

# 2023-2024 Race, Equity & Inclusion Working Group Meeting Summary

Friday, September 20, 2024 | 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Meeting recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTYveux-4i0>

## Working Group Outcomes:

- Build understanding and support among key stakeholders and Board members for SACOG's Racial Equity Action Plan implementation
- Develop regional equity indicators that SACOG will collect and report on a regular basis
- Better understand and define the key components of meaningful community engagement processes
- Provide recommendations to the SACOG board on assessing equity impacts of proposed policy decisions
- Based on REAP progress reports, make recommendations to the SACOG board of any updates to the REAP to increase its effectiveness and impact

**Agenda Packet** available at:

<https://sacog.primegov.com/Public/CompiledDocument?meetingTemplateId=5268&compileOutputType=1>

**Pre-reading: Attachment A**-September Meeting Overview; **Attachment B**-Overview of Progress Toward Racial Equity Action Plan goals; **Attachment C**-Racial Equity Action Plan Progress Report for September 2024

**Meeting Attendees:** Jill Gayaldo, Pamela Bulahan, Woodrow Deloria, Lakhvir Ghag, Elisa Herrera, Maria Chacon Kniestedt, Raul Martinez, Rich Desmond, Michael Saragosa, William Walker

**Absent:** Chair Rick Jennings, II, Aimee Barnes, Martha Guerrero, Shon Harris, Kendra Lewis, Marco Lizarraga, Jesse Loren, Darren Suen, Christine Tien

## Meeting Summary

September 20, 2024, was the seventh meeting of the 2023-2024 Race, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group.

Director Gayaldo led the working group in a review of their shared values and community agreements.

### Overview of Meeting and Look Ahead

Kacey Lizon, SACOG staff, gave an overview of the day's meeting and the rest of the year. Lizon recapped the origin of the REI Working Group in 2020, the creation and SACOG board's adoption of a racial equity statement of change and commitment and racial equity action plan.

In this seventh meeting of the Working Group, members would begin to assess SACOG's progress toward each of the Racial Equity Action Plan goals. This would occur in break out groups that will also meet with staff in ad hoc meetings in October to collaborate on recommendations for updates to the Racial Equity Action Plan to increase its effectiveness.

## Overview of Progress Toward Racial Equity Action Plan Goals

SACOG staff used Attachment B to talk through their assessment of progress toward each of the Racial Equity Action Plan goals:

There are three goals for each focus (Operations, Programs, Board Practices) of the Action Plan. As a reminder, the goals were created in 2022 directly from the one-on-one listening sessions with working group members, and group listening sessions with SACOG staff, local government partners, CBOs, and other regional organizations. In all listening sessions, we asked, given the board's racial equity statement commitment and change, what can SACOG be doing to make progress toward its commitment?

In the last few months, SACOG staff assessed our progress toward these Action Plan goals. We find the goals to be very durable and should continue forward; we have not achieved the goals but are making progress toward them. We'd like the working group to think about how SACOG can learn from lessons so far and build on the progress we've made so that we can keep making progress toward those goals.

### *Operations Focus Area (Erik Johnson)*

*Goal 1: Establish an inclusive workplace where all current and future employees feel they belong.*

*Goal 2: Identify, attract, invest in, and retain a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Sacramento region by providing equitable access to opportunities.*

*Goal 3: Reduce barriers to SACOG procurement and contracting process to create more opportunity for Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and communities of color, along with low-income rural, urban, and other underrepresented communities.*

In the last two years, Operations work was setting up processes and staff. We have accomplished a lot of the objectives for each Operations goal. What can we do next to set up objectives that are programmatic and measurable?

Goal 1 is about organizational experience for staff. We've started tracking demographics from the time they start until they leave. We're providing trainings, asking for feedback, and using that to identify future trainings.

Goal 2 focuses on new hires and broadening the pool of potential applicants to SACOG. How do we advertise, attract, and recruit potential employees? How do we help the public become educated about what it means to have SACOG in the region and how they can belong to the agency and pursue professional goals.

Goal 3 focuses on reducing barriers in procurement. Similar to the human resources goals, we've started to do more proactive work to educate staff internally to think about barriers that are inherent to process. We're also assessing how contracts are awarded to make sure we're casting a broad net for potential vendors.

### *Programs Focus Area (Kacey Lizon)*

*Goal 1: Increase engagement with community representatives of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and communities of color, along with low-income rural, urban, and other underrepresented communities to help shape SACOG's projects and programs.*

*Goal 2: Increase funding for programs and projects that prioritize REI and/or specifically engage underrepresented and underserved communities in the SACOG region.*

*Goal 3: SACOG supports and learns from member and local partner agencies incorporating racial equity best practices into their planning work.*

Programs goals focus on SACOG's outward-facing programs.

Looking at Goal 1, staff's assessment is that we're making good progress toward the first part of this goal: increasing engagement with CBOs that work with or represented underrepresented groups. We're starting to make progress toward the second part of the goal, where that engagement helps shape SACOG programs. Some things we've learned: there are many projects/programs where we are engaging CBOs to help shape projects; what we need to do now is to gauge how effective is our engagement. We have programs where we've centered equity and where we intentionally worked with CBOs to develop the program: the Mobility Zones and Engage, Empower, Implement programs are two examples of this. And we're learning from those examples how we could apply this approach to more of SACOG's programs.

