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

Friday, March 15, 2024 | 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Meeting recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdyt88m19xQ

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=4798&compileOutputType=1

Pre-reading/watching: REI refresher presentation to SACOG board https://youtu.be/UCHyCWNWnNU (start at minute 57:40); Racial Equity Action Plan Progress Report for March, 2024; Principles of Meaningful Community Engagement; Finding Strength in Partnerships through Meaningful Community Engagement; Public Outreach and Engagement Grant Program

Meeting Attendees: Chair Rick Jennings, Pamela Bulahan, Kendra Lewis, Shon Harris, Maria Chacon Kniestedt, Elisa Herrera, Woody Deloria, Raul Martinez, Darren Suen, Aimee Barnes, William Walker

Absent: Michael Saragosa, Lakhvir Ghag, Martha Guerrero, Jill Gayaldo, Jesse Loren, Rich Desmond, Christine Tien, Marco Lizarraga

Meeting Summary

March 15, 2024 was the fifth meeting of the 2023-2024 Race, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group.

Chair Jennings led the working group in a review of their shared values and community agreements and asked if anyone wanted to add to the values and agreements.

Values

Working group members asked to add the values that SACOG board members raised during the REI refresher presentation at the February SACOG board meeting and added their own values. These additions are shown in pink text, below:

REI WG Shared Values

- Contribution
- Humor
- Openness
- Curiosity
- Learning
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Poise
- Compassion
- Reflection

- Humility
- Balance
- Respect
- Collaboration
- Intensive Listening
- Encouragement
- Grace and Forgiveness
- Normalize this conversation
- Understanding
- Diversity

Community Agreements

Working Group members also added two more community agreements, as shown in pink text, below:

REI WG Community Agreements

- No one knows everything; we all have something to learn and offer
- Move up, move up (everyone is able to contribute)
- Come prepared to participate and be present
- Practice authenticity
- Accept and expect non-closure
- Recognize intersectionality and the difference between intent and impact
- Practice self-awareness, extend grace and compassion
- Agree to disagree
- Find opportunities for this group to build trust

Overview of the meeting and the rest of 2024

After the Working Group reviewed and added to its shared values and community agreements, Kacey Lizon, SACOG staff, provided an overview of the day's meeting and the rest of the Working Group's meetings this year. Lizon reminded the Working Group of its charge and the five outcomes it is working towards. To that end, the goal of each meeting for the rest of this year is to deepen the Working Group's understanding of the SACOG's Racial Equity Action Plan work, support Working Group members to provide recommendations on how the Racial Equity Action Plan can be updated to build upon current progress and increase its effectiveness and impact, and foster shared learning among working group members.

Applying Principles of Meaningful Community Engagement

At its October 2023, meeting, the Working Group developed principles of meaningful community engagement after reviewing and discussing the SACOG board's off-site workshops and tours in 2023. To continue that work, and in preparation for this March meeting, Working Group members were invited to share case studies from their own communities of the application of principles of meaningful community engagement. To that end, two Working Group members, Maria Chacon Kniestedt and Kendra Lewis, volunteered to share case studies from their communities.

Danielle DeRuiter-Williams, Working Group facilitator, explained that each member was asked to review the list of principles developed by the Working Group (see agenda packet for full list of principles), and pick one or two principles that have been employed to address a challenge or effort in their community. With that case study, they would then answer these three questions:
- o What was the challenge and who was being impacted by it?
- o Why was the principle employed in this situation?
- o What was different as a result of employing this principle?

Case Study: Meaningful Community Engagement for Resident Representation in Local Voting
Member Chacon Kniestedt presented a case study from the city of Rancho Cordova, where she works as the Director of Communications and Public Affairs. She highlighted two principles of engagement for the Working Group: **1) build on a foundation of trust/reciprocity with community**, and **2) look for gaps, look for who is not at the table, and seek to create a bridge**. Member Chacon Kniestedt started by sharing that the city is constantly growing on the continuum of public engagement, and this case study is from a moment in time. The case study was about the city's outreach and engagement efforts to address a racial disparity in voting, and Rancho Cordova's transition from at-large voting to district voting. This transition was precipitated by the city receiving a violation letter from a California attorney stating the city was in violation of the state voting act and had to correct this violation within 90 days.

Member Chacon shared that moving from at-large voting to district voting was a very sensitive topic, with changes mandated on an accelerated timeline, that affected all residents. The city designed a public outreach process with the above two principles (and more) in mind. The city acknowledged that people have different experiences interacting with government and wanted to make sure they reached people who didn't normally engage with the city to let them know they had a seat at the table. Within the mandated 90-day timeline, the city's outreach plan included: (1) community meetings with translators; (2) free transportation to meetings; (3) direct mail – citywide postcard in English/Spanish/Russian; (4) news alerts; (5) newsletters; (6) social media – recurring and pinned; (7) local newspaper articles; (8) paid hearing notices, paid advertising (Russian); (9) grassroots – flier distribution, broad, in-language; (10) city webpage – friendly URL, multiple links, aggregated information, community interactive mapping tool. The city also held more public hearings than required by law because they knew the minimum would not be enough.

The city's efforts resulted in unprecedented public participation at every meeting and 33 redistricting maps proposed by community members. By measuring and tracking engagement metrics associated with each strategy in the outreach plan, the city gained useful insights into what efforts yielded the best engagement, including some surprises. For example, based on existing data on how many residents read the city's regular newsletter, the city assumed that using the newsletter would be an effective outreach

strategy. However, the data the city collected showed that people were using the website more than engaging through links sent in the newsletter. Upon conclusion of the redistricting process, the attorney sent the city a thank you letter and commended their community engagement process.

