





Through the following case studies, we explore how five governments define the meaning of **diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)**, and the unique ways they are pursuing equity goals in their decision-making.

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**G**FOA advocates for public finance officers to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) considerations into financing and public administration decisions. The meaning of DEI proves evasive, though, creating additional complexity.

The definitions of diversity and equity vary, so governmental tactics to address it should also vary. With this challenge in mind, we compiled five case studies from different areas to understand ways in which finance officers have pursued equity goals. Unsurprisingly, we failed to uncover a “one size fits all” solution—discovering, rather, that every local government developed a strategy that fit their needs.

Some cities institutionalized equity goals into formal processes: the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, added a requirement for each department to file an equity memo with its budget; and the City of Madison, Wisconsin, identified equity teams within each department to further the goals of a central equity framework. Other municipalities formed task forces to pursue equity

initiatives: Metro Government in Oregon established the agency's first Equity Strategy, consisting of a wide variety of people and organizations from around the region; the City of Durham, North Carolina, started a commission to review city policies; and the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee, established the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the Finance department to lead the city's equity goals by providing leadership, guidance, and oversight of the city's equity, inclusion, and anti-racist framework and promoting equitable procurement, contracting, and entrepreneurship outcomes.

Each government also defined equity differently, aligning with the ways in which the community and region understand the concept. Some governments focus on racial minorities, while others aim for broad and expansive outreach. Returning citizens (former prisoners) and LGBTQ+ communities are included in some equity goals, but not all.

The following case studies aim to demonstrate the range of possibilities and provoke ways for finance officers to think creatively about how equity goals can be furthered in their own governments.



## Metro Government, Oregon

**Population:** 1,847,040

**Approach to equity:** Strategic plan to advance racial equity, diversity, and inclusion

In June 2016, the Metro Council adopted the agency's first equity strategy. The strategic plan was developed as a collaborative activity, with support from a wide variety of people and organizations from around the region. The plan is supported by Oregon Metro's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Department, along with the agency's Committee on Racial Equity.

### BACKGROUND

#### How is equity defined in your organization?

Race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.

#### When was the program established, and what is the timeframe?

Oregon Metro formally created its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) program 2012. The strategic plan was adopted by the Metro Council in 2016. In 2022, Oregon Metro transitioned the DEI program into a full department.

#### How did the approach come together?

The program grew out of initial diversity efforts that were primarily focused on internal staff recruitment and

training. There was a recognition that incorporating equity into policymaking was a critical step in improving outcomes for everyone in the region. Oregon Metro's plan uses a targeted universalism approach, in that the strategy is to address the barriers experienced by people of color, and that will effectively identify solutions and remove barriers for other disadvantaged groups.

### REFLECTIONS

#### How has this approach been successful?

There have been a number of significant successes. First, all of Oregon Metro's external-facing departments have action plans for implementing the goals and strategies. As part of those action plans, most departments have hired internal equity staff to drive successful implementation. Second, Oregon Metro has used the strategic plan to incorporate racial equity principles into a \$475 million bond measure supporting parks and nature investments, the region's solid waste management plan, and a new program to eliminate chronic homelessness, funded by new personal and business income taxes. Finally, we have implemented a new budget equity tool that uses departmental equity

outcomes and metrics to assess the agency budget.

#### What about the challenges?

Performance measurement continues to be a challenge. Many of the goals and outcomes in the strategic plan are long-term and/or involve the work of multiple governments and nonprofits. Determining the effectiveness of Oregon Metro's individual actions has been difficult.

#### Why does this approach work for this government, and who else could it work for?

It works because it's highly collaborative and is based on trust built between Oregon Metro, other local government partners, nonprofit partners, and the communities most affected by racial disparities. It is also effective in that accountability is reasonably clear. The strategic plan identifies specific work for Oregon Metro to accomplish, and our Committee on Racial Equity has been empowered to hold the agency accountable and ensure that progress towards those goals continues.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Oregon Metro's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion program ([oregonmetro.gov/regional-leadership/diversity-equity-and-inclusion](https://oregonmetro.gov/regional-leadership/diversity-equity-and-inclusion))





## City of Madison, Wisconsin

**Population:** 269,196

**Approach to equity:** Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI)

**T**his initiative strives to move the city toward the goals of equity in city policies and budgets, city operations, and in the community. The City Department of Civil Rights Division of Racial Equity and Social Justice helps coordinate staff-level efforts, with representation from every city department through a strategy team, core team, and action teams. The city's strategies for realizing its goals include equitable workforce plans, an equitable hiring tool, comprehensive racial equity analysis, and fast-track racial equity analysis.