Goal 2 is closely tied to Goal 1. We've made some progress toward the goal of increasing funding for programs and projects that support underrepresented communities, however we've also learned that it will take longer than we originally thought. The Engage, Empower, Implement program is an example of a program that engages underserved communities to build a pipeline of community co-created projects. With the REI Working Group's help we've defined principles of meaningful community engagement and we've applied that into our Funding Round Guidelines. However, most of our progress has been in setting up processes and procedures to be able to do this work, and not yet measurable.

Goal 3 is about being part of a learning and practice community of other agencies doing racial equity work. We've made progress on this goal through a different path than the objectives. By virtue of SACOG having a racial equity statement, and having a racial equity action plan, SACOG has been invited into other local and national working groups of government trying to do similar work. This has been beneficial to us where we have been able to vet items through and learn from other practitioners.

A Working Group member asked which focus area would be best to discuss the issue of credibility of grant applicants. Specifically the issue they observed that some organizations will say they do DEI work, but the experience of the organization suggests otherwise. In evaluating grant applicants, how do you know they credibly doing DEI work and not just saying they do the work? Staff suggested this is a good topic to discuss in the Program breakout group.

*Board Practices Focus Area (James Corless)*

*Goal 1: The SACOG board deepens its understanding of how race/ethnicity, income, and geography (rural/urban) affects the social outcomes of communities throughout the Sacramento region.*

*Goal 2: The SACOG board includes racial equity impacts in its triple bottom line decisions.*

*Goal 3: The Board maintains consistent engagement with racial equity action plan implementation process.*

Goal 1 is a continuous goal, and staff feels we've made some progress on helping the board learn. We've been intentional around our board meetings and workshops. We held an REI primer/refresher at the beginning of the year and surveys indicated that members learned from that. At offsite board meetings we've had more opportunities to learn about communities; it has helped the board understand the diversity of the communities and issues in the region. While offsite meetings are not always focused on equity, we're trying to integrate it where it makes sense. From the work with this working group there's been much better discussions at the full board.

Goal 2 is that the board includes racial equity in its triple bottom line decisions. We are furthest behind on this goal—we thought by this January we would have a process to measure race impacts of the board policies. We are behind in part because we are trying to be intentional in building a foundation and common understanding among all partners. For example, the Engage, Empower, Implement program took three years to develop because we wanted to be thoughtful and deliberate, knowing that we don't know what's best for designing the program. The great news, after all that effort and time: we had a lot of requests/applications from five counties for more money than what's available. We can see that there's a definite need for this program and that's a good sign. We also see initial signs good signs in the Mobility Zones program. We've also begun to see discussions at the board about equity in planning processes.

A Working Group member asked: in terms of this goal, what are discussions about how this is considered in the Regional Funding Round?

Staff responded: SACOG had a board funding round working group, a staff working group, and this REI working group weigh in on how equity can be incorporated into the Funding Round. Staff looked at the types of equity that were defined in Engage, Empower, Implement, and the principles of meaningful community engagement that this working group defined, and then created a set of questions that should be asked of proposed projects. For example: who is going to be served, which issues will the project address, etc. Staff is proposing these questions be included in the program guidelines that the board considers at its October meeting. A timely example of how these questions play out: In October the board will have a workshop on pedestrian safety/unsafe streets. We'll learn about the racial, income, age, and other disparities in people who are injured or killed in traffic accidents, for example. This working group helped shape what topics are coming before the board. We invite all of you to attend the October board meeting.

Working Group members responded with the experiences that in their communities there are some unique demographic groups or places that may not "show up" in the data, but have very real needs. For example, recently arrived refugees in a community, rural communities with low population and diversity today but were not always, small communities with low population numbers, places that appear "well

served” on a map but the resident experience is of unsafe and therefore underserved conditions. In addition, if a community is not interested in inclusion, from an agency perspective we want to “hug them more,” i.e., We want to invite them, not force them, to take a look at what we’re working on, sit at the table where we’re having these discussions.

Goal 3 is for the board to maintain consistent engagement in the Racial Equity Action Plan implementation process. We’ve made a lot of good progress on this goal. We’ve worked with this group to identify and collect indicators to monitor annually and will roll out the first report next month. This working group is also the implementation group on our action plan, trying to figure out what we’ve learned, what changes we need, and how to share this with the full board. Today’s meeting is all about Goal 3. We also think this working group needs to continue into next year.

## Working Group Assessment of Progress Toward Racial Equity Action Plan Goals

*Working Group members then self-selected into one of three focus areas groups (Board Practices, Programs, Operations) to discussed four questions about their focus area:*

- *Are there **additional barriers** SACOG should address that are not yet captured?*
- *Are there **promising practices** you’ve seen to be effective in removing those barriers?*
- *Do these **success measures** feel reflective of progress? Are there others you might add?*
- *What **opportunities** do you see to contribute to this goal in the year ahead?*

### Board Practices Breakout Group

**Promising Practices:** Overall, board members felt that we are heading in a good direction with the REI work. The offsite board meetings and tours of the region are very helpful and hold a lot of promise. Bringing in tribal governments as we did with Wilton Rancheria to talk to the board are powerful experiences that we should do more of.

