPOC. Providers also recommended allocating more funds towards crisis teams to help limit police interactions, which can compromise client trust.

Organizational Issues, Including Staff and Leadership

For people with lived expertise, observations on staff and staff interactions were mixed. Participants recognized staff who were passionate about the work and really cared about clients, citing professional, dedicated workers who were knowledgeable and supportive. Negative observations were mostly rooted in the context of recognizing organizational and systemic issues rather than interpersonal shortcomings, such as overworked staff, high caseloads, and high rates of turnover. Participants cited a need for systems to communicate and collaborate.

“We need more counselors and counselors with deeper knowledge. If they have more—even peer to peer counselors—that would be nice.”

“People have been very kind to me and my child... even watching my child while I eat and giving me a moment’s rest has been helpful.”

However, there were some interpersonal examples of difference in treatment by staff, calling out African American staff as being more supportive than White staff: “[T]he staff here, like, the African American women, they understand. Like, they get it. They understand. They’re so supportive.” Youth participants cited instances of staff carelessness and not valuing youth’s time. One youth respondent reported having experienced adultism, staff not being youth friendly, and the use of professional jargon when working with case workers. Some noted that staff serving youth do not always know what services are available for youth, so self-advocacy is important.

A major organizational issue identified by people with lived expertise is the presence of serious mental health issues among clients, and the challenges that arise when clients with SMI are mixed with those who do not have MH issues. They described instances where mental health crises take staff attention away from others, creates unsafe situations in shelter spaces, and impacts the mental health of other clients as they navigate the mental health of others. Youth participants observed that the system needs more speaking up about sexual assault, discrimination, and mental health needs, with more mentor relationships, community events, and opportunities for youth to be at the table.

“I feel like most people have accepted youth homelessness as a thing that exists, but acknowledgement is not the same thing as action.”

“When meetings and resources are being held and budgeted for the holding space, youth and young adults need to have access to that meeting and there is no one better to give the feedback on what young adults need. The invite to participate and advocate for themselves.”

Providers reported that staff are underpaid, undertrained, and experience high rates of turnover. Retention strategies should include better pay and more training, especially in mental health and equity and bias, so that staff can serve clients with higher needs with confidence, as well as clear professional pathways for growth and leadership advancement. Staff also need more support and training to deal with mental health issues and are not prepared or equipped to deal with crisis situations or clients with higher needs. *“Staff do not have the support they need to serve [clients] well and sometimes policies and procedures get in the way.”*

The majority of providers agreed representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color at the staff and leadership levels was very poor and needed to be improved, including diversification beyond a focus of only Black and White. *“Most of non-profit frontline staff are people of color, and they are underpaid and overworked and underdeveloped, and this is primarily because we all rely on county contracts to pay our staff.”*

One provider noted an organization where all Black staff were separated in one section. One community did report that leadership was diverse by design and efforts made to ensure representation were recognized.

“No. Not at all. Never enough minorities – African American, Hispanic – the community doesn’t look like an all-white community. Never enough representation. Not enough ppl who understand working with folks who are homeless. They still don’t understand what we actually do all the time. They don’t know what I do on a day to day basis to help people. Not just housing, but services. They didn’t become homeless in one day – unless it was an accident or emergency – this is stuff that built up over time. So we aren’t going to stabilize them in one day. Boards and supervisors – they have no clue of all the representation that they need.”

Providers also lamented minimal turnover for people in positions of power and made a call for leadership to come see what “actually goes on in direct service”.

“Easy for leadership to say that they know what’s going on, but they don’t. They don’t know the clients and they don’t see them, and they don’t understand. They make decisions based on what they think is best for the clients.”

“If you have people in leadership who are prejudiced and have some type of disdain against the people they’re trying to help, then that’s where the main problem is. You may have people on the lower level that want to do good, but then you have people at the higher level that don’t want to do it—don’t want to make policy changes that will bring that level of equity that you’re speaking of. And so, when I look at things from a leadership standpoint, sometimes you have to go a little higher up to see why this [effective equity work] is not happening.”

Providers discussed the issue of organizations not being safe spaces for staff to share lived experience, and recommended improvements for the inclusivity of PWLE in decision making. Most communities have YABs or CABs that are successfully initiating change, but in some areas those groups are struggling to stay supported. Only some communities have mechanisms for front-line staff feedback.

“Lack of representation for people with lived experience. It doesn’t make sense that people with no lived experience are saying that I am the expert when I’ve never lived in a shelter. Clients and people with lived experience should be making decisions for their safety. They know it best. We don’t. We don’t have the experience to.”

Additional System Analysis

To further understand the systemic structures such as governance, funding, CoC policies, and culture that could be contributing to inequities within each jurisdiction, REAC members were asked to conduct a system mapping activity and a review of CoC policies and procedures with a lens of racial equity. The C4

team provided tools, coaching, and facilitation of working sessions to advance this analysis at the local level. Towards the end of the project, additional system mapping sessions were added to support communities to develop strategies and action steps that were more detailed and specific to the unique challenges of each community.

Additional Findings

- Across the region, partners shared concerns about:
 - the lack of quality, affordable housing in communities where people want to live
 - high barrier programs that make access and retention difficult for clients
 - funding requirements such as jurisdictional residency, proof of citizenship/legal status, etc. that create barriers to access
 - limited staff capacity to coordinate and advance the work of racial equity
 - the lack of representation from Black, Indigenous, and people of color as well as people with lived experience of homelessness around policy-making tables
 - limited opportunities for frontline staff and people with lived experience to provide feedback, drive decisions that impact them, and advance to positions of leadership
 - the absence of structures and processes that “have teeth” and ensure accountability to the people being served/housed
 - continued use of an assessment and prioritization process that is not trauma-informed or racially equitable
 - the need for more culturally responsive services and outreach to communities of color

The REAC teams worked actively with community partners, system leaders, and HMIS system administrators to identify inequities, make meaning of their local data, and determine some priority areas for action planning.

