SACOG RACIAL EQUITY AUDIT
"The principles of racial equity, inclusion, and diversity are foundational to achieving our vision of a cleaner, safer, more accessible, and more connected transportation future for California."

David Kim, Secretary of the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA)
While many people have just begun their journeys to unlearn racism and walk in allyship, quick-build equity won’t pull us from the grips of structural racism that got us here. In April, when cities offered miles of road closures as a policy response to the pandemic, many Black planners — women in particular — spoke up about the dangers of excluding entire communities from public processes, and interrogated the open streets narrative for exploiting Black, Brown and Indigenous death to justify entitlement to recreation. But we were written off as the champions of “the enemy of progress” — that is, equity.

Destiny Thomas, Transportation Planner
"Making transit equitable requires us to question how we make decisions. It means being willing to call out decision-makers — when we see elected officials and other agencies asking for racist policy, we should not simply defer to their requests. It means being willing to call out partners — the city that does not want to provide street space for a decent bus stop is part of the problem."

Christof Speiler, Rice|Kinder Institute for Urban Research
“I’m calling on all of us to embrace the spirit of humility and curiosity to learn more about the history of anti-Black racism and urbanism. I’m calling on all of us to not only speak out against anti-Black racism and all forms of urban inequities but also to have the courage to address these issues.

Jay Pitter, Placemaker
In a press conference on May 26, 2020, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey in a speech about George Floyd’s killing said, “To the Black community, to the family: I’m so sorry. Being Black in America should not be a death sentence.” And yet, in our nation, extensive data and research over centuries shows us that we live in a society that offers Black, Latinx, Indigenous people, and other People of Color reduced access to quality education, increased experiences with healthcare discrimination and dehumanization bias, and higher likelihoods of both contracting and dying from COVID-19.

We live in a society that is founded on race-based caste and racial discrimination. The impacts of this discrimination are ubiquitous and can be found in the ways that organizations and companies confront racism within their structures, policies, organizational behaviors, training, and legislation. No one reading this report is responsible for having created these systems of racialized inequity. And yet, those who hold the most power in societies around the globe, have the power to perpetuate them; to keep them alive. They also hold the most power to disrupt these inequitable structures and systems and replace them with systems, policies and structures that bring about an equitable distribution of power, wealth, opportunity, air quality, and housing. In our nation, data and research have extensively documented the racial disparities experienced among Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other People of Color.

According to the 2019 analysis from the Union of Concerned Scientists, people of color in the American north-east and mid-Atlantics are living with 66% more air pollution from vehicles than white residents are. In addition, a recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released findings that show that Communities of Color carry 2 times and in some cases even 5 times the risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19. Across the country, environmental agencies and government entities are responding to the calls to face and eliminate racial disparities by using qualitative and quantitative assessment tools to address racism and racial inequities embedded in their work.
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ABOUT MMG

The McKensie Mack Group is a Black-led, non-binary led consultancy that centers the principles of racial justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, transformative accountability, and gender equity in all that we do.

All over the nation, metropolitan planning organizations and regional transportation planning agencies are:

- making actionable commitments to racial equity in alignment with their stated values
- Refusing to settle for "diversity"
- Seeking long term transformation that re-distributes power equitably
- Working in collaboration with community-led organizations to develop approaches to regional planning that are centered in anti-racism
- This work brings about increased opportunities for collaboration across staff, managers, and senior leaders within these organizations

At MMG, we bring a multi-layered, relational approach to our work by:

- Understanding the ways that the experience of inequity is shifted and changed at various intersections of identity.

- We center intersectionality (the concept originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw) as a critical pillar in our consulting and coaching practice.

- Helping clients develop a shared language for anti-racism work that analyzes the ways that the intersections of multiple identities impact the lived experiences of staff, leadership, and historically marginalized communities our clients seek to support. Working with team managers and senior leaders to build their capacity and bandwidth for establishing and implementing equitable and inclusive initiatives in integral, meaningful, and effective ways.

- With more than 10 years of experience in working with teams across industries, we know that organizations often find themselves at one of three stages along the continuum of DEI: Assessment (where are we now?), Development (where do we need to go?), and Implementation (how do we get there and continue to grow?).
Our Racial Equity Audit process involves four key phases: **Research and Discovery, Discussion and Dialogue, Design and Development, and Action and Collaboration.** In our initial proposal, our Discussion and Dialogue phase was intended to entail a board survey. At the request of the agency and in light of local and national elections, we edited our process and will survey the Board at a later date and will present findings on this future assessment.

