INTERNAL SCAN FINDINGS 2019

# Staff Racial Equity and Inclusion Competency Survey Findings

On September 10, 2019 we administered our third annual Racial Equity and Inclusion competency survey to all staff to reflect on their individual competency as related to understanding and advancing racial equity. The survey was originally designed by Hafizah Omar, with feedback and input from Nadia Owusu and Ratna Gill. The questions from this survey were adapted from GARE’s Employee Survey for Local Governments, D5 initiative’s Field Survey, and additional best practices from the field. Last year we added demographic questions and this year we added questions that speak to our racial equity competency framework and additional questions on risk-taking.

The survey had 35 respondents, which is a 100% completion rate.

The survey results were analyzed by a subset of our internal racial equity team, Colleagues Operationalizing Racial Equity (CORE): Elodie Baquerot, Hafizah Omar, Evelyn Ontaneda, and Nadia Owusu. The survey results we had the following overarching takeaways:

3 years into doing the survey, we are thrilled to see that almost 100% of staff are reporting deepened understanding of interpersonal, institutional and structural racism and that they have/are taking concrete actions to increase equity in their team processes and infrastructure.

This increase in competency saw increased self-reflection, power analysis, and reimagining – all of which we see a lot of throughout the survey.

As we deepen our practice, existential questions that have surfaced: about specifically focusing on black people towards targeted universalism, and about our relationship to capitalism.

**Additional Context: Reduction in Force**

In May 2019, Living Cities leadership faced a difficult decision to lay off six full time staff. This was a painful time for Living Cities’ staff, and many comments in the survey reflected that. We want to acknowledge the harm that occurred during this time and that CORE is committed to support staff in our journey towards healing and accountability.

# Staff REI Competency Building and Practice

Post-mandatory racial equity training, staff are still engaged in racial equity trainings

Starting October 27, 2017 all Living Cities staff are required to attend an anti-racism training. Most of our staff have attended People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) Undoing Racism training, while others attended the Racial Equity Institute’s REI Training or Groundwater training. Through the REI Field Building work, some staff were able to go to additional Undoing Racism workshops that we hosted with our partners. Even so, many staff took the initiative to get other trainings to deepen their racial equity practice. Multiple comments suggest that the IISC facilitation workshop has been impactful to their day-to-day work. A list of these trainings that staff had recommended is provided at the end of the document.

2018 also saw the launch of Living Cities’ competency framework which included [the Racial Equity Competency Framework.](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BzN8-TeWbPv3KD-knAylPTKvA9jWQgoj/view?usp=sharing) This competency framework has helped the CORE team to understand how trainings and opportunities offered at Living Cities can support in building these competencies.

One comment brought up the limitation of staff conversations where it might be tough to get in the right frame of mind in the middle of all-staff meetings and through video conference. One comment mentioned that, “*Generally I think it's tough for me to get in the right frame of mind when we're all in the office, sitting in a big conference room where we have other more very head-space-y all-staff meetings and conversations, and connected via conference video.”*

From the survey, we found that the CORE activities that staff have found most impactful are:

1. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
2. Coaching
3. Healing Justice at the December Staff Retreat

Highlighted comments:

“Coaching was hugely helpful for applying REI work to my own self-governance. When values came into conflict with each other, when I was frustrated with colleagues, coaching and ERGs helped me re-center on my commitment and make me feel ownership over my own behavior”

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“Facilitation for Racial Justice training has also had applications for my own life – feeling confident in engaging conversations with people in my life about race and racism.”

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“The Healing Justice staff retreat helped me feel really connected with everyone in a very personal way.”

Staff continues to be active in advancing racial equity in their project teams while reflecting that there needs to be more space in being able to share failures.

91.43% of staff reported taking concrete actions to increase equity in their team processes and infrastructure and 94% of staff reported having used the Racial Equity Assessment tool. Tools that are mentioned multiple times in the survey are: equity pauses, racial equity assessment tool, and People’s Institute anti-racist principles. A full list of racial equity tools that staff have used is at the end of the document.

Highlighted comments:

“I use our own tools a lot -- the REI Report, the FAQs (especially helpful for talking points for external use). Incorporating art (especially poetry) has also been a helpful tool for me for getting out of my typical modes of thinking and working.”