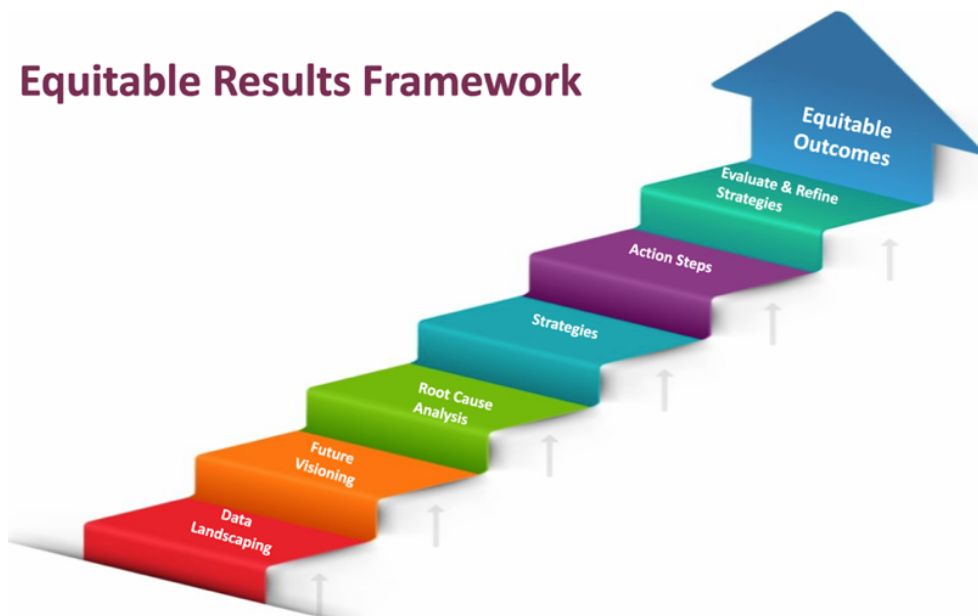
Action Planning Process



Equitable Results Framework

As communities increase their awareness of inequities, a natural response is the desire to move quickly towards solutions and action. The second phase of this initiative ensured that REAC members were grounded in a framework that promotes accountability to both an equitable and inclusive action planning

process and shapes system change through targeted equity outcomes. The Equitable Results Framework aims to achieve better outcomes for all while addressing factors that contribute to racial inequities and block access to opportunity.



Future Visioning

After analyzing quantitative and qualitative data as well as findings from the system mapping activity, REAC members were tasked with developing a shared vision for the desired end result. What are we trying to accomplish? What do we want to see for ALL of the people being served within our systems? The vision for a more equitable homeless response system was that:

“All persons experiencing housing instability and homelessness within the COG region will have an equitable path to safe, stable, homes in communities of their choosing.”

Root Cause Analysis

In examining the desired end result statement, project participants had to determine, based on the data, which demographic groups were not meeting this desired end result or not meeting it in the same way as others. They identified the greatest inequities and then conducted a root cause analysis to understand the underlying factors, structure, and mental models that were leading to those inequities.

Development of Strategies and Action Steps

Strategies that address the contributing factors and root causes of inequities will be most impactful in addressing the specific challenges that are faced by Black, indigenous, and people of color. As communities moved forward with strategy development, they were asked to ensure that all racial and ethnic groups who will be affected by decisions and changes in policy or practice, have some representation and decision-making power in the process.

REAC teams worked in their communities to develop strategies and action steps and create local racial equity action plans. The plans from the 9 CoCs were reviewed by the C4 team and synthesized into one regional coordinated racial equity plan with recommended action that can be taken at the regional and local level.

Regional Priority Areas

Communities were encouraged to choose up to three Focus Areas to guide the work of action planning for equitable results. Focus Areas that centered around people with lived experience of homelessness were chosen most often: “ensure that people with lived experience have decision-making power” was chosen by 5 communities, and “improving the experiences of people utilizing the system” was chosen by 4 communities. This indicates that MWCOG communities are building solid foundations for racial equity work by prioritizing strategies that build authentic partnerships and ensure shared power with people with lived experience.

Several communities identified Focus Areas tied directly to existing system processes and staffing, including “analysis of assessment and prioritization process for CES,” “addressing racial disparities in prevention/upstream,” and “addressing racial disparities in CoC staffing and leadership.” Finally, several Focus Areas were chosen by very few communities and may be useful to consider when building out a robust regional plan. “Building community” and “develop stronger collaborative relationships with cross sector partners” were chosen by 1 community each, and “equitable funding and resource allocation” was not explicitly chosen as a Focus Area by any community. These areas may be useful to consider in the context of regional work to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, as they may be better served by using a wider regional lens and network of resources to begin meaningful work.

It is important to note that each CoC came into this work with varying capacity, knowledge, and skill sets in relation to racial equity, some that had already been working towards identifying and addressing disparities and some that were very new to these concepts. As such, the Regional Racial Equity Action Plan represents data-informed and community driven recommendations for strategies and action steps that will promote equitable policies and practices across the COG region, and hold system leaders and providers accountable to ensuring more racially equitable access and outcomes for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Summary

Communities participating in this initiative were provided with an Equitable Results Framework tool and met individually with their teams to develop customized plans for furthering local, CoC-specific racial equity work. Each local racial equity action plan as well as the Regional Racial Equity Action Plan, is a live planning document intended to be used in a flexible way and is expected to change over time. The strategies that communities outlined are intended as tests and the impact of those strategies should be monitored and evaluated frequently and revised as needed depending on real-time feedback.