We reviewed HR policies, internal communications, transportation plans, air quality reports, external communications and messaging, and accountability practices. The goal of our documentation review was to understand the history of SACOG, its culture, the current cultural climate of its industry, and its impact in the Sacramento region.

We interviewed 44 members of the SACOG Board, Staff (meaning all members of Staff and Managers), and Senior Leaders (meaning Directors) from October 2, 2020 to October 26, 2020 to assess how the organizational culture aligns with the organization's commitment to equity and inclusion. Our interview process and experience was narrative-driven. We designed the interviews and led their implementation.

Following the qualitative phase of our research, we developed a quantitative assessment to be taken by all members of SACOG staff.

In total, over 90% of SACOG Staff (including Senior Leaders) participated in the survey. By leading this initial qualitative and quantitative research, we've been able to develop a strategic plan to help the agency address racism, racial justice, and racial inequities. Facilitate staff and board education, and build capacity among staff for ongoing implementation, performance monitoring, and reporting. We have found that you already know what you need and experience specific pain points as it relates to practically applying the knowledge you hold as an organization.

We've developed an education plan to cover your more immediate training needs as requested by the DEI Director. MMG will then create pre and post evaluation tools as well as assessment quantitative and qualitative question sets and design the best method for gathering data across the constituencies both internal and external.
RACISM IN U.S. LAND PLANNING

Racism in land planning is a system of inequality that strategically places white people in comparably safer, cleaner, more open residential spaces, than their Black and Brown counterparts. It is used as a segregation tactic, in order to keep racial demographics split; and to add to the myth that the quality of an area is directly related to the race of the people that live there. This practice often meets at the intersection of class, with Black and Brown people also being poorer in cities where this practice occurs.

Racism in land planning is nationwide, dating back at least a century in some locations; with notable cities being St. Louis, Seattle, Chicago, Hartford, Connecticut; Kansas City, and Washington D.C. Resulting effects have ranged from lower air quality, barriers to home ownership, and environmental disparity in Black and Brown neighborhoods, as a product of the climate crisis. Robert Moses, who designed overpasses on Long Island making them too low to accommodate buses. Purposefully, his design was driven by the desire to block poor members of the community from accessing the beach. “Legislation can be changed. It’s very hard to tear down a bridge once it’s up,” Moses told his biographer Robert Caro about the effectiveness of designing inequity into the public structures of a city.

This is one of many forms that racial land planning has taken over the course of a century. Covenants, for example, having existed since the early 1900s; are “racially restrictive deeds...all over the country to keep people who were not white from buying or even occupying land.” In some cases, land owners could even face loss of property altogether for violating these deeds. Around the 1930’s, the process of redlining was also introduced. This is a color-coded process used to rate a neighborhood’s quality and real estate potential; with many Black neighborhoods being labeled red, making them “unsuitable for housing and federal aid.” This has also created a climate disparity, due to the rise in global, temperatures; which is compounded by Black and Brown neighborhoods having fewer trees and parks, older buildings with less ventilation, and higher amounts of heat absorbing pavement. Redlined areas are also more likely to be placed in “high traffic-high speed” roads, exposing Black people to 61% more pollution from fossil fuels than white people, which can be higher if those neighborhoods are also placed near industrial facilities, which is common.
RACISM IN U.S. LAND PLANNING

In Sacramento, the effects of racial land planning have taken a literal shape on its map. Dr. Jesus Hernandez, an urban sociologist at UC Davis, says that there has been an X drawn across the state capital; a product of decades old policies that sometimes took the form of racial covenants in the 1930s, a mandate for receiving relief funding from the then Federal Home Administration during the Great Depression. According to Dr. Hernandez, the northern and southern line represents the North Highland to the Meadowview area, a string of impoverished communities containing low-income Black and Brown residents. Conversely, the eastern and western line contains a whiter population, and the majority of economic infrastructure and opportunity in the state capital. “You can take any social ill and measure it by that X,” says Hernandez. “Who drops out of high school...who gets the flu...just about anything.”