### BACKGROUND

#### How is equity defined in your organization?

- Living wage jobs, safe neighborhoods, high-quality education, a healthy and sustainable natural environment, efficient public transit, parks and green spaces, affordable and safe housing, and health food are afforded to all.
- The benefits of growth and change are equitably shared across our communities.
- All people have opportunities for fair and just inclusion in public processes and decisions.

- One's future is not limited by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, income, place of birth, place of residence, or other group status.

#### When was the program established, and what is the timeframe?

The Madison Common Council adopted a resolution in 2013 and 2014, establishing the Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI) in response to the "Race to Equity" report [at [madison365.com](http://madison365.com)] that identified significant racial disparities in the city.

#### Why or how did the design of the approach come together?

The initial council resolution focused on developing an equity impact model to better understand and report on inequities in Madison, including an interdepartmental city equity workgroup and training of all city staff on equity and social justice concepts, frameworks, and skills. The goal was to improve city service delivery to underserved populations, to develop strategic partnerships with other agencies and groups, to prioritize public participation and community engagement in decision making and processes, and to prioritize increasing diversity of city government bodies and department staff.

### REFLECTIONS

#### How has this approach been successful?

RESJI has been a grassroots staff effort that has sought to involve a wide range of staff throughout the city and imbue equity in all city decisions. The intensive training effort dramatically increased awareness of implicit racism and development of strategies to increase inclusion in decision making throughout city programs and processes.

#### What about the challenges?

- Using equity, at times, as a political tool to slow down proposals that have already had a comprehensive review.
- Incorporating equity into the everyday work of the city. Should it be an outside review of all decisions or included as part of all processes and procedures?
- Maintaining training programs after the initial effort to train all staff and council members.
- Using existing staff has slowed efforts, at times, because of burnout and other workload demands and priorities.
- Why does this approach work for this government, and who else could it work for?
- Madison's effort is staff-centric and reflects the culture of city government in that way. A staff-led approach has helped to increase overall involvement in the initiative. Other governments should consider this approach to help address equity issues in a comprehensive manner.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- *Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative – Department of Civil Rights*, City of Madison website [[cityofmadison.com](http://cityofmadison.com)]
- *Race to Equity 10-Year Report*: Dane County, Kids Forward, 2023
- *Imagine Madison Comprehensive Plan* [[imaginemadisonwi.com](http://imaginemadisonwi.com)]



## City of Durham, North Carolina

**Population:** 326,126

**Approach to equity:** Racial Equity Commission

**T**he Racial Equity Commission is made up of 17 members nominated by three governing boards: Durham County Commissioners, Durham Public Schools, and Durham City Council. The purpose of the commission is to examine, enhance, recommend, and advocate for policies and legislation to eliminate the burden of systemic and institutional inequities and racism in Durham County.

### BACKGROUND

#### How is equity defined in your organization?

Justice, fair treatment, and opportunity for the advancement of all people across all systems (workforce, housing, education, economics, healthcare, environment, social, and community).

#### When was the program established?

The commission was established in October 2018.

#### Why or how did the design of the approach come together?

It came from a deep commitment to

racial equity which requires significant and long-term reallocation of resources. Centuries of systemic racism and segregationist policies have resulted in an enormous and still-growing racial wealth gap that contributes to the perpetuation of racialized outcomes in education, housing, health, employment, and other quality of life indicators. This reality is not unique to Durham, but it is exacerbated here by rapid economic development and gentrification that further marginalizes, displaces, and impoverishes Durham's communities of color.

### REFLECTIONS

#### How has this approach been successful?

We developed a racial equity checklist for policies that are designed to directly remedy racial inequities and a racial impact tool for overall city policy. Recognizing that all city policies, whether directly designed to remedy racial inequities or not, have powerful racial impacts that need to follow the suggested protocol of the racial impact tool.

#### What about the challenges?

Implementation of recommendations. Many questions stem from the source of revenue for future recommendations. Questions arose around understanding the vocabulary and concepts of systemic racism surrounding the need to focus on areas of education, conversation, and reconciliation.

#### Why does this approach work for this government and who else could it work for?

We are envisioning a bold city and county racial equity development plan that is sustainable, accountable to community oversight, and ambitious enough to effectively address racial inequities in areas of housing, economy, criminal legal, healthcare, education, and public history. This bold plan is being worked out to meet the challenge of the racial wealth gap. Other cities have gestured in this direction, including the City of Sacramento, California; and while we don't always endorse any other plans, they do offer some insight and precedent for what we have and will propose in the future.