Action Plan



The Regional Racial Equity Action Plan is the culmination of almost 18 months of working in partnership with community members across the COG region. The plan consists of *recommended* strategies and action steps and is not meant to be all inclusive or definitive. It is important to acknowledge that some communities may already be implementing strategies outlined in the plan which could provide opportunities for continued cross-community learning and resource sharing as other communities may be beginning their work. The Regional Plan is laid out by focus areas that were prioritized in the CoC-specific racial equity plans as well as areas of opportunity that were highlighted during engagements with regional stakeholders and working sessions with CERT members. The focus areas are as follows:

- i. **Culture:** Shifts in policies and processes that will embed racial equity principles across local and regional efforts to end homelessness. This includes developing and sustaining authentic partnerships with people with lived experience, ensuring shared power and decision-making, increasing racial and ethnic representation at all levels of the HRS and policy-making bodies, and embedding cultural humility across the homeless service system.
- ii. **System Improvements:** Methods to understand and address the needs and inequitable experiences of people of color experiencing homelessness/housing insecurity in the COG region.
- iii. **Analysis:** Ensuring that data is collected, reported, and utilized in ways that advance racial equity and promote shared accountability to the Regional Racial Equity Plan.
- iv. **Funding:** Allocating resources in ways that advance racial equity and sustain process and system improvements.

Many strategies are interrelated and are meant to be reinforcing of other aspects of the plan. The plan links related strategies together in ways that may help define how they are actionable. It is also important to recognize that each CoC will have different resources and capacity. Implementation planning should consider the varying levels of support that CoCs may need to successfully carry out the identified action steps. One specific example is that CoCs do not collect or report data in the same ways across the region. For some communities, pulling specific data metrics may be outside of their ability.

Regional vs. local efforts

Although each CoC developed a local racial equity action plan (See Appendix B) to identify and address inequities within their jurisdiction, many REAC members expressed an interest in understanding what influence they will have in regional implementation planning as well as

monitoring progress on the plan and evaluating impact. Next steps at both the regional and local level will include determining who will do the work, fund the work, priorities, and timeframes, etc. Partners across the region will need to work to understand capacity and feasibility of each action step and may need to build out additional, and perhaps more fundamental, steps to see each strategy through.

Culture Shift	Strategies	Recommended Initial Action Steps
C1, A2	Implement Shared Decision-Making Approaches	C1.1 Through regional power mapping, identify where funding decisions are made in the housing ecosystem and which people and departments are making the decisions and how representative those decision makers are of the people who will be most impacted by the funding decisions C1.2 With community participation, develop strategies to invite more input into funding allocation decisions being intentional to include people who have experienced housing instability and homelessness
C2, S2, F2	Engage Wide Variety of Stakeholders including People with Lived Expertise	C2.1 Build an infrastructure to support the formation of a fully resourced Regional Lived Experience Coalition, with representatives from each COG jurisdiction (i.e., ensure there is capacity in each CoC to orient, authentically engage, and support partners with lived experience in a robust manner) a) Develop onboarding process, mentorship opportunities, and career pathways to sustain partnerships with people with lived experience b) Consider staffing a regional position that can support partners with lived experience to facilitate regional-level work through coordination, onboarding, professional development, etc. c) Ensure feedback mechanisms are in place to continually assess and maintain accountability to authentic engagement C2.2 Ask each CoC to engage with, recruit and support 2-3 individuals who have experienced homelessness over the last ten years to become part of a Regional Lived Experience Coalition that could work with and within a newly formed Regional Interagency Council on Homelessness (recommendations around Regional ICH discussed further in Sustainability and Accountability section) to make decisions on strategies, funding, and staff C2.3 Provide network providers and system leaders with training to ensure authentic engagement of partners with lived experience
C3	Ensure that Frontline Providers are Racially/Ethnically Representative of those most Disproportionately Impacted by Homelessness and Inclusive of Lived Experience	C3.1 Standardize recruitment, hiring, and compensation practices across the region that value lived experience as much as a formal education a) Create standard job descriptions for frontline positions b) Establish a minimum compensation rate across the region for frontline positions that will help to attract and retain a racially/ethnically diverse staff C3.2 Pay frontline providers a living wage, and ensure pathways to leadership positions to address staff capacity and high turn-over rates across the system
C4, A2	Ensure that System Leaders are Racially/Ethnically Representative of those most Disproportionately Impacted by Homelessness and Inclusive of Lived Experience	C4.1 Develop succession plans for positions (e.g., CoC Boards, Human Services Policy Council, COG Homeless Services Committee, etc.) that provide opportunities for leadership advancement that include shadowing, mentorship, and any additional supports necessary for success C4.2 Include representation of people with lived experience on all current regional decision-making bodies C4.3 Analyze demographic makeup and inclusivity of CoC Boards, Human Services Policy Council, and COG Homeless Services Committee across the region
C5, S6	Institutionalize Racial Equity Principles by Incorporating Equity into Regional Policies and Procedures Documents	C5.1 Establish and implement a formal process to review regional and local policies (e.g., committee bylaws, governance charters) using the racial equity review protocol shared by C4 a) Build regional capacity to review and refine policies to be more inclusive and anti-racist. (i.e., for each policy, determine who is being left out, who is benefitting, who is being harmed, codesign policies with those who will be most impacted, disrupt power imbalances, embed accountability processes, etc.) b) Conduct racial equity review/revision of regional policies at least annually c) Write language into future contracts that requires a focus on equity to concretize and enforce equity action