Case Study: Meaningful Community Engagement for Inclusion in Local Government Decision Making and Staffing

Member Lewis presented a case study from the city of Elk Grove, where she is a community member. She highlighted two principles of meaningful community engagement for the Working Group: **1) build on a foundation of trust/reciprocity with community; 2) get on the ground to understand the needs of the community**. Member Lewis started by sharing that she grew up in a community where everyone was always engaged in community issues and had access to government. Because of this, community engagement and activism is second nature to her. Member Lewis also shared that her experience of going to college when Proposition 209/187 were on the ballot also shaped a lot of her perspective, as a good student who was a first-generation college student and often the only black woman in her classes. She is sensitive to including people who have been left behind and sees pathways for doing that fairly and inclusively.

Member Lewis' case study was about how community members came together to work with the city of Elk Grove to address a disparity in representation between the city of Elk Grove's resident demographics and city staff demographics. Elk Grove is a very diverse city racially and ethnically, but community members were concerned that city staffing did not reflect the diversity of its residents. A group of community members went to a city council meeting and asked the city to create a committee to have a conversation about the issue and conduct an audit of the city's staffing. Community members also organized a broader community conversation about this topic. Because Elk Grove is a commuter city and people don't always have time to attend meetings, community members relied on trusted people to bring messages back to their friends and neighbors. There were hard face-to-face conversations in the community, but the city worked over months to conduct an audit, report the findings, and take next steps. The most important part of the process was building trust in the community and having tough conversations about inclusive hiring. It was helpful that the city had the audit report as a tool for accountability, to ensure that people of color are moving up in the city government. This transparency showed how people were being included in decisions and actions as well. Through techniques like blind hiring, the city established more inclusive hiring practices that led to tangible progress in representation. Today, Elk Grove city staff more accurately reflect Elk Grove's diverse communities. There is still more work to be done, particularly regarding people of color represented at the executive leadership level, but the community effort and the city's response made an impact across many city departments.

Themes from the two case studies

Facilitator DeRuiter-Williams facilitated a discussion of the two case studies to surface themes and lessons. Working Group members identified these themes:

- For meaningful community engagement, there may not be budget, but it is worth it to find the budget for it.
- Meaningful community engagement can involve difficult conversations; it's okay to bring in a third party (e.g., consultants) to lead conversations that might be more sensitive.

- For conversations about inclusion and representation, it is important to start with the "why" of the community, which may be different depending on the community.
- For the broadest community input, it's important to tailor outreach to go to where people are at: e.g., through their trusted networks of friends/neighbors; e.g., through the ethnic grocery store they go to.
- When it comes to representation and inclusion, for a lot of communities, there is a sense that their community is *their* home. They don't want outsiders coming in and telling them how to take care of an issue. Situations where issues of inclusion are raised by trusted community members are an opportunity for a community to address it themselves, without being told to.
- These case studies illustrate important work. How can SACOG, in a convening role, share or encourage the kind of work done in these case studies?
- A big challenge SACOG has as a regional agency is that the region is incredibly diverse. Communities want to maintain local control. When it comes to equity work, SACOG's approach will need to be scalable because the same approach will not apply in all communities.

Review of SACOG's CBO Grant Program and its effectiveness in achieving Program 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)

Alex Cole-Weiss, SACOG staff, gave an overview of SACOG's grant program for community-based organizations, which was used to broaden and increase public engagement in the development of SACOG's 2025 Blueprint. The program was designed to emphasize quality of outreach over quantity of outreach—i.e., to reach people who have not been reached before. This approach did help SACOG make progress on representation in its outreach, though there is still more work to do in getting fair representation of regional demographics. One question (but not the only question) that came up throughout the program was: How to provide consistent resources that support capacity-building and sustainability of CBO partnership efforts?

Annette Emery and Marbella Sala with the Gardenland Northgate Neighborhood Association (GNNA), one of the program's grantees, then shared their perspective on the effectiveness of the grant program and lessons learned:

- SACOG needs to educate the public so that more community groups know to engage with SACOG. GNNA represents the type of community SACOG wants to engage with for this CBO program and for Blueprint. And how did GNNA know to get involved and apply for the program? It's because Annette Emery knew what SACOG is and saw this as a way for a volunteer organization to pay for some of their time to do this work. If CBOs don't know what SACOG is and what it does, SACOG probably won't reach the communities it wants to engage.
- Spanish translation of the survey could have been much better.
- Co-create the survey with CBOs so that the language is more accessible, and users can understand the concepts being communicated.
- Do more education on how funding shows up for transportation and what it can be used for.

- In the past, no one asked residents about their opinions, so it takes time to build their trust that someone cares.
- Give the CBOs an overview or explanation of the survey so they can be confident in explaining it to others.
- What was important in collecting surveys was explaining that this survey is the beginning of a relationship with a funding agency that can make a difference in our neighborhood.
- Bring back the survey results to the community so they feel like they matter.

Facilitator DeRuiter-WIlliams invited Working Group members to join an ad hoc group to work with SACOG staff on the second phase of this CBO grant program. The ad hoc meeting will occur before the June Working Group meeting, and will report out on its efforts at the June Working Group meeting.

Closing
Working Group members shared announcements. Chair Jennings thanked all guest speakers, Working Group members, and staff for their contributions to the meeting and reminded the Working Group of the next meeting.

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

June 21, 2024, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

September 20, 2024, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

November 1, 2024, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm