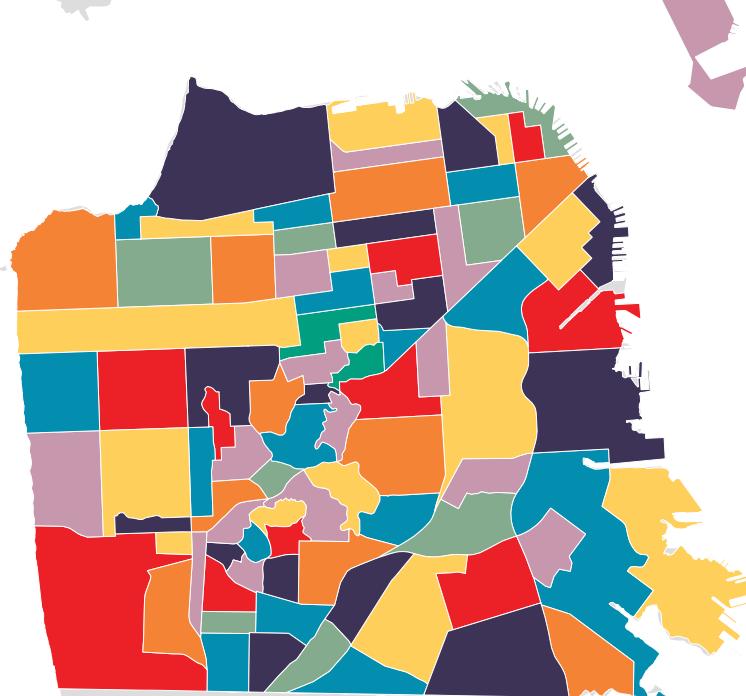


# San Francisco Opportunities for Advancing Racial Equity

Phase I: November - April 2021



**NIS** National  
Innovation  
Service

The City and County of San Francisco Department of Homelessness & Supportive Housing (HSH) set out to identify a set of priorities and actions to build trust and momentum for advancing racial equity goals within the department. In this process, HSH worked with the NIS Center for Housing Justice to center the experiences and wisdom of organizational staff and community members with lived experience to build understanding on current barriers to advancing racial equity and identify the pathway forward towards accountability and actions to advance deliberate practices as foundational to HSH becoming a more equitable department.

The NIS Center for Housing Justice designs equitable public institutions in partnership with impacted communities to drive systems transformation. Learn more about the team [here](#).

This work was completed in partnership with:

[Tipping Point Community](#)  
[The City of San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Housing](#)

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# Why Equity? Why Now?

"I am not pessimistic or optimistic. I am determined."

- Stacey Abrams

We are collectively living through a historic time in the history of the United States, and indeed the world. Over the course of the last year alone, the world has plunged into the COVID-19 pandemic where lives of many people have unnecessarily been lost, and those lives are disproportionately Black, Brown and Indigenous. We have witnessed multiple Black men and women be killed at the hands of police, a coup attempt at the Nation's capitol, and mounting anti-Asian sentiment, violence and killing. It has been a year where racism and white supremacy have become prominent in mainstream discourse.

Yet Black and Brown leaders have ushered in nation-wide and longstanding protests against the systems that perpetuate this violence, fights for abolition of policing and systems whose very foundations are linked to the perpetuation of white supremacy.

And it is here, in these conditions, that we turn to take a closer look at the housing and homelessness systems we have erected- at both the roots of racist policy, systems and structures, and at what is possible to construct instead. Any system transformation in the sector requires us to design toward a future where Black and Brown people, who have been historically marginalized, are leading and thriving.

This is where we begin the story with San Francisco's Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), looking inward at the culture, process, and structure within the department. It is here that we begin at the small scale so that it can reverberate to the largest scale- outward to also transform the broader system in San Francisco. HSH has been through so much in its short lifespan, and the path forward may seem too daunting or intractable. It is not. It will not be easy; but we have witnessed the determination of HSH staff, and members of the broader community. Transformation is coming.



Sarah Hunter  
Managing Director  
Center for Housing Justice, NIS

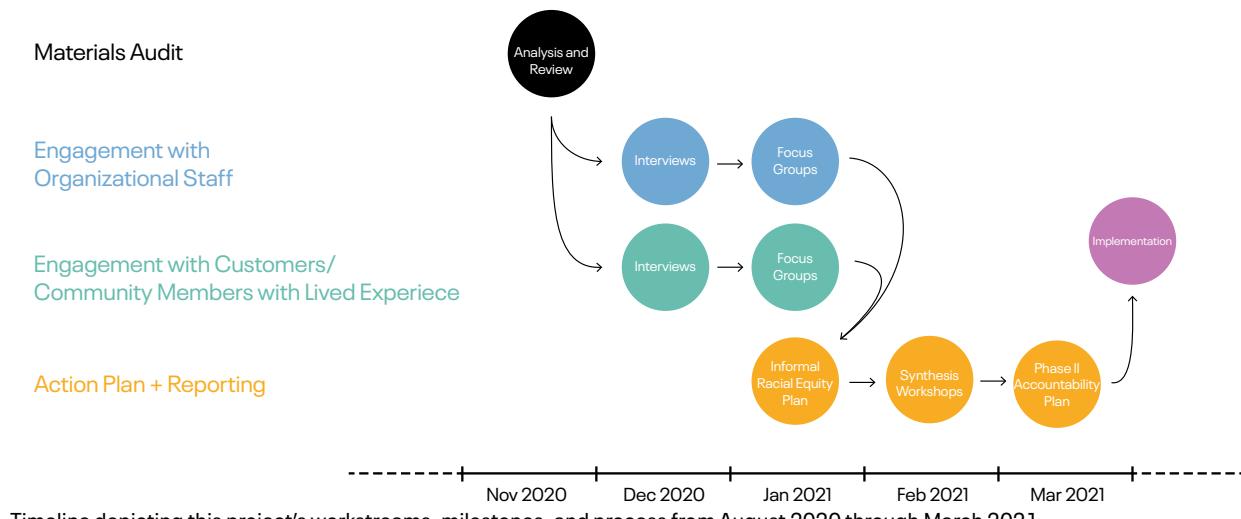
# Background

## Scope of Work

As part of the San Francisco Department of Homelessness & Supportive Housing's (HSH) [Five Year Strategic Framework Update and 2020 Implementation Plan During COVID-19 Crisis](#),<sup>1</sup> HSH elevated the importance of equity as a core part of the work to end homelessness. In October 2020, through a gift offered to HSH by Tipping Point, the National Innovation Service (NIS) Center for Housing Justice (CHJ) was contracted to accomplish three primary objectives to support advancing racial equity within the department:

1. support HSH's submission of the Phase I Action Plan on workforce equity to the San Francisco Office of Racial Equity;
2. create a set of priorities to help move HSH culture and actions forward immediately toward racial equity; and
3. create an accountability plan to sustainably advance equity.

## Process Timeline



<sup>1</sup> Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, 2020. "Five Year Strategic Framework: 2020 Implementation Plan During COVID 19". Accessed March 31, 2021. [https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-Implementation-Plan-During-COVID-19\\_FINAL.pdf](https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-Implementation-Plan-During-COVID-19_FINAL.pdf)

and histories of policy rooted in white supremacy enacted to deprive BIPOC communities access to resources and wealth building mechanisms—including home ownership. People experiencing homelessness, (in addition to the traumas suffered through the experience of homelessness) experience institutional and systemic racism from within the homeless response system, especially its services, which results in harmful and negative outcomes.

In *A Brief Timeline of Race and Homelessness in America*,<sup>2</sup> NIS and partners describe the historical connections between race and homelessness in the United States; including a timeline that illuminates the origin of policies and practices that drive homeless response systems today. An antiracist system must be able to acknowledge and translate the historical and present day racist trauma into policy, practice, and action that both addresses previous harm and moves towards a new reality.

The NIS Center for Housing Justice team applied this approach by centering the experiences and insights of members of historically marginalized communities—particularly people who identify as Black, Indigenous or other people of color, including intersecting identities and experiences in our discovery process. This process sought to map elements including the functions, limits, and opportunities of the culture of HSH; formal and informal power structures; HSH communication, patterns of shared experiences asserted by staff; decision making and evidence of accountability.

## Methods

CHJ worked closely with HSH staff, HSH-funded providers and people with lived expertise to build a shared understanding of the organization's experiences, needs and priorities and to identify missed opportunities to advance the department's racial equity efforts.

There were five distinct parts to our process:

1. a materials audit of written policy and practices, DEI meeting notes, HSH equity staff survey and documents;
2. in-depth review and analysis of the drafted [ORE Racial Equity Action Plan](#),<sup>3</sup>
3. in-depth interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions;
4. co-design strategies with HSH staff to address findings and
5. providing staff support and coaching.

The objectives of this process were the following:

1. Create space for organizational staff and leadership to have confidential conversations to feel fully self-expressed and contribute concerns and needs.
2. Assess core organizational needs around equity by evaluating organizational policies, practices, strategic plans, data, and related documentation.
3. Understand the experiences of people who are served by the homeless response system in San Francisco, to highlight areas where inequities and bias may appear in current approaches to lived-experience engagements and housing services.
4. Identify opportunities for equitable decision making and an increased

2 Olivet, Jeff, Amanda Andere, Marc Dones, Brittani Manzo, and Jessica Venegas, 2019. "A Brief Timeline of Race and Homelessness in America" Community Solutions. March 19, 2019. <https://community.solutions/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A-Brief-Timeline-of-Race-and-Homelessness-in-America-March-2019.pdf>

3 Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, 2021. "Racial Equity Action Plan: Phase I, January 2021". Accessed March 31, 2021. [https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/HSH-Racial-Equity-Plan\\_v1-01.29.21.pdf](https://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/HSH-Racial-Equity-Plan_v1-01.29.21.pdf)

- culture of accountability around racial equity, diversity, and inclusion within HSH and amongst community partners and HSH staff.
5. Support HSH with scoping the new Chief Equity Officer role and provide interview tools and resources in support of creating systems and structures of accountability to reinforce accountability culture.

At the time of this report, HSH is also currently in the process of recruiting for a Chief Equity Officer (CEO) to be hired by mid-2021. CHJ provided support in the development of the position description and selection models, and will expect to provide onboarding support and coaching to equip the CEO to hold the accountability work of phase I and the launch of external work toward phase II.

### **Materials Audit**

CHJ identified, collected, and reviewed programmatic data; organizational-, departmental-, and office-level strategic plans, process documents, and other service delivery materials and tools to inform the process and the staff and leadership interviews. Additionally, CHJ assessed for evidence of racial equity tools and concepts used to inform decision-making processes, program design and evaluation and organizational practices. CHJ's organizational audit was used to help inform opportunities for interviews to dive deeper into content (i.e. human resource management) and where to target areas of support for subsequent leadership coaching. CHJ also reviewed materials in service of supporting the completion of the Phase I Action plan submission to the City and County of San Francisco's Office of Racial Equity (ORE).

### **Supporting the Submission of Office of Racial Equity Phase I Action Plan**

In partnership with HSH ORE Plan project leadership staff, CHJ reviewed the draft Action Plan and provided recommendations and feedback to staff on areas to strengthen the plan. Given the ORE Plan extension offered

by the City to January 31, 2021, CHJ was able to provide additional support to the staff completing the phase I draft and supplemental materials. This provided a foundation for the subsequent work CHJ conducted in partnership with HSH by positioning the agency to lean into acknowledging past actions and areas for growth. The draft plan describes short-term actions to increase diversity, equity and inclusion within the department and is supplemented by the co-developed CHJ and HSH deliverables that centers on creating a foundation for accountability and action. In addition to the development of this report, CHJ will support HSH project leads with co-facilitation guidance of "Deep Dive" staff feedback sessions scheduled for April 2021 to further enhance agency understanding and support ongoing work towards racial equity beyond the initial ORE plan submission.

### **Applying the HSH Staff Racial Equity Survey**

In the fall of 2020, prior to the engagement with CHJ, HSH and Focus Strategies conducted a survey focused on staff perceptions of racial equity issues in the workplace. The survey was designed to inform HSH's Phase I Action plan submission to ORE. While a little over half of the organization participated in the survey, there was participation across levels of decision making and across teams within the department. While 52% of HSH staff identify as Asian, Black, Filipino, Latinx, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander or multi-racial, 56% of participants in the survey represented these categories. A large percentage of respondents chose 'preferred not to answer' as a response to race (22%), ethnicity (19%), gender (13%), and sexual identity (14%).

CHJ focused on the findings that may indicate structural reinforcers of inequity. The large percentage of respondents who 'preferred not to answer' demographic questions raised a flag about safety and trust that is consistent with other findings CHJ observed during our engagement. The survey findings also reflected differences between BIPOC, white staff, and those who preferred not to respond, especially in the handling of racial equity issues by senior management.

Among staff respondents who provided comments on HSH's work on racial equity (roughly half of the sample), there was a common theme of disconnection between departmental communications and actual policies and actions. Another widespread view expressed in the comments was that promotion and retention practices were racially inequitable and inconsistent in application. These survey results informed our approach to interviews, focus groups, and coaching.

### In-Depth Interviews

CHJ conducted 14 in-depth interviews with HSH staff from November 2020 through January 2021. The purpose of the interviews was to collect qualitative data from participants who have direct involvement or positional power related to DEI efforts within HSH to date. Staff who were invited to participate in interviews and focus groups were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Current involvement with DEI efforts (e.g. DEI Committee member, racial equity leads)
2. Former involvement with DEI efforts (e.g. former DEI committee member)
3. Holding a position in Executive Leadership
4. Other staff, as recommended by participants due to DEI commitment or lived experience.

### Focus Groups & Listening Sessions

As part of the engagement, CHJ connected with people with lived experience of the homeless response system in San Francisco (SF). Specifically, CHJ met with two separate groups of Black, Asian American, Pacific Islander and Latinx/e individuals who have experienced homelessness as part of a family and three focus groups with Black and Latinx/e young people who have experienced the system as youth. These sessions were facilitated by CHJ and focused on listening to responses from the participants on how they would describe a homeless response system rooted in equity and justice, experiences navigating the system resources, and name any

experiences of bias due to identity and feelings on accountability.

To broaden the sample size, CHJ also conducted several listening sessions with different cohorts of staff and stakeholder groups across the organization to gain a more varied perspective and provide opportunities for other staff to propose solutions in response to the audit findings. CHJ attended several external and internal standing community meetings to conduct listening sessions on equity issues with its participants. Meetings attended included the HSH Quarterly Provider Leadership meeting, HSH Funded Providers of Color meeting and HSH Supportive Housing Program Directors. The purpose of each listening session centered on elevating equity issues and informing priorities.

### Co-Design Workshops

On March 3rd and March 5th, the CHJ team facilitated two workshop sessions to review emerging themes based on the discovery findings and to co-design a set of priorities and action steps to advance racial equity efforts. We recognize this work is evolving and may be influenced by the incoming Chief Equity Officer. We hold the value of advancing the equity work, while also remaining flexible for continuous learning and evolution of how to advance the equity goals.

### Coaching

#### *Office of Racial Equity Phase I Action Plan Support*

Before engaging with CHJ, HSH organized itself functionally to be able to deliver their phase I action plan to ORE. CHJ began its engagement by drawing from and expanding on regular meetings of key staff who had volunteered for or been named as the team responsible for driving toward that action plan; intentionally valuing the individual and collective dedication and effort being put forth by that group. This process included collaboration with the HSH racial equity leads that included program staff, Deputy Director, HR Manager and HSH Interim Director. The focus of our review included refining the existing plan input, navigating internal stakeholder groups, co-designing and

input strategy, identifying internal structures of accountability and points of influence to sustain change.

#### *HSH Equity Leadership & Staff*

Over the course of the engagement, the CHJ team has coordinated routinely with HSH staff and leadership in order to support its continued ability to shepherd the advancement of racial equity work. The CHJ team has facilitated weekly video calls with a representative team of Executive Leadership, HR, Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Committee members and other HSH program staff who have been involved in HSH equity efforts. This group provided technical guidance and expertise throughout the project engagement, helped to shape and participate in co-design sessions to digest the findings and envision the next steps to advancing equity. This group also demonstrated a practice of living in authentic relationship to each other as this work evolved and offered space to each other for support and processing the emotional impact of experiencing the impact of white supremacy and racism.

The CHJ team also began engaging the Executive Team, as members of HSH staff with clear and direct positional power to move forward both action plan items included in the ORE report, and to assess readiness for and begin socializing big cultural shifts that would likely be necessary to be able to move toward racial equity and accountability as lived values for the organization. The CHJ team also supported the HSH leadership through the hiring process for the Chief Equity Officer position during these calls.

## Limitations

Given the size of the organization and timeline of priorities, CHJ was not able to actively engage all levels of staff. This approach limited our engagement with middle management and frontline staff who were not explicitly part of the DEI Committee, Phase I Action Plan team, or project advising team. Recognizing there are many voices, CHJ is intentionally co-designing pathways for ongoing input for continuous improvement and engagement from staff across the organization. CHJ is confident that the voices of HSH staff were heard through the completed activities; there was targeted representation across the organization even though the team was not able to speak to every current employee at HSH.

In addition, as the scope of work was focused on the HSH Phase I Action plan submission to ORE and addressing internal HSH culture, policies and practice, CHJ prioritized the early phase engaging internally. CHJ focused its effort on HSH organizational dynamics, policies, and procedures about human resources and structures within HSH. The impact of this limited opportunities to engage with funded external providers to one-off group meetings where racial equity was part of the agenda. This scope of work did not include a more expansive conversation with external HSH stakeholders. In the next phase of work with Tipping Point, CHJ will focus explicitly on external homeless response system and HSH partner engagement that includes external stakeholders, focusing on Black, Indigenous and Transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC), staff of funded agencies, and other community stakeholders. It will also work to actively engage more varied levels of HSH staff.

As HSH transitions to setting up an implementation structure and process for advancing racial justice, CHJ recommends that HSH builds on what was learned through this process to identify areas of intersection and exploration with staff, contracted providers, current clients, and other stakeholders engaged in the San Francisco homeless response system.

## Activities

Data Type	Activities
HSH Quantitative Data	<p><b>Collaborative data review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HSH-Focus Strategies survey results</li> </ul>
HSH Qualitative Data	<p><b>Policy audit and analysis + collaborative data review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative surveys</li> <li>• Organizational structures/staffing data</li> <li>• Racial equity strategies and tools:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs and processes focused on equity</li> <li>• Current and pending policies and guidance focused on equity</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
CHJ-CHJ Participatory Qualitative Data	<p><b>Participatory research:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Presentations, feedback sessions, and planning meetings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CHJ + HSH Racial Equity Project Advisory Weekly Meetings</li> <li>• Providers of Color Meeting</li> <li>• Quarterly Provider Leadership Meeting</li> <li>• Executive Team Meetings</li> <li>• Diversity, Equity &amp; Inclusion (DEI) Committee Meeting</li> <li>• All Staff Huddle Meeting</li> <li>• Coaching Calls w/ HSH Director &amp; HR Manager</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Focus Groups w/ People w/ Lived Expertise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Focus Group - English Speaking - Jan</li> <li>• Family Focus Group - Spanish Speaking - Jan</li> <li>• Youth Focus Groups - English Speaking - Dec, Jan, Feb</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>14 One on One Staff Interviews</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DEI Committee Members (current and former)</li> <li>• Executive Team</li> <li>• Management</li> <li>• Other Staff</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Findings

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In order to heal from any wound, it is important to acknowledge what has been harmed and what needs to be healed, learn what will be required to heal, and take action. The findings provided in this report are an acknowledgement of the wounds of how white dominant culture<sup>4</sup> has caused harm and shown up within HSH and the struggles that have been experienced by its staff, funded providers, and people accessing the system while experiencing homelessness. Along with the anger and grief expressed, there is a consistent drumbeat of hope. The community that comprises HSH is strong-willed with a desire to heal and has the capacity to dedicate to transforming itself into an agency that embodies the equity-driven values it aspires to hold.

HSH has demonstrated a tangible intention to be different: through the mobilization around the ORE action plan, advocating for new resources dedicated to equity (the Chief Equity Officer position specifically) and partnering with CHJ to drive this work. The examples elevated within the findings below are specific to the experiences of the people that make up HSH, however are not unique to the way that white dominant culture shows up in most organizations, governments and systems in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> We see these findings as the opportunity for HSH to understand together what it will take to heal and transform. These findings are the first step.

**Content Awareness:** We want to preface that the findings in this section explicitly name examples of structural racism and white supremacy culture.

Staff interviewed across levels discussed the harmful impact of reactive leadership

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4 Okun, Tema and Kenneth Jones, 1999. "White Dominant Culture & Something Different: A Worksheet. <https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>

5 Gray, Aysa, 2019. "The Bias of 'Professionalism' Standards" Stanford Social Innovation Review. June 4, 2019. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the\\_bias\\_of\\_professionalism\\_standards](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards)

## Finding 01

# Reactive Organizational Culture & Priority Setting

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Priorities are driven by politics. What's in the media, what the mayor deems important.

- HSH Staff

and program staff asserted the concerns and fatigue caused by the current environment, stemming from external political pressures and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff capacity. Staff asserted that priorities set within the department are often dismissed or amended based on external political drivers and that imbalanced accountability driver falls short and furthers harm through instability within the department. This impacts the way staff participate and connect to staff meetings, and the ability for staff to interact with external stakeholders. This balancing act of potentially risking future funding, or HSH losing control of the implementation of funding controlled by the political landscape in San Francisco creates a foundation where HSH has to navigate constantly shifting political currents. This instability can distract from racial equity efforts, at other times undermining them. It is in this context that HSH leadership has struggled to drive any racial equity strategy forward.

In order to meet the demands of external pressures, HSH leadership has set the tone and message to staff to "keep pushing through the wall" and to "work harder." This cultural tone dismisses experiences of real-time emotional burden of the pandemic, capacity issues, and structural racial biases, and in turn disproportionately impacts HSH's direct line

staff, who are predominantly staff of color. Together, the reactive culture and reactive priority-setting impacts the emotional and physical wellbeing of the staff and roots itself in perpetuating white dominant cultural norms.<sup>6</sup> The connection of this environment and expectation to a historical burden on people of color, especially Black people, who have historically and systemically been requested or often required to take on emotionally and physically taxing work by white manager is important to elevate as part of this context to understand how cultural norms create barriers to equitable organizational culture.

Reactivity in service of political demands prohibits opportunities

for authentic community-building and equitable decision-making and strategy that is rooted in the wisdom of people with direct experience of the ways inequity surfaces and resurfaces within an organization. This also harms the community because it inhibits the ability to model and hold transformative relationships with both people experiencing homelessness and the people within the organizations that HSH funds. In turn, it manifests in loss of trust and a hesitancy to believe in HSH's commitment to racial equity.

If all we do is react, we are going to fail. We will not be able to lead effectively. We can't distinguish for ourselves what is important and what is a priority.

- HSH Staff

Throughout the discovery process, HSH staff

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6 Okun, Tema and Kenneth Jones, 1999. "White Dominant Culture & Something Different: A Worksheet." <https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>

## Finding O2

# Missed Opportunities to Heal from Experiences of Harm

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When you have trauma from before and lack of trust, the trauma is still there, even when the people change.

- HSH Staff

initial formation process of the department, and 2) on-going staff relationships and engagement around former and existing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts. In addition, there was a theme elevated of lack of structure to provide safe and honest feedback that included grievances to HSH.

HSH's origin story is rooted in paternalism - there was no consultation or transparency in decision-making that impacted the many employees who came to HSH from other city departments at its creation. The experiences of staff who were impacted by that process have expressed that the department's formation and how new positions were classified during the formation created structural barriers that have disproportionately impacted Black HSH staff and reduced equitable opportunities to advance careers within the department. While some of these issues have been addressed, over time they have compounded to reflect a lack of trustworthiness of commitment to racial equity goals.

Power hoarding by staff in leadership positions was also expressed repeatedly by staff. Ideas from less senior staff have felt dismissed. Staff of color expressed the dismissal of ideas, priorities and concerns elevated by the DEI Committee to senior leadership. Specifically, staff elevated concerns related to structural issues that impact

shared common themes of experiencing harm without opportunities for authentic healing and repair. Two of the most consistent examples shared were 1) the harm felt by staff that was rooted from the

BIPOC staff and discussed multiple examples of occasions where the DEI Committee planned cultural programming that was dismissed and disrespected in order to center the comfort of white staff.

In addition, both staff and people with lived experience of the system shared experiences of a lack of opportunity or pathway to air grievances without fear of retaliation as a program participant or employee. While there are limitations to examples driven by individual cases, what emerged was a theme of a perception of fear of retaliation which impacts people feeling heard, valued and able to share experiences directly. Over time this contributes to an un-inclusive and even hostile work environment for some staff and indicates an unwillingness to meaningfully advance diversity, equity and inclusion work within the agency.

Within HSH there is a strong desire to have

## Finding 03

# Equity Efforts are Siloed

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No. It's hard. People don't realize equity costs something. Putting aside power and privilege. In order for people to be empowered there needs to be a sharing of power.

- HSH Staff

structure. Bold statements proclaimed about equity from leadership have been received as performative rather than authentic. There are structural barriers that contribute to this. As examples, HSH created the DEI Committee, but the committee does not hold positional power to create sustained impact within the organization's decision-making structure; and staff who participate in the DEI Committee or who participated in the creation of the ORE phase I action plan are not offered additional compensation, or even time/percentage allotments in their FTE for the work and necessary emotional labor associated with these efforts. HSH has also completed equity-related assessments in the past and have not yet applied operational changes in response to those findings(e.g. SPARC report; HSH Staff Equity Survey).<sup>7,8</sup>

Staff who have been part of the DEI Committee and/or leadership team who are responsible for advancing equity-related goals expressed that the work to advance equity is often viewed as an "additional task" for everyone instead of approaching equity as a way to orient structure, organizational culture, and day-to-day practice. This has shown up systematically through the

"equity as part of everyone's work," but there is a lack of clarity on how this can be operationalized throughout the department's

lack of resources dedicated for equity efforts to date. For example, staff who have been part of driving the DEI work to date have had to squeeze this work into their roles without additional resources and institutionalized support (e.g. schedule during lunch breaks, extra work). While the decision and approval to hire a Chief Equity Officer is a good first step, there is more work to be done than one position can hold.

Separating equity from the day-to-day work also can enact a very specific job-performance toll that disadvantages staff who are trying to advance equity efforts within the organization. Often, staff championing racial equity efforts are also not relieved from their full-time organizational role and responsibilities. This strains capacity and can indirectly impact performance in a full time role that does not reflect equity-related work, which over the long term—can impact performance and even employment status.

Only a few of us speak up and it's exhausting. Carrying the weight of everybody. I am not your spokesperson.