Funding	Strategies	Recommended Initial Action Steps
F1, S2	Use Federal Investments to Close the Funding Gap for Housing and Services Needs	F1.1 Complete Housing System Modeling (Resource: https://www.usich.gov/news/how-system-modeling-can-help-build-a-stronger-response-to-homelessness/) to determine actual housing and services utilization and projected need F1.2 Once the housing system modeling analysis and services analysis is completed, costs need to be assigned (E.g., if 1000 homes are needed, what is the breakdown of studio, 1, 2, 3, 4 bedroom? How many can be gotten from existing inventory if there is a rental voucher attached? How many will come from renovations? How many will have to be built and then what each will cost? etc.) Then determine which costs will be covered locally and which costs will need to be federal. F1.3 Make a Regional request to HUD and HHS for the resources needed (housing renovation funds, vouchers, service dollar allocations, move-in costs, development costs for PHA and other nonprofit affordable housing developers, etc.) a) Create dedicated funding pool to compensate (peer navigator and advocacy) positions within the region b) Build regional funding for landlord incentives and risk mitigation funds
F2	Integrate Racial Equity Practices into the Funding Allocation Process	F2.1 Prioritize reporting of quantitative data AND qualitative data in ranking and scoring of projects across the region F2.2 Create a dedicated pool of funding to compensate and support partners with lived experience a) Across jurisdictions, include compensation for partners with lived experience in HUD planning dollars when possible b) Identify additional funding, as needed, to compensate and support partners with lived experience to work at both the local and regional levels c) Examine the possibility of funding a regional staff position that can support recruitment, engagement, and onboarding of partners with lived experience for regional-level work and assist them with coordination as needed F2.3 Include and support partners with lived experience to fully participate in the development of RFPs, grant review, and grant management processes F2.4 Reallocate available resources to meet the needs of those who are most disproportionately impacted by homelessness
F3	Align Funding Streams and Resources to Increase Affordable Housing and Supports Across the Region	F3.1 Convene a regional funders collaborative with shared values and priorities around advancing a more equitable approach to ending homelessness F3.2 Align philanthropic dollars with federal funding streams to increase Extremely Low Income housing inventory a) Identify opportunities across the region to purchase hotels and transition them to single resident occupancy units (SROs) F3.3 Determine how CoCs are maximizing federal funding resources to increase housing inventory (e.g., ARPA, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, HOME dollars, CDBG, 811, etc.) and create cross-community learning opportunities F3.4 Develop regional technical assistance to support providers that want to own their own permanent housing buildings or pursue projects that use a master lease structure. Resource: https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Project-Funding-and-Structure-Brief-Master-Leasing.pdf F3.5 Partner with public housing authorities (PHAs) to leverage project-based and tenant based Section 8 vouchers for permanent supportive housing as well as move-on vouchers to free up supportive services. a) Identify CoCs across the region that have the strongest partnerships with PHAs and communities that are beginning to build these relationships b) Facilitate a regional convening of housing authorities to increase opportunities for learning (e.g., how to revise the annual tenant selection plan to create set aside vouchers for people experiencing homelessness), strengthen partnerships, and build more buy-in
F4	Create more Equitable and Practical Legislation that Reduces Barriers to Accessing Benefits, Developing Deeply Affordable Housing, etc.	F4.1 Create paid positions for direct service providers to participate in legislative and policy change work across the states and districts a) If direct service providers are unable to engage in legislative advocacy work, ensure there is a regional advocacy team that can represent the interests of people experiencing homelessness across all jurisdictions
F5	Ensure an Adequate Number of Trained Staff to Design, Implement, Evaluate, and Sustain a Coordinated Effort to Advance Racial Equity	F5.1 Develop regional funding stream to bridge the staffing and training gaps in smaller, less resourced CoCs F5.2 Create funded position(s) for a Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Liaison to oversee the regional racial equity work, support each CoC as needed to implement, and ensure the strategies and goals are being met.
F6, S6	Address Funding Restrictions which may be Reinforcing Inequities	F6.1 Address barriers within federally funded programs that deny eligibility to heads of households (HoHs) who have undocumented status a) Diversify funding streams to increase resources and housing opportunities for HoHs with undocumented status

