Racial Equity Work in Massachusetts Municipalities

The Racial Equity Municipal Action Plan and Racial Equity Advancement & Collaborative Hub Initiatives

Raúl González, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Faustina Cuevas, City of Lynn
Marsha Guthrie, Government Alliance on Race and Equity
The Metropolitan Area Planning Council
MAPC’s Equity Team

A cross-departmental initiative supporting the agency’s mission to ensure equity and opportunity among people of all backgrounds by evaluating project work and promoting office culture that values diversity and inclusion of all cultures and experiences.
Massachusetts Municipal DEI Coalition

- A group of professional DEI practitioners employed by cities and towns.
- At bi-monthly meetings, group members share experiences, compare best practices, and support each other through common challenges.
- The coalition has created a guidebook for DEI practitioners and has recently begun to formalize.
The Racial Equity Municipal Action Plan Program
Partnership

**Government Alliance on Race & Equity**
- Trainers whose aim is to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all by working with governments at all levels.
- Using the GARE Model, focuses on changing government policies, institutions, and structures that perpetuate racial disparities.
- Encourages collaboration among government officials, community leaders, and others to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

**Federal Reserve Bank of Boston**
- Aims to promote sound growth and financial stability in New England and the nation.
- Engages in initiatives to address economic disparities and promote fair access to financial services.
- Served project management role and funded REMAP training program and provided in-person space.
Beginning Stages

**2018 Partnership Formation:** MAPC, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (FRBB), and Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) collaborate.

**Wealth Disparity Report:** FRBB’s "The Color of Wealth in Boston" reveals a median net worth gap - $247,000 for white households vs. $8 for Black households.

**COVID-19 & Racial Injustice:** The pandemic's disproportionate effect on communities of color and the national response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor underscore racial inequities as a critical concern for regional leaders.
• **Selection from Applicants:** Initially, six communities, from small towns to larger cities, were selected for a year-long racial equity pilot. In 2022, this group expanded to include the DEI Coalition of Massachusetts.

• **Diverse Cohort Composition:** Teams included a mix of government officials, community organizations, and local leaders. Each team appointed specific team leads.

• **Format:** Starting in 2021, monthly day-long training sessions were held using the GARE training model.

Using GARE’s Racial Equity Toolkit, municipalities drafted action plans that sought to normalize racial equity through trainings, diverse representation, community engagement, and sustainable infrastructure development across municipal departments and community organizations.
Key Learnings

Understanding the GARE Model for building action plans using the Racial Equity Toolkit framework.

Broadening understanding of equity terms, municipal history, visioning, data, and literature.

Applying GARE’s approach to normalize, organize, and operationalize equity, focusing on root causes.

Applying Root Cause Analysis and the "Five Whys" technique in our initiatives.

Accessing and learning from national government racial equity efforts and multijurisdictional plans via GARE’s portal.

Gaining insights through a cohort process with peers from different municipalities.
The Racial Equity Advancement & Collaborative Hub
REACH Program Overview

• Starting in February 2024, this program offers eight monthly in-person workshops designed for practical learning, while fostering collaborative success through knowledge sharing amongst peer municipalities.

• The program features six in-person workshops led by GARE, along with two additional workshops with MAPC.

• The 11 REACH teams feature Town Managers, DEI Directors, Planning Directors, Finance Directors, Sustainability Directors, Police Chiefs, Economic Development Directors, and Health Services Directors.

• Anticipated outcomes include enhanced dialogue around racial equity, inter/cross-municipal cooperation, and policy reform.
REACH Communities

Acton
Arlington
Framingham
Hamilton
Hudson
Lowell
Lynn
Malden
Milton
Natick
Salem
Challenges
Navigating organizational cultures and practices.
For REMAP, this involved adapting racial equity to an online/hybrid format.
Addressing the emotional impact of race-centered discussions and creating partnership pathways toward racial equity.
Burnout & turnover among DEI professionals and municipal teams.
The systemic nature of the issues addressed by DEI work means that changes are often slow to materialize.
That being said...

- This work is necessary and foundational!
- Racial equity work cannot be housed within one position or even one department.
- Understanding that you must tackle root causes, not just symptoms.
- This is a marathon, not a sprint.
- Success is diverse and multifaceted.
- You must organize before you operationalize.
“Our collective efforts, no matter how small they may seem, weave together to form the fabric of a society rooted in compassion and understanding. Together, we are not just dreaming of a more equitable society; we are laying the groundwork for its realization.”