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“I need to be more proactive about seeking out more workshops and trainings, because when I have gone to them, they’re often powerful recharges for my REI practice, giving me new tools to practice a reminder that there’s a broader community outside of LC doing this work deeply”

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“I really appreciated it when [a member of leadership team] said that she wrestles with her values and her work on a daily basis. I wish there were more people from [leadership] who openly acknowledged that they're struggling rather than being defensive,”

There is an upward trend in staff competency in understanding in interpersonal, institutional and structural racism: 100% on all categories (both strongly agree and agree). Staff also reflected on what tools they would need to address structural, institutional and individual racism in the comments section:

**Institutional racism**: Most respondents talked about what it looks like to de-risk bringing up instances of institutional racism. There is also the need for a real feedback culture, and a space for comments/reporting instances of institutional racism. One comment touched on how staff who are not in the leadership team are not given the same space and time to contribute to organizational decision-making.

**Interpersonal racism:** Several respondents reflected on the importance of relationship building in addressing interpersonal racism, but also expressed a desire for more tools and space to practice (role play was brought up in one comment, and a request for a guide in another). Other comments also bring up that power dynamics make it difficult to call out people who are in leadership positions. One comment gave an example of their team culture around feedback and how that has helped the team navigate ways to address instances of interpersonal racism.

**Structural racism:** A question that came up is how we might address structural inequities that are present at Living Cities (i.e how our institutional policies and practices consider structural impacts on our staff of color). Another reflection reflected on whether Living Cities leadership and board are ready to address certain instances of structural racism.

While our tolerance for racial equity conversations and taking risks has increased, the CORE team wanted to understand whether talking about race is still perceived as a risky thing to do at Living Cities, and if staff felt that taking that risk has made any difference.

We added two extra questions to this year’s survey to further understand the perception of risk.

100% of staff (an increase on strongly agree from 85% in 2018 to 97% in 2019) believes that it is valuable to talk about race and its impact on our work and majority of staff is comfortable talking about race and when others talk about race. (compared to 30% strongly agree in 2017)

However, 56.25% of staff report that they felt that there are still some risks in bringing up race/racial equity at Living Cities. 94% of staff have set aside their own discomfort and fear of saying the wrong thing when talking about race at work. (compared to 84% in 2018 and 75% in 2017).

57.69% of respondents report that it has made a difference sometimes. Comments brought up the difference between taking risks internally as opposed to with external partners, as well as, the sense of defensiveness from the leadership team. One comment did note that they have had a negative consequence as a result of bringing up race.

***Highlighted Comments***

It only feels like a risk internally on occasion; not sure of impact. More often feels like a risk dealing with members/partners.

It’s easy to talk about race externally but hard to talk about race internally

***There needs to be a reflection on accountability at all levels***

There has been significant movement on staff reflecting on their person, role and system in understanding our role in moving racial equity work in the organization. There has been increased understanding of power dynamics and how that shows up in our day-to-day work. While there is a lot of self-reflection in the comments throughout the survey, there may still be spaces where some staff don’t see themselves as personally accountable to our racial equity work. Many staff used distancing language (e.g. “they need to” or “they don’t) when talking about the REI work of the organization.

# Institutional commitment to racial equity and our results

From the survey results, we have quantitative data to show that we are building our racial equity competencies and practicing them in our day-to-day work.

At the same time, we have come to a place in our racial equity work where getting deeper means that we run into the question of what this organization should be and/or wants to be if we want to hold fidelity to an anti-racist framework. The two questions that have come up throughout the survey are:

* + *Do we have a shared understanding of how addressing anti-Blackness is foundational to our anti-racist work? Do we have a shared understanding of targeted universalism and intersectionality as we move forward in our work?*
  + *As we go deeper in our racial equity work, how do we hold tensions of working within capitalism, while at the same time, understanding how capitalism and racism are inextricably linked?*

As staff, we may not be in total agreement to the answers to these questions. Some comments do appear to be in opposition of each other on these questions. However, what is clear is that some staff is looking to leadership to have a clear understanding of where we want to go and to communicate it clearly institutionally as we move forward in our new round of work. And, there are philosophical differences on these questions as evidenced by the below comments from staff, some pushing us to be explicit about our focus on black people and others arguing that we should not have that focus:

“While I feel comfortable talking about race, I feel at times Living Cities' approach can be too dogmatic and risks alienating those who would be best served to help to advance the very REI mission Living Cities so passionately undertakes. For example, saying we are focused on "creating and maintaining black wealth" feels as though we are missing a bit of the mission. Have black people been disenfranchised in American and victim to systemic and individual racism, yes. Does society as a whole suffer when even one ethnic group is marginalized, absolutely. However, saying "we are focused on building BLACK wealth" seems to further segregate.”

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“What does apply is that advancing racial equity is something that is spoken broadly throughout LC but only goes so far. There are different levels to the racial inequity. People of Color are discriminated against by white people across the board. On top of this, People of color discriminate against other people of color and on that spectrum, African American men and women who are descendants of slaves are at the lowest end of the food chain and are often not seen as equal regardless of education and experience.”