Analysis	Strategies	Recommended Initial Action Steps
A1	Identify Upstream Interventions (prevention/diversion)	<p>A1.1 Review existing data on upstream interventions.</p> <p>a) Collate across all regions: How much funding do you have for prevention/ diversion (P/D)? Who is being funded in each category (look at both the program grantees as well as the populations served through prevention and diversion funds)? For grantees, disaggregate by whether they have been funded for other programs over specific time frames, what percentage of funding for P/D are they receiving, whether their executive staff and Board members are representative of the people served through the P/D funds. For impact data, disaggregate the data of the recipient households of the prevention and diversion funds by race/ethnicity, gender and neighborhood clusters</p> <p>A1.2 Analyze disaggregated data on housing stability of recipient households by returns to homelessness in 3, 6, 9, 12 months, percentage going through an eviction of 2nd eviction during those timeframes</p> <p>A1.3 Conduct system mapping of upstream (prevention) programs:</p> <p>a) Convene stakeholders from adjacent systems (child welfare, criminal justice, behavioral health, department of social services, workforce development, etc.)</p> <p>b) Identify resources that support housing stability as well as strengths and gaps</p> <p>c) Examine disaggregated data to identify disparities between who is being referred to supportive services and who is accessing services</p> <p>d) Engage households from marginalized communities to determine if their needs are being met by available resources</p> <p>e) Engage stakeholders to identify actionable next steps in addressing gaps</p>
A2, C1, C4	Establish and Implement a System by which to Measure Progress on Regional Racial Equity Work	<p>A2.1 For each racial equity strategy, define what progress looks like using the SMARTIE format (strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable)</p> <p>A2.2 Establish a process in each CoC to collect and report qualitative data at least bi-annually</p> <p>a) Develop flexible streams of funding that each CoC can use to compensate participants in the listening sessions (e.g., CoC planning dollars can be used)</p> <p>b) Coordinate co-facilitators in each CoC and provide any training/support necessary to ensure trauma-informed process</p> <p>c) Include regional findings from qualitative data analysis in reports to stakeholders (COG Homeless Services Committee, Human Services Policy Council, etc.) to increase transparency and accountability.</p> <p>A2.3 Develop listening session protocols/tools to collect qualitative data to better understand the experiences of BIPOC households using the homeless response system and BIPOC providers working in the homeless response system</p> <p>A2.4 Develop racial equity assessment tool to measure how racial equity is being operationalized at the regional level and within jurisdictions</p> <p>a) Formalize equity assessments by measuring changes in: hiring practices, data analysis and utilization, committee membership, how racial equity is integrated into policies and procedures documents and CoC/COG strategic plans, shared power and decision-making with BIPOC and people with lived experience, increased and/or sustained racial/ethnic diversity in leadership and committee membership, racial equity integrated into system processes such as CE assessment and prioritization and grant development and review/scoring process, etc.).</p> <p>b) Hold open forums and town halls for reviewing, discussing, and addressing inequities across the region</p> <p>A2.5 Build infrastructure necessary to integrate racial equity into data collection, reporting, analysis, and utilization processes (i.e., develop supports throughout the process and increase capacity in each CoC to run reports such as tip sheets on how to pull data, instructional webinars, clear expectations around frequency of reports, etc.).</p> <p>A2.6 Develop and/or refine a standard reporting template that will allow each CoC to report on proportionality metrics as well as specific system performance measures (e.g., LOTH, returns to homelessness, number of homeless episodes, exit destinations, etc.).</p>
A3	Identify and Report Racial Disparities that Exist for Households Using the Homeless Response System	<p>A3.1 Conduct listening sessions with frontline providers and people with lived experience across the region at least biannually</p> <p>A3.2 Develop a regional racial equity report that includes an analysis of disaggregated system performance data and findings from any available qualitative data (qualitative data included on a biannual basis) and share with key stakeholders monthly</p> <p>A3.3 A Further develop the regional data dashboard to increase transparency and increase access to system performance measures by race/ethnicity across intersections of race/ethnicity AND age, household composition, and gender identity.</p>
A4	Develop and Implement Methods to Comprehensively Document Housing Insecurity across the Region	<p>A4.1 Determine how housing insecurity will be defined (i.e. multiple evictions, experienced multiple periods of homelessness over a certain timeframe, loss of job during past two Covid years, applying for rental assistance 2+ times in a given timeframe, etc. Does that extend to those with mortgages who may be gentrified out because of severe tax increases?)</p> <p>a) Develop survey with providers, people with lived experience, prevention and diversion programs (in and out of HMIS), legal aid eviction providers, sheriffs' depts, McKinney-Vento school liaison and develop method of inclusive survey distribution.</p> <p>A4.2 Collect and analyze disaggregated data on housing instability</p> <p>a) analyze available eviction data by race/ethnicity and geographical location (Resource: https://rampages.us/rvaevictionlab/data/the-virginia-evictors-catalog/)</p> <p>b) examine access to diversion, prevention, and crisis services across different demographic groups</p>
A5, C2	Use Qualitative Data to Inform Decision-Making and Required Training	<p>A5.1 Facilitate surveys and listening sessions with people in the shelters, PSH, those who are unsheltered, etc.</p> <p>a) Build compensation and support structure that would enable members of a Regional Lived Experience Coalition to facilitate this work</p> <p>a) Utilize listening sessions to determine the priorities of those experiencing homelessness around types of housing, location, affordability, etc. to ensure CoCs and regional partners are investing in resources that meet the specific needs of community members</p> <p>b) In CoCs where specific demographic groups are experiencing disparities (e.g., exiting more frequently to non-permanent destinations, higher rates of returns to homelessness, etc.), conduct listening sessions with those program populations to better understand their experiences and develop recommendations for system improvement</p> <p>c) Build an understanding of how the region's unique jurisdictional requirements impact people who are most transient between jurisdictions</p> <p>A5.2 As part of the cultural transformation - include ongoing learning sessions for providers with the content based on what is learned through the surveys and listening sessions</p>
A6	Expand the Network of CoC Providers to Bridge Gaps in Services and Housing	<p>A6.1 Develop Regional system mapping tool for "non-CoC" providers</p> <p>A6.2 Determine why some providers are considered outside of the CoC and, where possible, invite them to be a part of the CoC process.</p> <p>A6.3 Identify and strengthen partnerships with organizations that uplift Black and other communities that have been marginalized</p> <p>a) Identify and enhance relationships with programs that build pathways to home ownership and build economic stability</p>