## City of Charlotte, North Carolina

**Population:** 979,096

**Approach to equity:** Board-adopted equity framework

**T**he Charlotte City Council adopted an Equity in Governance Framework to guide policy formulation and service delivery.

Beginning with the city's FY 2024 budget development, department directors submitted separate memos with their budget submissions, detailing the department's efforts to advance equity using both existing resources and exploring ways in which requests for additional resources would advance equity, if funded. For requests for additional resources, departments used a budget equity tool that helps develop data-driven strategies and practices to advance equitable outcomes, measure the impact of budget decisions in terms of burdens or benefits for specific communities, minimize unintended consequences of budget decisions, and improve service delivery. The tool guides departments in assessing how budget requests benefit and/or burden communities, specifically communities of color, underrepresented communities, and low-income communities. Every department has

an important role in reducing inequities regardless of whether their core services are primarily public facing or internally focused.

### BACKGROUND

#### How is equity defined in your organization?

Fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have presented the full participation of some groups. To help provide some additional context and to be more explicit about groups in our community for which we are striving to advance equity, we use the phrase "communities of color," "underrepresented communities," and/or "low-income communities." To ensure we are working from the same understanding, those terms are defined below:

- **Communities/persons of color:** a term used to refer to people who do not identify as white.
- **Underrepresented communities:** groups of people who comprise a smaller portion of a subgroup than the group holds in the general population.

Groups may be defined by various characteristics including gender, ability, and/or race.

- **Low-income communities:** neighborhoods where the average household income is 60 percent or less of the area median income.

#### City of Charlotte DEI Statement:

The City of Charlotte is committed to creating an inclusive culture where our employees can show up and belong as their fully authentic selves. Diversity is our strength, as an organization and a community, and this strength is amplified through our pursuit of justice and equity.

To serve our community with integrity, we must address racial and other identity-based inequities, historical exclusion, and upward mobility. To that end, we will:

- Be honest and accountable about how the city has contributed to inequity.
- Use data and innovative approaches to engage stakeholders to assess where we currently stand in relation to equity.
- Create a short, intermediate, and long-term equity action plan to remove barriers to inclusion.
- Review existing and proposed City of Charlotte budget and organizational policies and procedures through an equity lens.
- Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training that aligns with the city's commitment to inclusion for all of Team Charlotte.
- Adequately resource the work of pursuing equitable policies in our government.

#### When was the program established, and what is the timeframe?

The council adopted the framework on 10/24/2022. The *Assessment of City of Charlotte's Efforts on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion report* was published in December 2018. The Office of Equity, Mobility, and Immigrant Integration was created August 2019. The council began work on the framework in February 2022.



## Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee

**Population:** 715,884

**Approach to equity:** Within Metropolitan Government, several entities work to incorporate an equity lens and public engagement into economic development and capital planning. This approach reflects the history of equity work in our organization, with different entities overseeing specific programs and project areas related to economic development and capital planning.

**M**etropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County has pursued multiple strategies to incorporate an equity lens into economic development initiatives and capital planning. To achieve these goals, Metro Government has focused on fostering diversity among its workforce and boards and commissions members, creating inclusive procurement policies and increasing the use of minority-owned businesses and economically disadvantaged individuals, developing an equity lens for financial policies and the capital and operating budgets, and, finally, by creating targeted programs that distribute resources to historically marginalized groups.

### BACKGROUND

#### How is equity defined in your organization?

While Metro Government has not established a single unified definition of equity, the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion uses this definition: equity refers to fair practices and policies that ensure everyone has access to the same opportunities. Equity means acknowledging and addressing past

and present structural inequalities that advantage some and disadvantage others. This definition closely mirrors other definitions used throughout Metro Government.

#### What is the timeframe for the program?

In 2016, the position of chief diversity officer was created within the mayor's office. The goal of this position was to increase minority representation with government; provide Metro Government employees with technical and cultural competencies to operate within a diverse organizational framework; improve the city's procurement practices and minority business participation; and make recommendations to improve diversity on city boards and commissions.

Later, Metro Government established the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the Finance department to lead the city's equity goals by providing leadership, guidance, and oversight of the equity, inclusion, and anti-racist framework, and by promoting equitable procurement, contracting, and entrepreneurship outcomes. Underlying these efforts are a recognition of historic harms and the need to take action against harmful policies and practices.