A significant example of this sort of planning in Sacramento comes in the systematic land theft of the city’s West End, a neighborhood populated by Black and Brown residents who had already been forced out of the downtown area through redlining. By labeling the West End a “blighted neighborhood,” white leaders could use property tax money initially used for schools and county efforts, to finance buying the property out from underneath the residents to build office and retail space. This, along with the creation of Interstate 5 directly on the West End’s edge, would displace the residents into over-policed neighborhoods like Meadowview; the neighborhood where Stephon Clark’s cellphone was mistaken for a weapon, resulting in his murder in his grandmother’s backyard by police. The history of land theft was so significant, that protestors chose to take over I-5 and the outline of the West End, instead of the neighborhood where Stephon Clark was murdered, as a symbol of resistance to what created the environment that led to his death.
As a result of the interviews and the data analysis performed, the following trends have appeared:

- A lack of representation in regards to People of Color, trans people, gender non-conforming people, LGBTQIA+ folks, and people who do not hold advanced degrees with a high rate of employees holding multiple positions of dominant privilege (i.e. white, cis-identified, heterosexual, English as a native language, able-bodied, etc.,)
- A lack of representation of People of Color in positions of leadership.
- SACOG Staff, Senior Leaders, and Board Members reporting a fundamental disconnect between the board, SACOG employees, and external partners.
- A tangible understanding of actions that can improve SACOG, as suggested by interviewees.

Overall, staff is mostly white (65%), heterosexual (90%), able bodied (around 96%), neurotypical (50%), speak English as their native language (82%), and less than 10% of staff identifies as genderqueer or gender non-conforming. Demographically and societally speaking, the population leans towards many intersections of dominant privilege.

Using the results from the Racial Equity and Belonging Survey that was shared with SACOG Staff in October, we looked for patterns relative to gender, race, class, LGBTQIA+ identity, etc. Respondents were given the choice of electing Agree, Strongly Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Here are some examples of the prompts respondents were asked to answer:

- The work we do improves the lives of LGBTQIA+ people.
- My supervisor is equipped to manage across identities.
- Emotional labor is recognized as real labor.
- Promotion decisions are fair at my organization.

The data tells us that the groups that often neither agreed or disagreed with the prompts focused on SACOG's success in meeting the needs of historically marginalized people in the greater Sacramento community were majority white, and in many cases, majority male.

This matters, because the majority of people who are in this gray area are in positions of privilege, meaning that the potential needs of SACOG are, at least, dictated by those who may not identify with those needs. This poses the potential of the needs of marginalized people at SACOG to be ignored or further marginalized.
We analyzed our interviews and found dominant themes specific to diversity, decision-making, and SACOG’s impact in its work. Interviewees emphasized the lack of diversity, with a lack of people of color not holding decision making or higher level roles, that generally the organization is predominantly white, which affects decision making. The following quotes from interviews included in this report are from SACOG Staff (meaning all members of staff and Managers), Senior Leaders (meaning Directors), External Partners, and Board.

"Urgency is felt at different levels--members asking what’s the ‘why’ for equity related work.”

“When I joined, I noticed quickly that this was a very white organization—in all aspects and there was tons of privilege, all kinds and all ways, especially economic.”

“I’d like to see true diversity—like all aspects not just skin color—and especially economic diversity…I want to see diversity without tokenism…stop checking the box.”

Data and interviews have also shown an inequitable power dynamic, particularly in regards to who makes decisions and has influence at SACOG. Interviewees spoke to an all-white, all-male state of upper management.

“No one of color is in decision making or influence roles...Staff reflects who they are comfortable with, and that’s it...”

“No one of decision making or influence is a person of color. Everyone I deal with at SACOG is white.”

This inequity has also been said to have created a disconnect between SACOG and the community, due to “a warped view of marginalized communities.”

“They take data, generalize it, and apply the general findings to all communities—which is a disservice because different communities have different needs.”

Members of SACOG have also indicated that disconnect and conflict with the board play a role, especially in regards to funding decisions, engaging with residents and SACOG members, and a lack of checks and balances to curb the board’s implicit bias. Funding restrictions have made it so that in many cases, only the already affluent can access funding, while marginalized people remain outside the parameters. The lack of diversity on the board is said to have emphatic influence in “what can and cannot be achieved.”
Members of SACOG have mentioned a variety of actions they think the organization can take as a whole to improve the equity of the space. These include, but are not limited to:

- More equitable hiring practices that are rooted in the communities SACOG serves. (ex: addressing the low hiring rate of LGBTQIA+ people, and the hiring of people from outside the community.)
- The creation of a paid advisory board committed to diversifying the projects SACOG takes on.
- Less competitive-based and more need-based funding strategies.
- More transparency in the decision making stages throughout SACOG.
- Adopting the practice and ethics aligned with anti-racism, replacing the philosophy of a post racial mindset on SACOG’s board.