System Improvements	Strategies	Recommended Initial Action Steps
S1, A2, A3	Standardize Practices that Advance Racial Equity Across the Region.	S1.1 Develop a regional shared resource library to hold tools, reports, and resources related to racial equity.
		S1.2 Develop a learning management system that could be used regionally to provide training and information in a consistent and dynamic way.
		S1.2 Utilize findings from quantitative and qualitative data (listening sessions) to inform system planning (i.e., center lived experience in regional strategic planning, resource allocation, policy development, advocacy efforts, etc.)
S2, F1, C2	Prioritize Peer Support and Peer Advocacy as a Central Part of the System	S1.3 Ensure the Regional Racial Equity Plan is fully aligned with the Regional Compact to End Homelessness
		S2.1 Support the development of a peer advocacy group as part of the new Regional Lived Experience Coalition that can work across access points within their jurisdiction to provide navigation services, and work collaboratively to advocate for regional change as needed.
S3	Fully Utilize Mainstream Funding Sources for Client Needs	S2.2 Ensure ongoing funding for these positions S3.1 Provide funding for trainers and time for providers to participate in ongoing workshops on mainstream resources that can be accessed and used with and for their clients.
S4, F3, F5, A1, A6	Address Racial Disparities in Housing Access and Outcomes	S4.1 Implement targeted strategies to improve housing access for Black, Indigenous and people of color a) Improve outreach to Black and Hispanic communities in jurisdictions that evidence racial and ethnic disparities in outreach and access data. Ensure outreach approach centers cultural humility and embeds language accessible documents and services for Spanish-speaking populations b) Track landlord practices that may be discriminatory (e.g., rates of eviction by landlord and zip code, refusal rates, etc.) Resource: https://rampages.us/rvaevictionlab/data/the-virginia-evictors-catalog/ and advocate for accountability c) Strengthen relationships with landlords through networking events and trainings d) Explore funding opportunities to build risk mitigation funds and incentive programs for landlords e) Explore opportunities for master lease programs throughout the region to minimize barriers to access f) Examine and challenge policies that create barriers to access (e.g., drug testing through PHAS, criminal background checks, residency requirements, income requirements, restrictions around household composition that don't allow people to self-identify family, etc.) g) Reallocate available resources to meet needs of those most disproportionately impacted h) Streamline processes and provide resources to expedite access to mainstream benefits and IDs
		S4.2 Implement targeted strategies to improve housing outcomes for Black, Indigenous and people of color a) Increase supportive vocational programs that work closely with people experiencing homelessness to mitigate biased hiring practices (e.g., Transitional Job programs/subsidized employment, Individualized Placement and Support model, etc.) b) Develop positions for peers in the homeless response system/promote hiring of BIPOC with lived experience and ensure the infrastructure exists to provide any needed supports c) Examine and challenge program-level policies across the region that create housing instability (e.g., 3-6 month time limitations for RRH subsidy, etc.) d) Develop partnerships with culturally specific social service organizations across the region so households can make viable linkages to supportive services that best meet their needs e) Ensure network providers have completed and can show competency in curriculum of equity trainings (racial equity foundational trainings, racial trauma informed care, implicit bias, cultural humility, LGBTQ+ equity) f) Work to educate households about tenant rights g) Establish a regional and/or local Renters' Bill of Rights to protect renters from unjust treatment and to protect those with informal lease agreements Resource: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/White-House-Blueprint-for-a-Renters-Bill-of-Rights.pdf h) Establish a regional or local mechanism(s) (e.g., Office of Tenancy Rights) to enforce tenant rights, quality housing standards, and increase accountability of private landlords
S5	Assess and Redesign more Equitable Regional Coordinated Entry (CE) Process, Frameworks, and Tools (VI-SPDAT)	S5.1 Assess CE processes (outreach, assessment, prioritization, housing match, supportive services, etc.) using a racial equity lens through quantitative and qualitative data methods
		S5.2 In community with partners with lived experience, develop a CE process that is equitable, trauma-informed, client-centered, and provides transparency.
		S5.3 Ensure structures are in place to examine implementation of the reimagined processes, frameworks, and tools, and ensure accountability
S6, C5, F4	Codify Racial Equity Strategies into Existing Policies and Procedures	S6.1 Identify the policies and practices that may reinforce parochialism which can prevent a robust and comprehensive Regional Response to preventing and ending homelessness.
		S6.2 Define the negative impact of the policies and practices identified in S6.1 on people experiencing, or at risk, of homelessness.
		S6.3 Develop work arounds (in the short term) and policy changes (in the long term) for county, state and federal funding restrictions, policies, and practices that create barriers to providing the housing and resources where and how they are needed. a) Describe how change will impact people experiencing homelessness and monitor impact b) Target regional advocacy to challenge exclusionary zoning ordinances that limit racial and economic diversity in specific neighborhoods c) Create regional advocacy effort to raise the established fair market rent (FMR) to be more reflective of the current housing market d) Develop regional advocacy effort to shift federally funded program requirements that deny eligibility to heads of households (HoHs) who have undocumented legal status e) Advocate for "ban the box" and fair chance legislation that limits criminal history inquiries
		S6.4 Develop a regional process to examine coordinated entry, emergency shelter, and housing program policies and procedures to ensure inclusive and trauma-informed language a) In partnership with people with lived experience, revise (and/or provide TA that supports the revision of) policies and procedures that may be perpetuating oppression (e.g., criminal background checks, ID requirements, need for formal diagnoses, etc.) to advance low-barrier rules and requirements that are more culturally responsive and promote healing



Challenges & Success

A. Challenges

Community members who participated in this initiative became a part of a regional movement that required capacity, continued learning, and a long-term commitment. As previously mentioned, this was during a pandemic, HUD's NOFO (funding opportunity) process, and during a time of increased staff and leadership transitions. It is important to name these challenges because there will always be competing priorities within a system that is addressing the housing crises of so many households. REAC members had to find balance between 1) challenging white supremacy cultural norms to push back against rushed timelines that threatened the quality of their work and 2) coming to the realization that some progress is better than no progress and there will never be a better time than now to address racial inequities.

There was a collaborative learning process between consultants and community members that ensured the work to advance racial equity could be done with integrity and participants who were challenged by competing priorities could still engage in ways that were meaningful and impactful.

Some of the challenges that CERT members named were:

- “It is challenging to move this work forward without increasing staff capacity. It would be great if additional consulting services would be provided to do the intricate work required to effect real change in our jurisdictions on the local, and regional, levels.”
- Difficulty identifying and recruiting people with live experience, and sustaining authentic partnerships
 - “Adding folks with lived experience and compensating them --especially when you represent a county agency. Some of the people with lived experience are not necessarily available during the business hours when county staff are working-REAC members. The timing of the work, vacancies in staffing, other day-to-day priorities. Having time to include more community partners, members...”

It will be important to be proactive about technical and adaptive challenges during implementation and sustainability planning.

Time and staff capacity have been a continuous challenge. It has also been challenging to keep non-homeless services members engaged and involved in the work. Lastly, as a CoC Lead that is also county government, we seem to have more "red-tape" to cut through to move things forward.

B. Successes

Honoring how difficult this work can be is important, as is celebrating every success along the way to strengthen support and community commitment. Through the work of the CERTs, CoCs were integrating racial equity principles in live time and advancing a more anti-racist culture. Some CERTs identified sustainable funding to compensate partners with lived experience. Some set aside funding to staff DEI positions, and all engaged in meaningful cross-community learning related to more

equitable practices. These are examples of the positive impact this initiative has already had on communities.



“

This work is helping us to look at policies, practices with intentionality. Learning from other jurisdictional staff...just learned that we could have used CoC Planning funding to compensate people with lived experience.”

”

“

We have learned a lot from other communities and C4 how to look at racial equity from a different perspective. We are more conscious of where inequities lie in our system starting with intakes, questions, and the client's first experiences with our CoC. Our team developed a Racial Equity Committee.

”



”

"The CoC has demonstrated an interest in learning the tools to advancing racial equity, we are beyond the training of theories, and ready to put into practice the skills learned."

”

Next Steps



A. Develop Implementation Plan

In collaboration with a diverse group of representatives from participating CoCs (including interested CERT members), it will be important to determine the priorities in the existing plan. For each racial equity strategy, define what progress looks like using the SMARTIE format (strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable), responsible parties, and timelines. Develop an ongoing way to collaborate with community members from each jurisdiction to ensure continuous feedback in the implementation process. Creating a **Regional REAC** may ensure that action steps are carried out at the local level and create a space for ongoing collaboration and cross community learning.