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“What feels inadequate (to me) is that racism doesn't occur in isolation - it is frequently combined with other "isms", e.g. sexism, favoring heterosexuality, poverty, etc. I know that LC can't address every oppressive system and that we have chosen to focus on race as a root cause - but obviously it is not the only root cause. I don't think we do a sufficient job in acknowledging the other "isms" and how they work together to disempower people.”

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“One thing I'm trying to focus on more in my own practice, and something that I want to see us do more about, is strengthening my understanding and analysis of intersectionality. I think we've increasingly communicated a clear and powerful message as an org. around closing the racial gaps, and anti-Black racism in particular as the foundational architecture of oppression in US cities. But I hope that we (I) continue to strengthen how we analyze and help partners/grantee connect the dots about the ways that racism relates to and shapes all of the inequities they encounter in their communities.”

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“Living Cities is clearly committed, but in my opinion, we haven’t yet examined our role and our members’ roles and our sectors’ roles in upholding racist systems.”

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“Our direction feels right. We will have to figure out when we are focused on black people vs people of color in general. When we are focused on black people, we should be comfortable saying that.”

Generally, staff perceived leadership at Living Cities as committed to racial equity and the results remain largely the same as last year. However, there are reservations about leadership team collective competency around racial equity and limitations of the shared leadership model as well as a call for more intentional transparency on leadership team processes.

***Highlighted comments:***

“…I see the effort many leaders have made but I think there is still more work to be done. Not all members of [leadership] have shown the same level of understanding and it seems like a lot of burden is placed on a few leaders to support those who are still on a journey and to communicate to staff”

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“What is the strategy to make sure all leaders have the competency levels in the competency framework for their positions?”

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“In rhetoric, yes. But it will take a lot of work to break down the hierarchical approach to decision making and to really value the contributions and potential of staff at all levels”.

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“Shared leadership model is great, but unclear how power dynamics within [leadership] still upholds or attempt to dismantle status quo”

# Institutional REI policy and practice

An inconsistent and sometimes inequitable application of policies and practices remains a challenge, as well as questions about advancement at Living Cities.

Across the three years of our survey results, the inequitable application of telecommuting, professional development and PTO has been brought up several times. Another theme that came up is the consistency of policies and the exceptions that leadership might make for themselves. The policies mentioned were the guideline on number of people attending conferences and when promotions take place outside of the review process.

In a response to last year’s survey, HR/Talent drafted a new policy in our handbook to address telecommuting/work from home. However, we know that creating policies alone will not solve inequitable implementation in practice, so we want to focus on 1) Clarity on policies 2) Clarity on organizational management culture and philosophy that we want to build 3) Reducing instances where policies are on the discretion of People Manager/ Project lead.

We also want to better understand the comments about clock-watching, seat monitoring, and undue questioning of people’s PTO decisions and to ensure that we are clearer about these policies/practices and the overall office culture we want to create.

In our discussions, CORE came up with specific plans to support all staff on this area, in partnership with HR/Talent:

1. Support performance managers, project leads and project managers to have a clear understanding of organizational policies and practice
2. Support performance managers, project leads and project managers in creating accountability mechanisms around performance issues
3. Create space for staff to report instances of inequitable implementation of policies all-year round (not just in the annual REI survey)

# Our Vision

Staff Vision for Living Cities’ work in Racial Equity

25 people (or 71.4% of staffers) responded to the question, in your own words, what do you think a focus on racial equity and inclusion should mean for our mission and how we work? What should we do more / less of? What would we need to change?

* **Clear criteria for leadership and create paths for distributed leadership** – explore current leadership roles, who has them and how - what are the criteria we have for people to be in leadership?
* **Continued building of our intersectional analysis** in our work. Continue to strengthen how we analyze and help partners/grantees connect the dots about the ways that racism relates to and shapes all of the inequities they encounter in their communities.
* What might an **anti-racist accountability framework** look like and what that means for us? What might it look like to have accountability across the sectors we work in, and supporting people who are organizing in the field? How far are we actually willing to push as an organization? Could we/ would we spend more time calling out philanthropy/corporate sector for their inability to commit long term to solving systemic racism?
* More **intentional organizing training** in order to align our collective understanding/ analysis/ practice about what it means to be antiracist organizers.
* More work to open ourselves and others up **to reimagining systems.** We need to identify new ways to support each other and ensure our staff can also be in the spaces we’re creating for others to heal, build relationships, and grow.
* **Our focus on the public sector** feels like a good way to focus and narrow our scope. Committing to this strategy long term will help us see what might work and not work.
* Resources in investment **proof points for capital work with an REI lens.**

Some themes that emerged last year also continued to show up in this year’s survey:

* Transparency. Within the shared leadership of the leadership team, how can we actually embed transparency as a principle across our culture given how important it is to fostering trust, community, relationship, shared power building, organizing, and relational culture? Staff wants to know how leadership team is holding shared leadership, and wants to understand the tensions, struggles and disconnects that leadership team is holding.
* True community input. Same as last year, there are multiple comments on the importance of being in relationship with community and co-designing our programs with community.

