

# Governmental Use of Racial Equity Tools

## *Addressing Systemic Racism and the Social Determinants of Health*

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More than **100 jurisdictions across 26 states** have worked with national organizations to use racial equity tools.

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Jurisdictional use of racial equity tools has **directly influenced changes to internal governmental policies and practices.**

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Racial equity tools enable decisionmakers to identify how policies and programs can disproportionately harm people of color. **The use of racial equity tools can vary widely**, including use for strategic planning, yearly training, and everyday operation.

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Racial equity tools alone are not enough to effect change. **Leadership support and jurisdictional integration are needed for sustainability.**

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Asian, Black, Indigenous, and Latino Americans die earlier, have higher infant mortality rates, and suffer more chronic conditions and disabilities than most white Americans. These health inequities are due in part to systemic racism and the social determinants of health (SDOH). Racial equity tools enable decisionmakers to identify how policies and programs can disproportionately harm racial and ethnic minority groups. Our **study**, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson's Policies for Action program, focused on whether and how local jurisdictions nationwide used racial equity tools to address systemic racism and the SDOH.

### **MORE THAN 100 JURISDICTIONS AROUND THE US HAVE WORKED WITH NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO USE RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS**

Across 26 states and in all 4 major regions of the country, 107 jurisdictions are using racial equity tools. We found that 80 cities and 27 counties are working with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and/or PolicyLink. The intentional work of using racial equity tools is a significant step in eradicating racial inequity, because it shows a jurisdiction's commitment to addressing the harms of systemic racism and the SDOH. Racial equity tools provide training materials, toolkits, data indicators, and frameworks designed to guide leaders, employees, and community members in working toward racial equity.

**Jurisdictions working with GARE and PolicyLink.** Our findings show that a diverse group of local governments, in terms of the type of locality (i.e., city or county) and their sizes, racial demographics, and regions, are using racial equity tools created by GARE and PolicyLink. States with the most local governments using racial equity tools are California (20), Minnesota (19), and North Carolina (9). Most jurisdictions working with GARE and/or PolicyLink are in cities. We found that

- 77 jurisdictions are working with GARE,
- 11 are working with PolicyLink, and
- 19 are working with both GARE and PolicyLink.

### **SOME JURISDICTIONS USING RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS HAVE PRIORITIZED OR ENACTED LAWS TO ADDRESS RACISM AND THE SDOH**

Among 24 jurisdictions responding to an email survey, 17 said that after using racial equity tools, they had identified at least one of the SDOH and/or racial equity as priorities for changing laws and policies; 12 prioritized policy change related to employment, 11 named race in all policies as a priority, 7 prioritized

housing, 3 prioritized education, and 2 prioritized health care. To determine if a jurisdiction's use of racial equity tools translated into change (not just prioritization), we tracked and mapped laws associated with eradicating systemic racism and addressing the SDOH.

**Racial equity tools influence public health and minimum wage policies.** We found that among the jurisdictions identified as working with GARE and having start dates for their collaboration, 17 declared racism as a public health crisis, and many of these jurisdictions were the first to do so. We also found that 17 jurisdictions enacted or modified their minimum wage laws, whereas 29 jurisdictions could not enact minimum wage laws because of state preemption laws.

## JURISDICTIONAL USE OF RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS

The use of racial equity tools can vary widely. Some of the first jurisdictions to work with GARE and/or PolicyLink in the United States began doing so in the mid-2010s, using their tools to address systemic racism and the SDOH.

**The use of racial equity tools is cyclical.** Many jurisdictions have created their own racial equity tools; completed strategic plans and training; and implemented these plans and laws, policies, and practices to change the workplace and the entire jurisdiction. Strategic planning generally happens broadly across various organizations and entities. Some jurisdictions have even begun evaluating changes and have used evaluations to revise their strategic planning and training, beginning a new cycle of racial equity tool use. Additionally, each interviewed jurisdiction requires racial equity tool training for all of its employees and assesses baseline information about what employees understand about racial equity before they attend the training.

**Challenges faced in using racial equity tools are surmountable.** Every jurisdiction faces challenges in using racial equity tools to address systemic racism, yet many have overcome these challenges to achieve change. According to one interviewee, racial equity is “a slow building process where part of the challenge is the issue of time, because often expectations are that things have to get done right away.” Each organization interviewed went through an incremental cycle of tool use (figure 1), including strategic planning, training, implementation, workplace change, law and policy change, and evaluation. And every jurisdiction is at a different place in this cycle.

**Racial equity tools alone are not enough to effect change.** For sustained change in these jurisdictions, racial equity tool use not only had to become an integral part of everything the government did, but it also had to be supported by leadership. Based on our overall findings, we conclude that cities and counties using racial equity tools and working with GARE and/or PolicyLink have made some important changes, illustrating their commitments to addressing systemic racism and the SDOH. Yet, the work must continue to eradicate systemic racism and address the SDOH.

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Figure 1. Cycle of Racial Equity Tool Use Model, 2021



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