#### How did the design of the approach come together?

In 2020, the Metropolitan Government Council and Minority Caucus of Nashville advocated for a new chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer position, stating that "this position is essential to the work of our city, and these are tangible steps that can be taken to ensure you are listening to and addressing the needs of the Black Community." In 2021, the position was created within the Finance department to address known and unknown disparities within Metro Government and the city.

Metro Government established its Metropolitan Human Relations Commission in 1965. The commission works in many areas. Since 2015, the commission has published the IncluCivics report, which analyzes the demographic makeup and income data of Metro Government departments. The commission has the authority to nominate one member of the Metropolitan Government Procurement Standards Board.

### REFLECTIONS

#### What have been the successes of this approach?

Since its creation, the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has developed and implemented an equity lens for both the operating and capital budgets for Metro

Government, and it has worked with Finance leadership to incorporate language in recent fund balance legislation that would prioritize allocation of funds in an equitable manner.

Through Finance's Procurement division, Metro Government works to increase the use of minority-owned and women-owned businesses as well as small businesses. Within Procurement, the Office of Minority and Women Business Assistance oversees the Equal Business Opportunity Program and sets percentage targets for minority-owned and/or woman-owned subcontractor participation. Prime contractors are required to meet these targets or otherwise demonstrate a good faith effort. The office also offers a mentor-protégé program to increase the capacity of existing subcontractors by providing an experienced mentor from the private sector and support from Metro Government.

Other departments across Metro Government also have implemented equity-based initiatives that impact economic development within the county. A selection of recent efforts is listed below.

- In 2016, Metro Government adopted the Nashville Next plan, a tool to guide the physical development of the entire county. One of the guiding principles of this plan was to “ensure opportunity for all,” which stresses the importance of equitable access to opportunities to advance an individual's well-being and the need to integrate equity into decisions, policies, practices, and methods of community engagement. All projects submitted for the capital improvements budget are scored on how well the project fulfills this guiding principle.
- Metropolitan Government Information Technology Services leads the Metropolitan Government Digital Inclusion efforts to ensure that residents can access, afford, and use technology, and achieve all the benefits technology offers. This work includes the digital navigator programs, which train nonprofit staff to help residents gain digital literacy, community asset mapping, and other programs. In 2020, Metro Government hired its first digital inclusion officer to ensure that all

residents have equitable access to the benefits of technology.

- In Fall 2021, Metro Government's Public Health Department established the Bureau of Health Equity to oversee the department's equity work. Public Health defines health equity as an environment where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Achieving healthy equity requires the dismantling of obstacles to health such as discrimination and poverty, along with the consequences of those obstacles, including lack of access to good jobs, quality education, housing, safe environments, and healthcare.
- The Metropolitan Action Commission's *Making a Change 4 Jobs* workforce development initiative helps adults in adult education programs as well as youth opportunities to increase their earning potential through workforce development programs including an entry-level information Technology Credential, and CompTIA A+ Certification for adults interested in a career in IT.
- The Metropolitan Government Council elected to use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for several projects. They included the Nashville Small Business Relief Fund, created to help disadvantaged businesses in North Nashville/Bordeaux and other under-invested areas. Metro Government also used ARPA funds to bolster its efforts at increasing affordable housing within the county, with 20 percent of the total funding going to smaller nonprofits. The COVID 19 Financial Oversight Committee launched an online community survey in January 2022 to gauge resident priorities; 2,116 residents responded.
- The Metropolitan Government Development and Housing Agency oversees the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) ([nashville-mdha.org/tax-increment-financing/](http://nashville-mdha.org/tax-increment-financing/)) to combat disinvestment and blight through land use controls, design controls, and financial inducements through tax increment financing. The Tax Increment Financing Study and Formulating Committee was formed in 2023 to study how Metro Government

uses tax increment financing and formulated recommendations for its implementation in a more transparent, equitable, effective, and understandable manner.

### What about challenges?

The recent Supreme Court decision in the cases *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina* implications has created some concern about Metro Government's ability to enact policies that would specifically and explicitly address equity issues and racial and economic wealth gaps.

### Why does this approach work for this government and who else could it work for?

Addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion within and beyond government requires focus, dedicated effort, and time. Although each governmental system is at a different point on its journey to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, overall goals should include a leadership and governance team composed of individuals who reflect the culture and diverse background of the organization's leadership. Better decisions and more inclusive policies are the product of a greater understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of policies and the circumstances in which they function. By promoting diversity in government, such policies can filter through an entire organization. Furthermore, by taking critical steps to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion of governance best practices, finance departments can accelerate advancements in eliminating disparities, resulting in better outcomes for employees and communities. ■

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