B. Sustainability/Accountability

MWCOG system leaders from the Homeless Services Committee and Human Services Policy Council will need to define the infrastructure that will maintain accountability for the Regional Racial Equity Action Plan. It is recommended that a **Regional Interagency Council on Homelessness** is established to provide oversight of the plan, address any implementation challenges, ensure ongoing evaluation of impact, and update the plan as needed. The Regional ICH should be racially and ethnically representative of those most disproportionately impacted by homelessness as well as inclusive of lived experience. ICH members will be able to align efforts across adjacent systems in which people experiencing homelessness may be experiencing additional disparate outcomes. ICH members will also be able to address technical and adaptive leadership barriers during implementation, clarify pathways for accountability, and ensure that there are continuous quality improvement processes in place. An ICH will also create opportunities for more upstream homeless prevention strategy development and aligned contributions.

The **Regional Data Metrics Workgroup** played a significant role in this initiative since the start of the project. It is recommended that they develop a public facing dashboard with defined benchmarks that indicate progress on the Regional Racial Equity Plan that would allow for greater transparency and shared accountability.

It is also recommended that CoCs work to engage and support individuals with lived experience who can participate as members of a **Regional Lived Experience Coalition**. A lived experience coalition could provide leadership in identifying and driving transformative system change and ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness are always centered in system planning processes.

C. Align efforts across the region

Align the Regional Racial Equity Action Plan with the Regional Compact to eliminate duplicative work.

Facilitate workshops for staff of elected officials to ensure support of the plan and shared accountability within those offices.

C. Build understanding of capacity building needs for smaller CoCs

Be proactive about the ongoing challenges faced by CoCs. Establish a mechanism to collect feedback from CoCs as it relates to their ability to implement racial equity strategies. Be responsive to the identified needs (especially within smaller CoCs) as they relate to technical assistance, training, funding, staffing, and other capacity building.



Appendix A

Quantitative Data Community Reports

- [City of Alexandria](#)
- [Arlington County](#)
- [District of Columbia](#)
- [Fairfax County](#)
- [Frederick County](#)
- [Loudoun County](#)
- [Montgomery County](#)
- [Prince George's County](#)
- [Prince William County](#)

Appendix B

Local Racial Equity Plans

Alexandria CoC

Focus Area: Address racial disparities CoC staffing and leadership

Alexandria CoC elected to work on addressing racial disparities in CoC staffing and leadership by forming a new Racial Equity subcommittee group to sustain future equity work. This group will

incorporate racial equity work into Alexandria's strategic plan and get the necessary approval from the PPEH Governing Board regarding this addition.

Arlington County CoC

Arlington County CoC selected three focus areas for their ongoing racial equity activities, including ensuring that people with lived experience have decision-making power, improving the experiences of individuals moving through the homeless response system, and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in prevention resources and systems that are “upstream” from the homeless response system. “Upstream” refers to systems, agencies or resources that individuals who experience homelessness may interface with before or while they are unhoused.

Focus Area #1: Ensure that people with lived experience have decision-making power

The Arlington team has decided to hire a Racial Equity Program Manager to sustain future racial equity work, assess the extent to which the current CoC governance structure supports the full participation of people with lived experience of homelessness, provide training to CoC partners on the importance of on the benefits of and strategies to engage current and former program participants in program and system design, form a Consumer Advisory Council, develop a system to equitably compensate individuals with lived experience, establish performance review cycles to monitor metrics and refine strategies over time, and codify racial equity strategies into existing policies and procedures.

Focus Area #2: Improve the experiences of people utilizing the system

Using data disaggregated by race and ethnicity the Arlington team will develop baseline reports and a CoC report card to track performance measures with a racial equity lens and further explore disparities, conduct surveys and focus groups with individuals experiencing homelessness and implement other types of qualitative data collection, identify actions needed to improve participant experiences based on quantitative and qualitative analysis, codify new equitable hiring practices and more.

Focus Area #3: Address racial disparities in prevention/upstream

The Arlington team will review existing data on upstream interventions (prevention/diversion), develop a stakeholder analysis of key decision-makers and advocate partners for each upstream system identified, develop outreach plan, to include key influencers and people with lived experience to engage identified systems, stand up a CoC subcommittee that can support cross-systems strategies to address system-driven entries into homelessness, and incorporate strategies and action items into next CoC Strategic Plan.

Fairfax County CoC

Fairfax County CoC selected three focus areas for their ongoing racial equity activities, including ensuring that people with lived experience have decision-making power, addressing racial and ethnic disparities in prevention resources and systems that are “upstream” from the homeless response system, and developing stronger collaborative relationships with cross sector partners. “Upstream” refers to systems, agencies or resources that individuals who experience homelessness may interface with before or while they are unhoused.

Focus Area #1: Ensure that people with lived experience have decision-making power

The Fairfax County team is planning to hire people with lived experience into the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness and on agency Board of Directors, hire people with lived experience at housing and service providers, promote people with lived experience who are employed at agencies to management and decision-making roles, consult with people with lived experience regarding their experience navigating the Fairfax homeless response system, and make homeless service committees more inclusive of people with lived experience.

Focus Area #2: Addressing racial disparities in prevention/upstream.

The Fairfax team also plans to perform a system mapping exercise of upstream programs in order to identify systems strengths/gaps and synthesize available resources, disaggregate housing instability data by race/ethnicity, compare the populations served by Coordinated Services Planning versus the populations that call for assistance, and analyze why the needs of a high percentage of Black households are not resolved by services offered by Coordinated Services Planning.

Focus Area #3: Develop stronger collaborative relationships with cross sector partners

Fairfax will create space for collaborative efforts that are CoC wide that promote racial equity, prioritize relationship building and collaboration efforts to promote sustainable efforts, develop action plans around targeting and building relationships with network partners, communicate and organize a group to lead the work identified in each focus area; create memorandums of understanding in adherence to racial equity values between partners, and solidify this group into a functional task force to sustain the work in future.