In the spirit of re-imagination, staff also shared what an anti-racist institution could look like:

* A multi-ethnic and multi-cultural organization where differences in race/ethnicity and cultures are celebrated and there is unity in those difference. That there it exists in the feeling of the space and being - music, culture, art and openness.
* Staff **have agency, feel trusted, not judged**. Staff roles reflect the breadth, depth, and variety of experience that staff hold in the organization.
* More risk-taking to break away from white institutional norms
* An environment where healing justice is truly practiced, for example, staff engaging in conflict when differences arise and work through that conflict.
* Accountability across levels: individual accountability (self-awareness and self-governance) and collective accountability (to culture and to results) that is equally shared across staff and isn't tied to power or hierarchy.
* A different way of governance: a coalition of the willing of leaders of establishment institutions who very intentionally want to close these gaps and leaders who have been working in and with communities to chart a long term course for change that challenges long held orthodoxies and white cultural norms
* We can name and understand power dynamics and shift them, and for some people in power, to let go of their power.
* Centering humanity (building in time to know each other and each other's histories; continuing to build a culture that is rooted in mutual care/respect; connecting with art in ways that allow us to feel, not just think, etc.)

# Implications for our work

For CORE:

* Ongoing curriculum, trainings and competency building that address request, feedback and comments from the survey
* Project audit with teams
* Roll out plan on addressing policy and practice inequities
* Create an anonymous CORE mailbox for people to report policy and practice inequities
* Create an organizational plan around building a culture of accountability to build trust and flexibility might require difficult conversations

For Resources & Results (our leadership team):

* Name shared analysis on how Living Cities want to be accountable as an anti-racist organization which might include conversations on capitalism and anti-Blackness
* Explore what real transparency could look like through thinking how leadership team can hold shared leadership what happens when organizational values come into conflict with personal values

HR & Talent

* More clarity on current policies and practices
* Transparency on compensation study process
* Ongoing education and partnership on identifying gaps on policies
* Create consistency across systems in policies and practices
* Work with CORE on accountability mechanism for performance

Closing the Gaps Network

* Document on practices of co-design and collaboration with communities

All Staff

* Continue to participate in our REI internal activities (ERGs, coaching, staff discussions etc.) and work to apply lessons learned to our work
* Share examples with CORE and LSR team on how you are operationalizing racial equity in your teams
* Support each other
* Continue to give feedback to leadership team, CORE, HR & Talent
* Hold ourselves and others accountable to our racial equity and inclusion value and norms
* Seek out and receive feedback from peers, project leads, and leadership
* Consider one’s own self orientation: How am I stepping up or back? How am I listening to others? How am I being an ally to people of color?

# Appendix

Trainings mentioned by respondents:

* Racial Equity Institute
* 30-day workshop called Me and White Supremacy,
* cultural competency training through the Intercultural Development Inventory
* 101 and 201 of Arrabon on reconciliation in the church
* HR practices with REI lens
* Equity in the Center
* PISAB trainings, building on Undoing; Training focused on history of racism in US,
* CORE trainings on decolonizing gender, healing justice, etc.
* Anti-Racist RBA
* Storytelling for racial equity
* IISC Fundamentals of facilitation for Racial Justice Work
* Deep Dive on PISAB anti-racist organizing principles
* Othering and Belonging Conference
* ProInspire leadership workshop
* Affinity group discussions
* Generative Somatics
* GARE racial equity 101

Respondents also mentioned tools that they use in their day-to-day work:

Impact assessment/ Decision Making tools:

* Equity pauses
* GARE and Racial Equity Tools' tools
* Fakequity Racial Equity Mapping Tool
* Power analysis

Framework

* Structural racial equity matrix,
* Person/role/system framework
* normalize/organize/operationalize framework
* Racial Equity action plan: how-to
* PISAB principles
* 4 R’s
* Weaving a World Without Violence Workbook

REI Concepts / History

* Book Club and other literary discussions,
* Accountability buddies

Communications / facilitation tools

* GARE Communications Guide
* Non-violent communication tools
* REI questions in the creative brief
* Media history timeline