“When we can see outcomes in disadvantaged areas looking similar to outcomes in affluent and adequately funded areas, then we will have achieved equity. We all know that takes a greater investment.”
**OUR FINDINGS**

**SACOG Staff Gender/Racial Demographics**

- White: 64%
- Black or African-American: 2%
- East Asian: 10%
- Hispanic/Latinx: 6%
- South Asian: 2%
- Southeast Asian: 8%
- Not listed: 4%

**Six-County SACOG Region Gender/Racial Demographics**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- White: 51.1%
- Black or African-American: 6.4%
- Asian: 13.4%
- Hispanic or Latinx: 22.6%
- 2 or more races: 4.9%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.8%
- Other: 0.1%

- Female: 56.3%
- Male: 43.7%

The above chart are the gender demographics of cis men and women only. Less than 10% of staff identify as genderqueer or gender non-conforming,
O U R  F I N D I N G S

Promotion decisions are fair at my organization.

Perspectives like mine are included in the decision-making at the organization.
At my organization there is open and honest two-way communication.

- Agree: 46%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 34%
- Disagree: 12%
- Strongly agree: 6%

At my organization, the work we do improves the lives of low-income families.

- Agree: 50%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 32%
- Disagree: 14%
- Strongly agree: 4%
OUR FINDINGS

Management is equipped to manage across identities (i.e., Staff of color, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, women, etc.,)

- Strongly agree: 4%
- Agree: 28%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 44%
- Disagree: 22%

At my organization, the work we do improves the lives of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities

- Strongly agree: 4%
- Agree: 42%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 34%
- Disagree: 18%
“We tried to get the board to reflect on its own lack of diversity. But that hasn't worked”

“Marginalized residents have not been a part of this process. Outside agencies have reached out to the board to speak to them about anti-racism work, but nothing came of it. If they reach out, board members basically say, ‘stay in your lane.’”

"Once there was testimony that was related to a project proposed in partnership with an African American regarding mobility access in the community. It was a low ask, less than $1M. The project was disqualified on a technicality and the process for selection wasn't shared until he protested. That moment doubles to answer the question of describing a time when 'you were disappointed in SACOG.'”
50% of the Board cares about racial equity. The other 50% could not care less.

“They’re trying to advance a political agenda through the race and equity conversation. That’s not our mission.”

“We need to work on working together and not being on the fence. We’re a good ol’ boys network. We need to make leadership opportunities open to all and not just people who know each other.”

“We need shift from compliance mindset to avoid racism and discrimination to a more active stance against racism — consensus that we have to do something to change the outcomes of our work’”
In our interviews, we’ve found Staff, Managers, Directors, Board Members, and Community Stakeholders to be incredibly transparent and candid. Many of these respondents expressed sincere interest in and a commitment to racial equity. In the midst of a global pandemic, you prioritized a need for strategic racial equity assistance. You sought out support and have responded to calls for internal structures and external impacts that are equitable for all. You have ample opportunity as an agency that makes a tremendous impact in the community and holds substantial privilege to disrupt internal and external systems that disenfranchise Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Immigrant, and other People of Color. We’ve identified three main buckets of strategic work that lies ahead for your agency. These main buckets are: Board Representation, Building Cultures of Listening and Accountability, and Approaches to Measuring Equity Impact.
OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Board Representation

The structure and make-up of the SACOG Board is inequitable. Our interview respondents reported feelings of overwhelm and frustration with existing Board representation and Board actions. SACOG agency community members want to leverage their expertise to make the Sacramento community a more brave and equitable place to be. Here are our recommendations for diversifying Board representation:

- In the next two years, we suggest restructuring Board bylaws to enable SACOG community residents, non-elected officials, and Staff representatives to hold seats within the existing Board structure. Without the input of people who work in disenfranchised communities and who reside in disenfranchised communities, it will be nearly impossible to make equitable decisions based on need.

- In order to create cultures centered in racial equity, the structures we create need to be built on a foundation of accountability. We would recommend creating an annual equity evaluation that enables SACOG staff to review Board representation and actions annually with those results being shared with the Board post-evaluation.
Board members: undergo extensive training specific to racial equity and how it can be operationalized within the organization.

Seek to build this training requirement into the structure of the organization by requiring all new Board members to undergo racial equity training as one of their key duties/responsibilities.