Loudoun County CoC

Loudoun County CoC selected three focus areas for their ongoing racial equity activities, including providing racial equity education and training to CoC members, building community, and ensuring that people with lived experience have decision-making power.

Focus Area #1: Racial Equity Education

The Loudoun County team will provide foundational Racial Equity training to CoC members and establish a CoC Racial Equity sub-committee by the end of 2022.

Focus Area #2: Building community

Loudoun County will ensure that their CoC Governance Board includes people of color with lived experience, and identify and recruit at least one person within our CoC to champion diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and to help us analyze any new policies and procedures through a racial equity lens. Loudoun County will also identify and add to their current CoC membership list to include organizations working with ethnic, immigrant, disability, LGBTQ+ and re-entry groups.

Focus Area #3: Ensure that people with lived experience have decision-making power

Loudoun County CoC will assign Coordinated Entry or CoC staff to work at the Loudoun Homeless Services Center a week prior to every CoC meeting to interact with participants and collect information to better understand the participants' needs and barriers, and share them during CoC meetings. The Loudoun County team will also work to create opportunities for people of color with lived experience to share input regarding the provision of service delivery, including what worked and what needs improvement. Finally, this team will also develop surveys and interview protocols to collect data on the experiences of those going through the homeless services system.

Montgomery County CoC

Montgomery County CoC selected three focus areas for their ongoing racial equity activities, including conducting an analysis of assessment and prioritization processes within their Coordinated Entry System, improving the experiences of individuals utilizing the homeless response system, and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in prevention resources and systems that are “upstream” from the homeless response system. “Upstream” refers to systems, agencies or resources that individuals who experience homelessness may interface with before or while they are unhoused.

Focus Area #1: Analysis of assessment and prioritization process for CES

Montgomery County plans to develop a work group that will evaluate and review the current assessment tool (VI-SPDAT) and create a new comprehensive screening tool; evaluate the current tool for bias in existing questions, implement mandatory and regular training on the assessment tool and on implicit bias, and shift/reallocate service provision of available resources to meet the needs of those most impacted by homelessness.

Focus Area #2: Addressing racial disparities in prevention/upstream

Montgomery County is would like to explore any racial disparities in the outcomes of housing recertifications, analyze eviction data with a geospatial lens, conduct tenant rights/landlord discrimination advocacy work, increase supportive vocational programs to mitigate biased

hiring practices, and improve access to information about diversion, prevention and crisis services.

Focus Area #3: Improving the experiences of people utilizing the system

The Montgomery County team also plans to create peer advocacy groups for shelters, increase opportunities for peer-to-peer support with housing navigation, improve access to services for sheltered and unsheltered individuals, provide more direct in-person training on financial literacy and mainstream resources, and create advisory groups in all homeless service providers that provide feedback and recommendations for improvement.

Prince George's County CoC

Prince George's County CoC selected three focus areas for their ongoing racial equity activities, including improving the experiences of individuals utilizing the homeless response system, conducting an analysis of assessment and prioritization processes within their Coordinated Entry System, and ensuring that people with lived experience of homelessness have decision-making power across the CoC.

Focus Area #1: Improving the experiences of people utilizing the system

The Prince George's County team will assess and improve core CoC system competencies in serving individuals from different cultures and backgrounds by improving representation, program approachability, and staff training. The team will also conduct qualitative assessments to better understand the needs of key demographic groups including barriers to accessing the system, and develop a CoC-wide plan for embedding and sustaining equity practices throughout all aspects of the system.

Focus Area #2: Analysis of assessment and prioritization process for CES

Assess the quality and equity of Prince George's County assessment and case conferencing processes using a continuous quality improvement process focused on equity.

Focus Area #3: Ensure that people with lived experience have decision-making power

Prince George's County will hire a person with lived experience of homelessness to serve as a representative and advocate, create a structural support system that makes space for and pays individuals with lived experience to participate in committees and teams, restart a resident advisory committee and create similar committees for other housing types, create a safe space for continuous feedback from individuals who have engaged with the homeless response system, create a continuous quality improvement methodology to regularly review and act upon learnings from all tested strategies.

Prince William County CoC

	List Needed Resources and/or Potential Challenges					

Focus Area	Strategies	Action Steps	Party / Dept Responsible	Date to Begin	Date Due	Progress will Look Like
Culture Shift: reducing stigma and implicit bias, increasing representation, inclusivity of lived experience, staff trainings, shared power and decision making						
	List Needed Resources and/or Potential Challenges					

Focus Area	Strategies	Action Steps	Party / Dept Responsible	Date to Begin	Date Due	Progress will Look Like
Funding and Resource Allocation						
	List Needed Resources and/or Potential Challenges					

Focus Area	Strategies	Action Steps	Party / Dept Responsible	Date to Begin	Date Due	Progress will Look Like
Partnerships with Adjacent Systems and Community Providers						
	List Needed Resources and/or Potential Challenges					

Focus Area	Strategies	Action Steps	Party / Dept Responsible	Date to Begin	Date Due	Progress will Look Like

Analysis						
	List Needed Resources and/or Potential Challenges					

Appendix D

Glossary

Equity: A concept that refers to fairness, impartiality, and justice in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits among different groups of people.

Disparities: Differences or inequalities between groups of people, especially in terms of access to resources, opportunities, and benefits.

Disproportionality: The condition of being overrepresented or underrepresented in a given situation or context, usually compared to a reference group.

HMIS: The Homeless Management Information System is a database used to collect and manage data related to homelessness, including demographic information, service utilization, and housing outcomes.

Continuum of Care: A collaborative network of providers and organizations that work together to provide a comprehensive system of care for people experiencing homelessness, including outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.

PIT Count: Point-in-Time Count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals and families conducted on a single night in January every year in the United States.

AHAR: Annual Homeless Assessment Report is a report that provides national estimates of homelessness and information on the characteristics of homeless individuals and families.