

Racial Equity and Community Engagement Requirements and Strategies for Homekey: Technical Assistance

This document offers guidance to the Racial Equity and Community Engagement Requirements of the Homekey NOFA.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates existing community needs and inequalities. In many communities, people of color already disproportionately experience homelessness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is also reporting disproportionate impacts by race and ethnicity for COVID-19 hospitalization and death, specifically Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic/Latinx persons.¹

Given that persons experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of infection and death due to novel coronaviruses, Homekey's target population means individuals and families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Homekey incorporates equity considerations into the project scoring criteria in sections 3a and 3b to address the disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities within Homekey's target population. **In particular, this document has been prepared to provide guidance to project applicants and awardees on approaches to incorporating equity strategies with the target population in mind.**

Applicants who have additional questions may contact California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) staff at Homekey@hcd.ca.gov.

[California's commitment to health equity - Coronavirus COVID-19 Response](#)

¹ As of June 12, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported age-adjusted COVID-19 hospitalization rates are highest among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native (5 times white persons) and non-Hispanic Black persons (5 times white persons), followed by Hispanic or Latino persons (4 times white persons).

High-Level Summary

Homekey NOFA Section 300: Threshold Requirements, v. Racial Demographic Workbook

Relevant Threshold Requirements:

- Applications must include a completed Racial Demographic Data/ Outcomes Worksheet, which reports Continuum of Care outcomes by race and ethnicity. The completed worksheet will be submitted by the Applicant and the template can be found on the Homekey [webpage](#).

Homekey NOFA Section 304: Application Scoring Criteria 3a, Racial Disparities Analysis

Scored criteria (up to 10 points):

- Using the Racial Demographic Data/ Outcomes Worksheet (in application), provide the Continuum of Care Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity and the following analysis. NOTE: Section 300 of this NOFA further outlines this threshold requirement.

Using the data from the worksheet, provide a narrative analysis of the racial and ethnic disparities in CoC outcomes. What are some of the factors leading to these racial inequities? For service providers with prior experience, provide an analysis of prior program outcomes.

Detail how the Applicant will address racial and ethnic disparities in program outcomes at each stage of the project design and development.

Homekey NOFA Section 304: Evaluation Criteria 3b, Community Engagement

Scored criteria (up to 10 points):

- Detail how the Applicant has engaged or will engage with the target community to inform the design of the project. This includes engaging with people currently experiencing homelessness and people with who have experienced homelessness

Provide documentation of this engagement, including but not limited to meeting notes, community planning documents, MOU of partnership with community organization, etc.

Technical assistance related to the threshold and scoring criteria described above:

Homekey NOFA Section 300: Threshold Requirements, v. Racial Demographic Data/Outcomes Workbook

Relevant Threshold Requirements:

- Applications must include a completed Racial Demographic Data/Outcomes Worksheet, which reports CoC outcomes by race and ethnicity. The completed worksheet may be submitted by the Applicant. The template can be found on the Homekey [webpage](#).

Complete the Racial Demographics Data/ Outcomes Workbook (Required)

- Using Stella data, please complete the attached workbook. Data should refer to the CoC within which the proposed project will operate. HCD can provide technical assistance to assist applicants in connecting with their local CoC.

Steps to complete the Racial Demographics Data/Outcomes Workbook:

1. Column B: Using Stella data for 10/1/2020 – 9/31/2021, provide the total number of people within each racial/ethnic category that experienced homelessness.
2. Column C will automatically calculate the percentage of the total population that each racial category comprises.
3. Column D: Using Stella data, provide the total number of people within each racial/ethnic category that accessed Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing.
4. Column E will auto-calculate the percentage of the total population Accessing Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing that each racial category comprises.
5. Column F will auto-calculate the ratio of people experiencing homelessness accessing Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing observed within each racial category.
6. Column G will auto-calculate the percentage of the total unhoused population within each racial and ethnic category that did NOT access emergency shelter and transitional housing.
7. Column P: Using Stella data, provide the total number of people within each racial and ethnic category that Returned to Homelessness.
8. Column Q will auto-calculate the percentage of the total population that returned to homelessness that each racial category comprises.