Build feedback from SACOG into critical decision-making processes and make this a matter of policy.

Develop and implement a racial equity metric into all of SACOG's funding decisions annually. This should also include a committed percentage of funding reserved specifically for low-income Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Immigrant, and other Communities of Color that is made a matter of policy for the organization.

All Staff: Undergo extensive racial equity training that teaches staff members to apply racial equity principles to their work within the agency.
**Approaches to Measuring Equity Impact**

When asked whether SACOG's work impacts BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities, 34% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting the impact was not clear to them, and 18% disagreed. When over 50% of those working within an organization are unclear about its impact, the organization needs better metrics. A theme within interviews was also that SACOG's lack of measures made it difficult to track progress. As one interviewee noted, "I don't think we know yet how we are doing on DEI." All of this suggests that a major priority for SACOG needs to be the development of clearer DEI metrics for project funding and impact. It can be hard to know how to move forward within a complex terrain of possible DEI commitments. **Here are our recommendations for how that can be done:**

- **Start small and well.** It's okay to start small with metrics and data collection because it allows time to build community buy-in.

- **Create an equity metric for external impact.** Build on lessons learned from future racial equity training and apply them to measurement of SACOG's impact in BIPOC communities and low-income communities of color.

- **Choose what not if.** We have substantial research that tells us BIPOC communities are systematically disenfranchised by land, regional, transportation and housing planning. To measure equity impact we have to acknowledge that the inequity exists and name its points of origin. We are beyond conversations of "if it exists" because ample studies show that it does.

- **Engage community based organizers.** Leverage local data and invite participation from community organizers who have extensive experience of how the agency's work impacts real people on the ground.

- **Lift restrictions to provide increased access to SACOG funding.** Heavy restrictions to access funding negatively impacts communities of color, specifically low-income communities of color. The more restrictions, the less likely that funding decisions will be equitable. Work with SACOG staff members to restructure funding restrictions in ways that increase access to BIPOC community members.
Within the next 60-90 days, we recommend that SACOG secure a consultant or consulting group to lead the Board through a racial equity intensive. This training should focus on various intersections of identity including gender, building affirming cultures for LGBTQIA+ people, and socioeconomic status. As a culminating aspect of this training, the consultant and/or consulting group should work with the Board to develop a strategic plan for acting on the recommendations made in this report. Training themes should include: Operationalizing racial equity, applying principles of racial equity to building cultures of trust and mutual accountability, and frameworks for listening to communities of color and other historically marginalized communities.

Within the next 60-90 days, we recommend that SACOG secure a consultant or consulting group to lead SACOG Leaders through training focused on how managers, directors, and senior leaders can apply the principles of racial equity in the following areas: leading meetings and calls in ways that center those who hold the least power, disrupting racism in the workplace, embracing conflict and seeking out repair, giving and receiving feedback, building relationships founded in trust with BIPOC communities. These sessions must be focused on action. We recommend the training sessions culminate in SACOG leaders working with one another to develop recommendations for how the policies and structures at SACOG can be improved upon to make the culture a more brave and equitable place to be for all.

Within the next 60-90 days, we recommend that SACOG secure a consultant or consulting group to lead SACOG staff members through facilitated learning and discussion sessions to guide them in developing proposed approaches to establish an equity performance metric to be applied to their specific focus of work at SACOG. We recommend participants present their suggested equity performance metrics to their peers during an All Staff meeting once their learning sessions have been completed.
"They already have the relational capital - they are already perceived as leading...They can set the stage for equity helping cities and counties that are smaller and don’t have the staff or understanding....They can provide templates, education and webinars about how equity shows up in their work.”

- SACOG Interview Participant

As an association of governments in the six-county Sacramento region, SACOG is uniquely placed to leverage its resources and influence to bring about racially equitable policies, metrics, and agency culture that can disrupt and dismantle centuries-old systems of racial inequity. This work will not be easy, but it's also not impossible. There is no agency, company, or organization that becomes anti-racist overnight. You'll need to offer yourselves as much grace as possible as you enter into this work. You'll also need action-focused training, education, and policy that helps you to keep moving forward during a pinnacle moment in this nation's history. As the consulting group at MMG, we are confident in your potential to leverage the evidence presented in this report to get closer to your goal of creating an anti-racist work culture and producing anti-racist work products and policies. In the words of Civil Rights activist, essayist, and poet, James Baldwin, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
REFERENCES

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