- HSH Staff

7 Okun, Tema and Kenneth Jones, 1999. "White Dominant Culture & Something Different: A Worksheet." <https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>

8 Vu, 2019. "Are you Guilty of Equity Offset." Nonprofit AF. November 17, 2019. <http://nonprofitaf.com/2019/11/are-you-guilty-of-equity-offset/>

## Finding O4

# Lack of Accountability Structure to Advance Equity Goals

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HSH has expressed consistent intention and desire to create and sustain an equitable culture and practice within the department, however the efforts to date have not led to measurable or felt impact. CHJ has observed a lack of structure and resources (e.g. time) needed to authentically support the kind of accountability that is required to advance HSH's stated racial equity goals. There is a lack of clarity on decision-making processes that support racial equity, how to provide antiracist leadership, and who is ultimately accountable within the organization for advancing racial equity.

As elevated earlier in these findings, there has been a historical lack of investment to authentically advance equity within HSH. The resource named most often as a barrier throughout the discovery process was the lack of dedicated time to work on equity goals.

White privilege is a systemic reality primarily grounded in inequitable systems and stereotypes.<sup>9</sup> White privilege gives white staff, particularly leadership, the option to lean in or lean out, or avoid discomfort when confronting racial dynamics. At HSH, this was apparent as white leadership expressed discomfort and concern of "getting it wrong." In turn, reluctance to make mistakes has created lack of transparency, and resulted in a need for a structure that can hold transparent accountability on issues related to equity. This has also influenced the lack of action and a perception of apathy of leadership to advance equity efforts.

Additionally, there is limited structure and few opportunities for people experiencing

homelessness and navigating the HSH funded system to have impact or input into the system. Equity efforts, including engaging people with lived experience of HSH-funded services, is primarily driven by specific staff-interest or funder requirements rather than being institutionally embedded. When CHJ conducted focus groups with people with lived experience, many people we spoke with stated that this was the first time they had been asked to engage or provide input based on their experiences.

There is a direct impact on the ability to achieve racial equity when efforts lack an explicit structure for transparent accountability. Without it, attempts to advance equity fall flat and perpetuate the structural racism and harm to BIPOC individuals. CHJ heard expressed anger and confusion among external partners, and views among staff that this current effort is one last chance or a "final straw." Ultimately, without a structure for accountability, HSH risks lasting reputational damage as a trusted organization to end homelessness for people of color in San Francisco.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas, P.L. 2017. "Understanding Racism as Systemic and About Power". Radical Eyes for Equity. March 31, 2017. <https://radicalscholarship.wordpress.com/2017/03/31/understanding-racism-as-systemic-and-about-power/>

## Actions

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The following section outlines the actions CHJ and HSH staff have identified to advance the racial equity goals of the organization. As part of the method to identifying recommendations, CHJ rooted the proposed actions that pivots HSH towards equity. We have included resources for each action to provide additional context and ideas for HSH to operationalize. In addition, the actions suggested here can be considered and integrated into an external-facing, broader system transformation effort across the San Francisco homeless response system.

The actions include aspirational values for the agency that have been named throughout the discovery process by HSH staff, providers and people with lived experience.



## Action 01

# Shift Organizational Culture & Invest in Transformative Relationships

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### Aspirational Values



### Recommendations

#### 01. Establish shared language across the department and a commitment to building ongoing knowledge, skills, and confidence to talk about racism and white supremacy and strategies to operationalize racial justice for every staff member at HSH and key stakeholders. This may include:

- Establishing and supporting opportunities for brave spaces<sup>12,13</sup> to talk directly about racism and white supremacy. This can include modeling talking regularly when white dominant culture norms are practice and welcoming pivots as part meetings. In addition, consider caucus strategies based on racial identity (e.g. AAPI, Black, Latinx and other groups);
- Building shared understanding and language of the historical and current-day impacts of white supremacy culture, systemic racism, anti-blackness, in community and in the workplace, as well as in the solutions designed to respond to people at risk of and/or experiencing homelessness;
- Building shared community norms on how staff will engage in conversations about race,

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10 Carruthers, Charlene, 2019. "The Three Commitments". The Crisis Magazine. December 9, 2019. <https://www.thecrisismagazine.com/single-post/2019/12/09/the-three-committments>

11 Okun, Tema and Kenneth Jones, 1999. "White Dominant Culture & Something Different: A Worksheet." <https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>

12 Breakaway, 2017. "Do We Need Safe or Brave Spaces?". BreakAway. December 1, 2017. <https://alternativebreaks.org/safe-or-brave-spaces/>

13 Zheng, Lily, 2016. "Why your brave space sucks." The Stanford Daily. May 15, 2016. <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/05/15/why-your-brave-space-sucks/>

- identity and other experiences and practice applying them in all meetings including practices of calling in colleagues when racial microaggressions<sup>14</sup> and/or other explicit racist behavior and actions occur;
- Centering learning around firsthand knowledge of what is happening on the ground through engaging with people with lived experience (e.g. Family Advisory Council & Youth Policy & Advisory Committee) and HSH direct service staff, including what works and what does not; while creating opportunities for this voice to be elevated across and outside of the division; and,
- Practicing addressing white fragility and creating spaces for white accountability for white staff (white staff in particular should practice leaning into discomfort).

**02. Invest in resources, activities and policies to increase a sense of belonging and inclusion across HSH departments and staff members, particularly for front line staff. These investments should include:**

- Co-designing and centering the experiences of frontline staff in all-staff huddle meetings, all staff newsletter communications and other broad-staff reaching meetings;
- Promoting and encouraging community and cultural rituals and practices; making staff time accessible for department-wide events (e.g. a policy to cancel conflicting meetings);
- Prioritizing wellness—pivot from the “grind culture” that is disproportionately harming BIPOC staff by creating both structural (policy) and tactical (modeled) drivers that promote the ability for staff to rest and restore;
- Communicating often, in a consistent and inclusive way, using written and verbal methods
- Cultivating formal and informal leadership opportunities;
- Creating opportunities for cross-departmental culture building; and,
- Holding celebrations that do not require personal monetary contributions from staff and be consistent with how celebrations are offered across the department (e.g. avoid special treatment for certain roles, positions or individuals).

**03. Create practices to address harm and relationship healing practices. These may include:**

- Practicing co-creating community agreements for meetings with staff;
- Practicing checking in with team members regularly in a way that allows people to bring in their whole selves and build authentic relationships with one another;
- Rebuilding broken trust through authentic apology, accountability and action; and,
- Creating caucus strategies<sup>15</sup> based on racial identity for BIPOC staff to have the ability to process without white colleagues present and for white colleagues to create separate accountability spaces.

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14 Limborg, Andrew, 2020. “Microaggressions are a big deal: How to talk them out and when to walk away”. National Public Radio. June 9, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/microaggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away>

15 Blackwell, Kelsey, 2018. “Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People.” The Arrow: A Journey of Wakeful Society Culture & Politics. August 9, 2018. <https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/>

## Action O2

# Embed Equity Across the Organization

## Aspirational Values



## Recommendations

### 01. Make racial equity everyone's responsibility. This may include:

- Ensuring that each job description/role has racial equity-related accountability and goals that integrate racial equity actions and aligned strategy into team project/action plans and role related performance review processes;
- Power shifting, i.e., sharing inclusive leadership practices<sup>16</sup> around how racial equity is part of everyone's roles by centering the lived experiences of BIPOC staff, but not leaving it to these individuals to do or champion racial equity work; and,
- Provide ongoing professional development and training for all staff related to implicit bias, cultural humility and other equity and anti-racist practices. Ensure that trainings are accessible to all staff including online access for both new and existing staff.

Equity doesn't mean equal. This means training, conversation, being transparent all the time and slowing down  
- HSH Staff

### 02. Implement an equity based decision-making framework in all departments and functions of the organization to guide decision-making as leaders. This may include:

- Identifying the practices that department/teams will adopt to transparently address power dynamics in their relationships and decision-making processes, and,
- Creating a structure that can hold the accountability to racial equity goals.

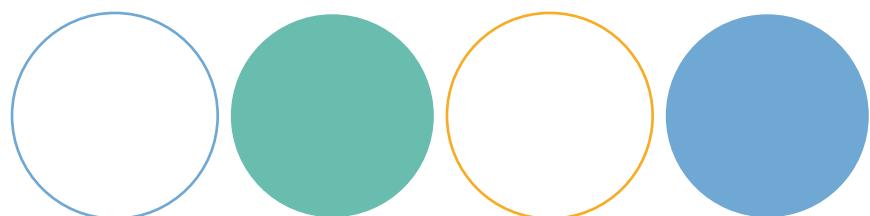
### 03. Create internal mechanisms that promote, center and compensate the expertise of BIPOC Communities & individuals with lived experience. Including:

- Engaging BIPOC community leaders as equity advisors to inform HSH priorities.
- Addressing intersectionality by understanding what is happening in communities related

16 Proinspire. "Crises as a Catalyst: A Call for Race Equity & Inclusive Leadership". Accessed March 31, 2021. <https://www.proinspire.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Crises-as-a-Catalyst-2.pdf>

#### Action 02: Embed Equity Across Organization

- to the racial, ethnic and cultural makeup of the service areas, and individuals experiencing homelessness;
- Engaging individuals with lived experience at the start of program and policy design and ensuring they are in leadership and decision-making positions throughout the process; and,
- Identify dedicated resources that include dedicated staff roles and compensation for participants to adequately support ongoing practice of collaborating with people with lived experience



## Action O3

# Implement an Equity Accountability Structure

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### Aspirational Values



### Recommendations

Living into the values and practices needed to advance equity within HSH will require an approach to accountability that addresses and transforms individual, interpersonal and institutional bias. It is important to note here that taking action on addressing racist structures, policies and behaviors cannot wait for (predominantly white) individuals to do their individual work to understand internalized privilege and bias. We are including recommendations that address both individual and institutional accountability as the foundation to advancing equity within HSH and in the broader San Francisco homeless response system.

#### 01. Encourage individual accountability to address and understand internalized privilege and bias. This may include:

- Creating a regularly updated resource catalogue to share broadly with staff of relevant books, articles, podcasts, videos and other resources on topics related to anti-racism;
- Considering book clubs for interested staff to read books relevant to anti-racism and undoing white supremacy;
- Developing individual professional development goals that are supported by investments in learning tools and resources and available paid time; and/or
- Developing tools for individual and teams to utilize as reflection and evaluation exercises.

#### 02. Create a transparent and resourced organizing structure(s) to support racial equity actions and tasks with shared ownership and accountability. These should include:

- Establishing a Racial Equity Action Team to organize and operationalize equity tasks across the organization - inclusive of, but not solely, the actions named in the HSH ORE Action Plan, ensuring representatives on the Racial Equity Action Team are resourced with the

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17 Mack, Leslie. 2019. "We need to make proactive accountability regular praxis in organizing and beyond." Black Youth Project. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200530045756/http://blackyouthproject.com/we-need-to-make-proactive-accountability-regular-praxis-in-organizing-and-beyond/>

- adequate time within their staff position, roles, and responsibilities;
- Establishing a Racial Equity Accountability Council comprised of both role-specific positions (e.g. Chief Equity Officer; HR Manager) and experiential positions (staff with interest and whose racial, ethnic and cultural identities represent the community HSH serves, including people with lived expertise) to provide oversight and hold the organization accountable for advancing equity goals and actions;
- Refining the role of the DEI Committee to align with complementary goals and membership strengths, creating defined goals and roles for this committee that are complementary to the accountability structure;
  - These could include focusing on providing advisory support and representation to the Racial Equity Accountability Council, cultural programming within the department, peer support, etc.;
- Ensuring all leadership positions that hold positional power in advancing equity have equity goals and metrics built into job descriptions, performance goals, and metrics, including:
  - Executive Staff
  - Directors
  - HR Management
- Creating transparent and direct lines of decision-making from the Racial Equity Action Team & Council that connect to HSH Director, Chief Equity Officer and HR Manager.

**03. Develop a continuous improvement plan that may include but is not limited to:**

- Establishing the Racial Equity Accountability Council as the primary home for holding the theory of change for advancing equity, related organizational goals, resources allocation, and continuous quality improvement;
- Providing a consistent cadence of executive leadership communication, reflecting on and publicly reporting-out progress, new challenges, new learning, and team growth that includes a feedback loop;
- Monitoring progress, impact, and new opportunities across organizational departments and leadership levels;
- Providing transparent access to view progress via a tracking mechanism to document progress and challenges to implementation of racial equity goals; and,
- Ensuring continuous improvement processes include regular qualitative and quantitative assessments to track both experiential & structural progress and include opportunities for staff input who may not be as involved or as vocal.

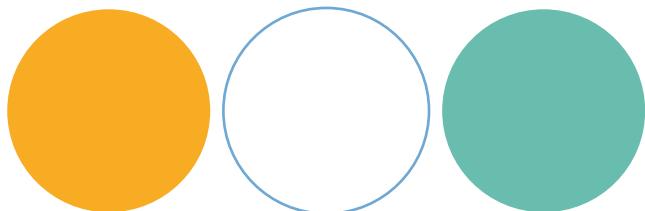
## Closing and Gratitude

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The importance of taking action toward racial equity is vital for the lives of the people that HSH serves and the people that represent the department. CHJ is hopeful for the change efforts that are possible at HSH and in San Francisco, as demonstrated by the commitment of the staff and leadership in the efforts we have undertaken together, and by the willingness of the team to look at its challenges and move through them with progress as the guide, rather than avoiding or deflecting. Each of the actions included in this document are equal parts fundamentally necessary for change and major efforts unto themselves. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by work ahead. Believe that even the smallest changes in practice toward liberation, care for the humanity in people and repair from harm will ripple and grow to make much larger impacts.

NIS Center for Housing Justice is grateful for the opportunity to continue our work with San Francisco as we continue to partner with Tipping Point to move onto the next phase of advancing racial equity within the homeless response system. Our next phase of work will build upon the internal efforts at HSH and connect to broader system transformation efforts to advance equity within the San Francisco homeless response system.

NIS Center for Housing Justice would like to express our gratitude for the authentic partnership extended by HSH and the people who have vested their resources and trust into co-designing a way forward for advancing equity within HSH and beyond. We are changed by you; and close this phase of work with gratitude for the wisdom, hope and vision that has been extended to us as partners on this journey.



# References and Resources

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## Glossary of Terms

### **General Information - Background & Key Concepts**

- [A Brief Timeline of Race and Homelessness in America](#)
- [The History of Homelessness in the United States](#)
- [From Exclusion to Destitution: Race, Affordable Housing, and Homelessness](#)
- [White Dominant Culture Worksheet - Tema Okun](#)
- [University of California San Francisco - Racial Equity Anti-Black Racism Resources](#)

### **HSH Specific Report Information - Background**

- [HSH ORE Action Plan](#)
- [HSH Strategic Framework - 2020 Action](#)

## **Action 1 Resources**

### **Organizational Culture & Anti Racism**

- ["But I didn't mean it!" Why it's so hard to prioritize impacts over intents](#)
- [Operationalizing Racial Justice in Non-Profit Organizations](#)
- [Racial Equity: Getting to Results](#)
- [Dismantling anti-Black bias in democratic workplaces](#)
- [Asian American Racial Justice Toolkit](#)

### **Transformative Relationships**

- [Emergent Strategy, Adrienne Marie Brown](#)
- [Powerful Partnerships: Transformative Alliance Building by Shelly Tochluk and Cameron Levin, AWARE-LA](#)
- [Toward a Psychological Framework of Radical Healing in Communities of Color](#)
- [Facilitating hard conversations](#)

## **Action 2 Resources**

- [Housing Equity Framework](#)
- [Equity Based Decision Making Framework — National Innovation Service](#)

- [Ladder of Participation](#)
- [When Addressing Anti-Racism - Not Just What, But How: Introducing Theory of Being](#)
- [Becoming an Anti-Racist Organization: An Anti-Racist Model for Organizational Change](#)

### Action 3 Resources

#### **Accountability and Shared Ownership**

- [Toward a Psychological Framework of Radical Healing in Communities of Color](#)
- [Trauma Informed Community Building Model - Organizing Engagement](#)

#### **Individual Accountability**

- [Resources on Systems of Privilege and Oppression](#)
- [Silence Is Violence and Inaction Gives Traction to White Supremacy](#)
- [Dreaming Accountability: Dreaming a returning to ourselves and each other](#)

#### **Collective/Organizational Accountability**

- [Rethinking Accountability in the Age of Abolition](#)
- [Reactive vs. Proactive Accountability](#)