Homekey NOFA Section 304: Evaluation Criteria 3a, Racial Disparities Analysis

Scored criteria:

- Using the Racial Demographic Data/ Outcomes Worksheet (in application), provide the Continuum of Care Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity and the following analysis. NOTE: Section 300 of this NOFA further outlines this threshold requirement.
 - Using the data from the worksheet, provide a narrative analysis of the racial and ethnic disparities in systems outcomes. What are the root causes or factors leading to these racial inequities? For service providers with prior experience, provide an analysis of prior program outcomes.
- Detail how the Applicant will address racial and ethnic disparities in program outcomes at each stage of the project design and development.

Recommended Approach to Explore and Document Homelessness Systems Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity

When attempting to meet this criterion, applicants should complete the following steps:

1. Identify the areas in which BIPOC populations have had a different level of success than white people within the homelessness response system.
2. Identify which element(s) of their homelessness response system (language barriers, tenant screening, etc.) is/are associated with observed disparate outcomes. These may include specific policies, processes, or environmental factors of many levels of the homelessness response system.
3. Create a detailed plan to address the barriers that are leading to racially disparate outcomes.

NOTE: The following are guiding questions and examples of potential barriers to housing equity. The applicant is not expected to address ALL of the potential barriers listed below.

1. Analyze the Racial Disparities in Systems Outcomes

Use the completed worksheet to identify the racial disparities in systems outcomes in narrative form. The following questions may help to frame this analysis.

1. Is the flow of people into the homelessness racially disproportionate? Is the number of people experiencing homelessness greater than their representation within the general CoC population?
2. Is the number of people accessing emergency shelters racially disproportionate? Does this differ from the racial disproportionality of the total unhoused population?

3. Does HMIS data show that access to homeless system programs, such as Coordinated Entry, is roughly proportionate to the racial breakdown of homeless Point in Time (PIT) count or does it vary by race?
4. Does the length of time that people experience homelessness for vary by race or ethnicity?
5. Does the rate at which homeless people achieve permanent housing and positive housing outcomes from the homeless response system vary by race?
6. Does the rate of return to homelessness vary by race?
7. Are there other data sources that provide information on disparate outcomes in your jurisdiction?

2. Identifying barriers to Housing Equity

Provide a brief narrative assessment of the elements of your CoC and homelessness response system where racially disparate outcomes are observed. The following provide examples of elements that commonly produce inequities. It will be important for applicants to recognize their own potential blind-spots in this analysis and to consult with frontline workers, service providers, and people accessing services., It may be helpful to consider the following components of your CoC's homeless response system, including:

Policies: How do the written statements of organizational position, decisions, or courses of actions potentially burden or disadvantage non-white populations? Examples of policies are: ordinances, resolutions, mandates, guidelines, or rules.

Processes: How do the procedures of the organization, institution, or network potentially burden or disadvantage non-white populations? Examples of processes include: personnel/hiring processes, resource allocation decisions, programs, or in building organizational culture.

Environment: How do the physical, social, or economic surroundings or contexts burden or disadvantage people of color? Examples of environmental factors are: the physical location of services, cultural norms within an organization, the race and cultural background of service providers and decision makers.

Elements of the Homeless Response System that might be evaluated for barriers include, but are not limited to:

- Outreach: Outreach workers connect people at risk of or experiencing homelessness to coordinated entry, emergency services, and shelter.
 - *Have BIPOC been consulted on where outreach should take place? Are the staff that preform outreach racially, experientially, and culturally reflective of the people they are serving? Are they trained in cultural humility and cultural responsiveness? Does the organization prioritize these characteristics?*

- Coordinated Entry: Coordinated Entry is a standardized community-wide process to outreach to, identify, and triage homeless households. This process consists of utilizing common assessment tools to enter the household information into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), providing appropriate referrals, and prioritizing access to housing interventions and services to end their homelessness.
 - *Do people need transportation in order to make contact with Coordinated Entry? Are the staff conducting assessments racially, ethnically, or experientially reflective of people experiencing homelessness in the community? Are documentation requirements more challenging for BIPOC? Are extra efforts being made maintain contact with BIPOC until housing is secured? Are staff trained to understand the disproportionate denial of disability certification for BIPOC?*

- Emergency Shelter: A facility operated to provide temporary shelter for people who are homeless. Effective emergency shelters do not have barriers to entry (such as a sobriety requirement) and should be primarily housing-focused rather than focused on providing services.
 - *Does the shelter have policies, systems or environmental factors that result in BIPOC being disproportionately turned away? Once in the shelter, do policies, systems, or environmental factors result in BIPOC disproportionately going to negative exits or being involuntarily exited?*

- Rapid Re-Housing: A housing intervention designed to move a household into permanent housing (e.g., a rental unit) as quickly as possible, ideally within 30 days of identification. Rapid Re-Housing typically provides (1) help identifying appropriate housing; (2) financial assistance (deposits and short-term or medium-term rental assistance for 1-24 months), and (3) support services as long as needed and desired.
 - *Are individuals being connected to culturally specific local community resources and supports? Is the organization screening potential tenants for characteristics that disadvantage BIPOC (criminal background, credit history, etc.)? Does the location of the housing unit disproportionately disadvantage BIPOC? Do policies or systems of the housing provider result in BIPOC exiting housing at a higher rate than white people?*

- Permanent Supportive Housing: Safe and affordable housing for people with disabling conditions, with legal tenancy housing rights and access to flexible support services. PSH should prioritize people who are chronically homeless with the longest terms of homelessness and the highest level of vulnerability/acuity in terms of health and services needs.
 - *Are individuals being connected to culturally specific local community resources and supports? Is the organization or property manager screening potential tenants for characteristics that disadvantage BIPOC (criminal background, credit history, etc.)? Does the location of the*

housing unit disproportionately disadvantage BIPOC? Do policies or systems of the housing provider result in BIPOC exiting housing at a higher rate than white people? Are staff racially and culturally reflective of the people experiencing homelessness? Are staff trained in the historical and structural barriers for BIPOC getting into and maintaining housing?

Create Action Plan to Address Barriers to Housing Equity

Using the barriers identified in the previous analysis, create a plan to address each of the relevant obstacles to housing equity. This plan should address all of the barriers that could be reinforced by the Homekey project and acknowledge those that are beyond the program scope. Each element of the plan should include details of what steps will be taken, by whom, and in what timeline.

NOTE: The following are examples of how the applicant might address barriers to housing equity. Please consider only those that are relevant to your CoC and identified inequities.

Organizational Barriers

- Expand opportunities for people of different races/ethnicities who have lived experience of homelessness to provide expert advice and opinions on policy, procedures, and services delivery. Pay them as experts.
- Identify a staff person or create a team that will be charged with either leading or ensuring that the racial equity work is undertaken
- Annually train all staff on race equity and inclusion.

System Entry

- Convene focus groups of people experiencing homelessness to provide firsthand accounts of the challenges to accessing the homelessness response system. Compensate people for their time.
- Convene representatives of feeder systems (child welfare, criminal justice, mental health, health, etc.) and identify opportunities for data-sharing and data warehousing. Begin dialogue with these partners on policy changes that could reduce exits into homelessness among racial and ethnic groups disproportionately represented in their systems.

Crisis Accommodation and Temporary Shelter

- Convene a group of staff members, program residents, and community stakeholders to review policy and procedure for any barriers that might cause a specific racial group to avoid or be barred from crisis housing (e.g., culturally biased dress codes, racial balance of program staff, rules on previous behavior or residence, etc.

- Review data on who was banned or terminated from crisis housing to check for disparities in who is asked to leave and for how long.
- As a part of your exit process, provide anonymous ways for people to give feedback on racial and cultural treatment.
- Engage with other minority-serving organizations to exchange ideas about outreach and assessment processes that improve equitable outcomes.
- If there are racial or ethnic disparities in permanent housing placements, consider the program design of your permanent housing model(s): - Do(es) your model(s) address discrimination that may occur in the market (e.g., landlord engagement)? - Do(es) your model(s) take into account culturally responsive, community-based supports the client/tenant might need? - Is your model(s) supportive of the person's employment or employment prospects?
- Continuously examine the coordinated entry processes, including vulnerability assessments and housing matching tools to determine any potential disparate impact by race/ethnicity.
- Get technical assistance to re-design your coordinated entry process (which includes access, assessment, prioritization, and referral) if found to have disparate outcomes.

Returns to Homelessness

- Review and eliminate (where possible) policies that ban services for returning clients.
- Assess patterns of disparate placement in communities of higher/lower poverty, opportunity, transportation, jobs, schools, churches, family support, health care, etc. to see if the race of the consumer is a factor.
- Examine whether housing case management is engaging landlords who do not discriminate.
- Partner with community-based systems that can support clients with jobs, health care, social support, etc. in a culturally responsive manner.
- Analyze and replicate programs that place and maintain people in housing while achieving equitable outcomes

Additional Resources

Guidance on addressing racial inequities within a Homelessness Response System: [The Alliance's Racial Equity Network Action Steps - National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

Guidance on addressing racial inequities in the Coordinated Access System: [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Advancing Racial Equity through Assessments and Prioritization \(hudexchange.info\)](#)

Guidance on analyzing data to detect inequities within a Homelessness Response System: [Homeless System Response: Data & Equity: Using the Data You Have \(hudexchange.info\)](http://hudexchange.info)

Homekey NOFA Section 304: Evaluation Criteria 3b, Community Engagement

Scored criteria (up to 10 points):

- Detail how the Applicant has engaged or will engage with the target community, including people currently experiencing homelessness and people with lived experience of homelessness, to inform the design of the project.

Provide documentation of this engagement, including but not limited to meeting notes, community planning documents, MOU of partnership with community organization, etc.

Recommended Approach to Develop a Community Engagement Strategy

When attempting to meet this scoring criteria, applicants should provide a brief narrative description of the actions that they have taken or will take to meaningfully engage with the impacted community. Meaningful community engagement will honor the wisdom and experience of people with lived experience of homelessness, frontline workers, and community-based organizations.

The applicant's community engagement strategy may include any of the following:

Proactive Engagement:

- Engage with existing networks of community-based organizations that serve and organize in diverse cultural communities. Ensure that these communities are compensated for their work.
- Ensure that events reach the community where they are, rather than requiring participants to travel in order to participate.
- Seek out relationships with leaders from non-English speaking communities and work with them to identify barriers to engagement.
- Engage faith-based organizations in the community to help include hard-to-reach residents
- Avoid working with citizens' groups that aren't reflective of the community the program is designed for.
- Include incentives for engagement for each strategy that reduce barriers to participate. Support working families with busy schedules and childcare restraints by holding meetings in evenings and on weekends; and when possible provide childcare and transit passes.
- Leverage other funds to support engagement through partnerships with foundations and other public agencies.

Building in decision making opportunities for community partners

- Structure engagements to include substantive representation of people of color and people with lived experience of homelessness in decision-making capacities (stakeholder meetings, committees, consortia leadership)
- Establish a social-equity caucus or working group with decision making authority and oversight over key areas of the project.
- Set aside resources to be shaped and decided on by community members. This could include grants for community engagement, hiring of consultants, participatory budgeting, etc.
- Articulate expectations for equity inclusion and partnership with other stakeholders.
- Create a community liaison or community organizer position, ideally filled by a member of the community, who will play the “bridging” role to help develop consistent relationships in the community.

Strategies for iterative and reflective processes

- Work with community members and equity organizations to identify benchmarks for success on both community engagement and program outcomes. Develop concrete and measurable benchmarks and identify accountable parties.
- Establish regular check-ins to gauge progress with stakeholder, partners, and residents, gain feedback on the process, and gain new ideas for cultivating connections and maintaining relevance to community concerns.

Additional Resources

Additional guidance in planning for community engagement: [Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities | PolicyLink](#)