

**CREATING COMMUNITY TRUST:**  
A SMART PRACTICES AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK GUIDE FOR  
OAKLAND'S DEPARTMENT OF RACE & EQUITY



Photo by Bryvan Wiley

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## **DISCLAIMER**

This study has been prepared for The Walter & Elise Haas Fund. The student author conducted this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Public Policy at Mills College. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Mills College Public Policy Program, the sponsoring Client organization, or any other organization or agency.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### INTRODUCTION

On June 30, 2015, Oakland's City Council voted to establish a Department of Race and Equity (DR&E) in an effort to respond to Oakland's Black Lives Matter protests and make improvements along the lines of social equity and racial justice that could be lasting and comprehensive.

Although Oakland has been called the most ethnically diverse City in America, systemic and structural forces have routinely advantaged whites, unequally distributed resources and marginalized communities based on race.

This is a problem because (1) color blind or race neutral policies threatens the lives of Oakland's most vulnerable populations, (2) government has spent millions of taxpayer dollars trying to solve these problems, and (3) racist policies, and practices harm everyone: it is impossible to be a true equitable and democratic society while so many people struggle against these daily injustices (Hyatt, 2014). The DR&E must work to build trust in the face of this history in order to succeed. This theme suffuses the analysis and recommendations of this Report.

My client, The Walter & Elise Haas Fund (the Fund), is a highly respected family foundation, with a long history in supporting critical issues facing the Bay Area. The Fund believes in collaborating with partners whose work provides access and opportunity in order to build a more equitable community. The Fund has often partnered across sectors, working with both community and local government to create a more just society. Though different in purpose, The Fund and the fledgling DR&E state similar values and missions: both institutions desire healthy, just and equitable societies in which people have equal access to the tools and opportunities that enable them to fully participate in community life.

At this beginning stage of the DR&E, and given the increased focus on issues of equity within philanthropy locally and nationally, the Fund is interested in supporting an examination of the role the DR&E is expected to play in solving Oakland's racial disparities. The Fund also desires to learn about various stakeholder concerns and expectations for the Department, and identify key lessons from other municipalities that have established similar departments or agencies.

#### **KEY FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK**

Interviews were conducted with key selected participants in person and over the phone. The following four individuals were interviewed: Junious Williams<sup>1</sup>, retiring CEO of California based Urban Strategies Council; Jose Corona, the City of Oakland's Director of Equity and Strategic Partnerships & Senior Advisor to the Mayor; Tomiquia Moss, Special Assistant to the Mayor, City of Oakland; and Steve Spiker, Director of Research and Technology, also of the Urban Strategies Council. All interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes and insights.

#### ***Expectations:***

1. The DR&E provides an opportunity to build some credibility in terms of employment, procurement and services and hopefully, raise the visibility of these issues.
2. The City is hopeful that the DR&E will serve as a resource to the City staff, the community and elected officials and provides them with the resources and tools to evaluate equity in their work and practices. Most importantly, City staff is expecting the DR&E to manage the community's expectations of the Department.

#### ***Concerns:***

1. The DR&E possesses insufficient resources and staffing to accomplish its goals.
2. The DR&E lacks the necessary authority to implement a clear remediation activity or plan should it stumble in its early stages.
3. The City requires a robust data system and better analytical capacity to guide its decisions, including the DR&E's work. To enable the DR&E to evaluate whether or

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed by Junious Williams represent his views as a citizen of Oakland, rather than those of the Urban Strategies Council.

not government is delivering services equitably, it will depend on reliable and integrated data gathering, management, aggregation, and reporting.

4. The DR&E Ordinance lacks a specific mechanism for the community to weigh in and engage on its work. A focused community engagement strategy is essential to allow the DR&E to identify any pattern of disparate outcomes or treatment and allows those who are traditionally deprived of power, the ability to influence the social, political and economic issues that affect them.

***Suggestions:***

1. Create clear lines of authority supporting rapid response to address early-stage challenges.
2. Create a commission or an advisory committee that can convene community engagement and dialogue.
3. Improve the City's Open Data Portal capacity to serve as a primary resource for the DR&E to engage the community.
4. Create a mechanism to channel complaints of inequitable outcomes or opportunities, and engage citizens and groups openly to listen for the essence of how they envision shaping the community.
5. Consider use of SMS Polling as a simple, fast and effective for government and mobile users to connect.

**KEY FINDINGS: SMART PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM PEER DEPARTMENTS**

Smart practices and policy innovations were identified for creating community trust from a small sample of cities that have implemented departments and initiatives similar to the DR&E. Data on smart practices were collected through phone interviews from leaders and directors of race and equity initiatives and government departments across the U.S.<sup>2</sup> These practices serve as a guide for the DR&E on how to build trust by engaging effectively and directly with community.

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<sup>2</sup> The following six public agencies were included in the study: Multnomah County, Oregon; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; Madison, Wisconsin; Dubuque, Iowa; and Fairfax, Virginia.

***Lessons learned:***

1. Focus on building internal capacity and race trainings to create a solid foundation for community engagement practices.
2. Collect and measure data in the first years of the program to determine impact: both internally and in the community.
3. Managing community expectations: unfulfilled community expectations can serve as the touchstone for public dissatisfaction with projects that exacerbate community tensions.
4. Government staff must know before they engage in the community what they are willing to do. Broken promises (even suggestions) create more harm than good.
5. Most importantly, the relative success of these departments proceeds from a vibrant climate of community trust and engagement.

***Smart Practices for Community Engagement:***

I searched, in particular, for smart practices with the following attributes: Appropriate for the Oakland community; honored community knowledge; holistically inclusive; and sustainable and unique. The following alternatives were considered:

1. *Neighborhood Resource Teams, Madison, Wisconsin*
2. *Equity Advisory Committee, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota*
3. *St. Paul's Pop Up Truck, St. Paul Minnesota*
4. *SMS Polling (a confirmed viable alternative from a stakeholder).*

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

I recommend the DR&E adopt a phased implementation of the alternatives I have analyzed and developed: An Equity Advisory Committee should be implemented in year one. The development and implementation of Pop Up Meeting Truck Project should take place in year two along with initial discussions about the Neighborhood Resource Team that could be implemented in year 3 or 4. Last, I recommend the implementation of the SMS polling to alternative to disseminate and receive information quickly to a wider base of Oakland's population, specifically the underserved.

The table below indicates each community input option scored on a scale of 0 to 3. Each criterion was weighted equally.

<b>CRITERION</b>	<b>Equity Advisory Committee</b>	<b>Pop Up Meeting Truck</b>	<b>Neighborhood Resource Team</b>	<b>SMS Polls</b>	<b>Phased Implementation</b>
<b>Admin Feasibility</b>	2.5	2.75	2	3	2.75
<b>Economic Feasibility</b>	2.5	2	2	2	2.75
<b>Political Feasibility</b>	3	2	2	2	3
<b>Technical Feasibility</b>	3	3	3	2	3
<b>Total Weight</b>	2.75	2.44	2.25	2.25	<b>2.86</b>
<b>Timing of Implementation</b>	Years 1-2	Years 2-3	Years 3-4	Years 3-5	Years 1-5

Scoring rubric: 0 – does not satisfy, 1 – somewhat satisfies, 2 – substantially satisfies, 3 – fully satisfies

Finally, next steps for success based on stakeholder feedback and smart practices, were recommended and integrated into a timeline.

With the assistance of other City leaders, and Oakland’s community, the DR&E will be well positioned to demonstrate the possibility of government being effective, inclusive and advancing racial equity. Oakland can establish a solid foundation to further expand its role to advance racial equity, by building off the work already done in other successful departments and initiatives across the Country, and adding community indicators and measurement specific to the DR&E goals. By normalizing racial equity, working both internally, and in partnership with other institutions and the community, Oakland has the opportunity to transform government so that it genuinely is “of the people, by the people and for the people.”