**Additional Barriers:** Barriers and challenges going forward include the fact that we will get a number of new SACOG board members in early 2025 and we need to figure out how to onboard with in general and with REI in particular. Another barrier/challenge is the geographic diversity of the board, this may continue to provide a challenge to adopting policies around equity since these policies are going to have such different impacts based on the communities that are assessing how they will impact them.

**Success Measures:** The success measures that we have for board practices feel appropriate because we can measure them (e.g., REI working group members attending tours, board members attending REI primer at the beginning of the year. The exercise to read *Color of Law* and discuss it at an informal gathering was great and we should think about curating more of those experiences.

**Opportunities for next year:** For the next couple of years, it would be good for the board to hear more stories and real-life case studies of people and communities that stand to gain from our REI work. For example, could we highlight farmworkers and their situations, struggles, and needs. Perhaps we could

do that at an offsite board meeting like Yuba County or Sutter County (also shows that agriculture is not just Yolo County).

For new board members coming onto SACOG next year, it is really important we make them feel welcome and make them comfortable so they can dive into the REI work. It is important to lead with love and positive messaging so new board members understand how this work can have a beneficial impact.

#### Programs Breakout Group

**Promising Practices:** In designing some of its funding programs, SACOG has worked with community based organization and local government partners to bring equity and community engagement considerations into its program guidelines. In doing so, SACOG has created resources and room for local government partners to define and contextualize their equity priorities. REI Working Group members observed that this is more meaningful and impactful than the common practice of uniform definitions and quantitative evaluation criteria.

If SACOG is to provide technical assistance, an important way to provide technical assistance is to work with an agency to understand what they're already doing so that gaps can be identified. To this end, a best practice in one jurisdiction may not be a best practice in another. Each public agency is unique and at different points in their journey of community engagement. Some agencies do lots of different kinds of engagement. In others, one department will not know the engagement and community data that other departments have access to.

**Additional Barriers:** The approach to locally defining equity priorities in grant applications will also be more complicated for local government partners to implement. There will be a learning curve for some local agencies. For example, the initial round of the Active Transportation Grant Program incorporated the concept of identifying disadvantaged communities that would be served by a proposed project. Some local agencies didn't understand why and how to interact with that concept and felt that it was another box to check. Over time, local agencies have learned the the purpose of identifying disadvantaged communities in that grant program.

**Success Measures:** Measures of success can initially be superficial (like the measures currently tracked in the Racial Equity Action Plan, e.g., number of CBOs engaged). Once a target measure has been achieved, start using deeper measures to begin to get at the deeper impact in the community. For example, after grants are awarded, monitor how that grant funding impacted communities. An annual evaluation of grant awards will be critical to measuring the progress on Programs Goal 2.

**Opportunities for next year:** Engage local service providers in the development of programs. For example, health and human services departments work directly with many underrepresented communities. Those service providers will have a lot of on-the-ground knowledge.

#### Operations Breakout Group

**Additional Barriers:** With an internal focus primarily on the Operations Goals, the group had difficulty knowing what barriers might not exist. However, three potential barriers that members identified were

training fatigue, lack of proper training for community engagement, and vendors who are not following best practices.

**Promising Practices:** In the area of training, the discussion focused on how to not get staff to “check out” by employing a variety of different ways of training. Staff shared that we have been internally discussing how we avoid training fatigue by doing brief trainings for staff to get a base level of knowledge, using staff meetings as a way to deliver education, and encouraging those that are task leads to get involved with conferences and others ways of connecting that can providing training that helps fulfill Goal 1.

In the area of community engagement, one promising practice Working Group members suggested was to have someone who is knowledgeable and connected with communities go alongside SACOG staff initially when they are working with a new community. This can help both build trust with SACOG with a known connection and also build capacity for SACOG staff to see how the community-based organization works with communities.

In the area of vendors and procurement (Goal 3), there was a lot of discussion among working group members about how sometimes vendors may bid on work and not have experience in that area, use DBE subs as an inauthentic way to show diversity that may be tokenizing, and vendors may also represent that they can do equitable work that they may not be skilled to do. Some of the practices suggested were:

- Ask vendors if they have a DEI plan, and if they do, to share it as part of their proposal
- Ask vendors about the diversity of their project team, not just the firm overall
- Ask vendors for letters of reference from similar clients doing similar work
- Follow up with community groups that have worked with a vendor to see how their experience was
- Ask vendors to submit letters of reference

**Success Measures and Opportunities for next year:** The group struggled to identify success measures because the work is internally focused, but there was a consensus that especially with procurement to look at the suggestions above. We ran out of time to discuss revisiting the success measures, but we had a brief discussion about the need to update the success measures to reflect the work needed in the next iteration of the REAP.

### Closing

Director Gayaldo thanked the working group members for their engagement and adjourned the meeting.

**Next meeting dates in 2024 (all meetings will be in person):**

November 1, 2024, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm