EQUITY FRAMEWORK

LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS 2025-2030

ABRIDGED FRAMEWORK DRAFT | SEPTEMBER 2024

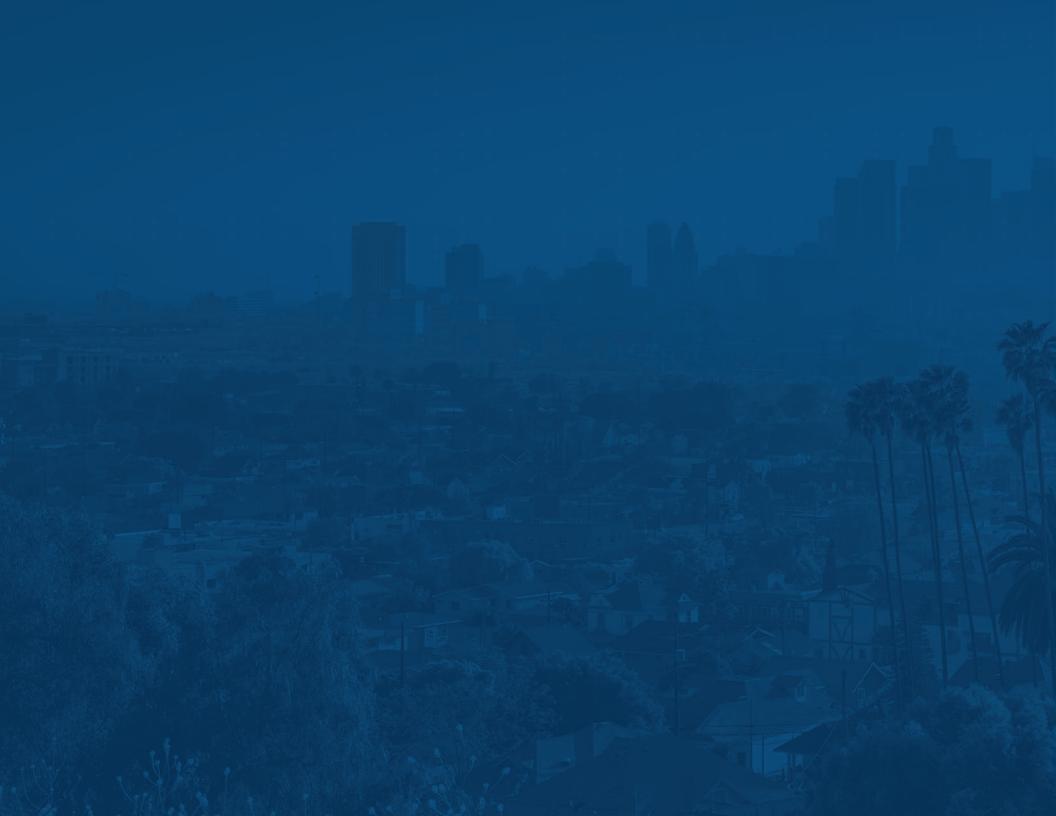


For more information about the Los Angeles County Public Works Equity in Infrastructure Initiative, visit **equity.pw.lacounty.gov**

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2020, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted a motion that created the Board's eighth Board-directed priority known as the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative. The Board's motion boldly articulated that ARDI create an anti-racism policy agenda to guide, govern, and increase the County's ongoing commitment to fighting racism in all its dimensions across Los Angeles County.

A year later, in August 2021, the Board passed a motion to speed up this work relative to the built environment, directing that Los Angeles County Public Works (Public Works), in partnership with ARDI and other County departments, create an Equity Framework to identify strategies for ensuring that services and infrastructure investments made by Public Works are more equitable. The "Equity in Infrastructure" Board motion aligned with Public Works' own vision to advance equity, as articulated in its 2022-2027 Strategic Plan.

This Equity Framework lays out a clear plan for the next five years to reduce inequities in how Public Works makes infrastructure investments and delivers services, with the ultimate goal of improving the well-being of all communities.

ANTI-RACISM DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (ARDI) INITIATIVE

ARDI provides central coordination and guidance to ensure the incorporation and integration of equity in Countywide policies, procedures, and practices, through the implementation of the Racial Equity Strategic Plan.

ARDI also partners with County departments to provide training and capacity building, and technical assistance and planning. In addition, ARDI advances equity in the County by creating racial equity tools, providing policy analysis and development, making recommendations on community and stakeholder engagement strategies, coordinating equity data collection, analysis and reporting, as well as infusing equity into program development and resourcing efforts.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Equity is not synonymous with equality; however, both are very important to achieve. While equality aims to treat everyone the same without considering individualized needs and regardless of results, equity focuses on treating everyone fairly to achieve just outcomes. True equality demands that we account for the differences in individual circumstances and level the playing field. This requires changing the way systems operate and reallocating resources.

Equality can be achieved when an equity agenda is pursued.



EQUITY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

What does "equity in the built environment" mean?

Public Works' mission is to plan, design, build, and maintain modern infrastructure that uplifts all communities in Los Angeles County. The Department is responsible for services that affect the daily lives of many residents, such as:



Managing and maintaining roads, sidewalks, bridges, bicycle facilities, and airports



Providing flood protection



Providing education on how to be prepared in an emergency and responding during emergencies and disasters



Collecting waste and recycling



Providing permits for building or renovating a structure



Operating and maintaining sewers



Removing graffiti



Designing, building, and renovating facilities for other County departments

For Public Works, equity in the built environment means making sure that resources such as water, roads, and waste management are shared fairly and justly. Everyone, no matter their income, race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, or religion, should have equitable access to these basic public services. When planning investments and services, Public Works considers the unique needs, culture, and characteristics of each community.

HISTORY OF INEQUITY

The United States has a long history of inequity. According to the Countywide Racial Equity Strategic Plan (RESP) released in February 2023, where a person grows up has a huge impact on their life outcomes. In Los Angeles County, opportunity yields very different life outcomes for those raised in neighborhoods of affluence compared to those raised in neighborhoods experiencing concentrated disadvantage, and race plays a big role in determining which of these areas people live in.

How did this happen? In many parts of the country, including Los Angeles County, access to resources and opportunities were closely tied to race because of carefully planned policy decisions. For example, after World War II, the G.I. Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) created low-interest mortgages to veterans, but many Black service members were blocked from buying homes in new suburban housing developments. At the same time, a practice called redlining marked areas where people of color lived as risky for lending. During this time, appraisers also produced official descriptions of neighborhoods called "Area Descriptions" that accompanied color ratings. In the descriptions for neighborhoods like South Central, Watts, or Boyle Heights, residents who were Black, Mexican, Japanese, "Oriental," or Jews were described as "subversive racial elements" and their presence in a neighborhood was characterized as "infiltration." While neighborhoods with zero Black residents were often rated green, neighborhoods containing any Black residents were almost always rated red. In fact, "% Negro" was a data entry field on the Area Description form and is the only field for indicating the race for any group in a neighborhood. As a result, redlining is most closely associated with the racial segregation of Black populations.

When highways were built in the 1960s, these same urban communities were further disrupted, splitting neighborhoods and cutting people off from economic opportunity. As a result, people of color and those with low incomes were often excluded from homeownership based on their race and socioeconomic status, and had their neighborhoods broken apart, not because of their actions, but because of legal decisions.



CALLING FOR CHANGE

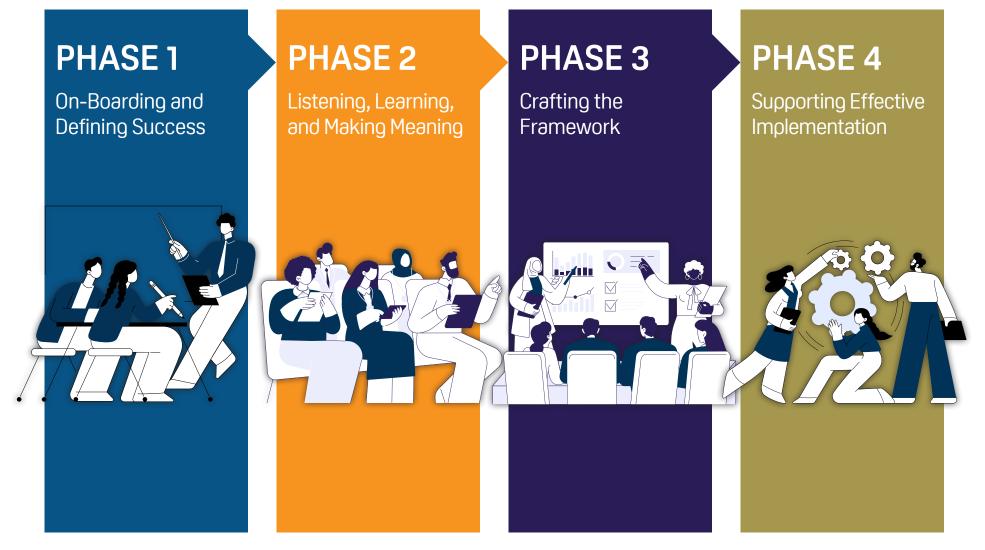
In 2020, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors acted to address the long history of inequity in the County. On August 10, 2021, they passed the Equity in Infrastructure Board Motion, which called for placing equity at the heart of all the County's work. This means looking at everything the County does through an equity lens, using data and community input to guide our decisions, and setting bold goals to fix these inequities. With the federal government investing billions of dollars in infrastructure and focusing on helping communities with concentrated disadvantage, Los Angeles County is committed to leading the way with an Anti-Racism Infrastructure agenda. To make this happen, Public Works developed a workplan and built a planning team. In partnership with ARDI, and supported by the consulting team of MIG, Inc., Public Works officially launched the Equity in Infrastructure Initiative (Initiative) in March 2022. The main goal of this Initiative is to find and reduce any disparities in how Public Works plans, delivers, and distributes its investments and services across different areas of the County. The Initiative aims to create a new, consistent approach that ensures equitable infrastructure funding and improve service delivery to all communities.



PHASES OF THE INITIATIVE

The Equity in Infrastructure Initiative is being carried out through a four-phase process, as shown in the image below. Phases I and II are complete, and Phase III will conclude after the public review period in early 2025. Phase IV, full implementation of the Framework, will begin in May 2025.

Image 1: Equity in Infrastructure Initiative Phases



LISTENING AND LEARNING

Public Works used the five activities below to gather data and community feedback to help identify the most important changes needed in Public Works operations, investments, and services.



POLICY AND PRACTICE REVIEW

Identified the strengths and areas for improvement related to equity, diversity, and inclusion across Public Works policies, procedures, practices, services, and operations.



INVESTMENT ANALYSIS

Mapped out where Public Works has invested in infrastructure over the past five years and plan for the next two years. Used the Federal Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool1 (CJEST) to understand how much of that investment goes to disadvantaged communities. Conducted a second analysis to understand who benefits and who is burdened because of these projects.



DEPARTMENT ALIGNMENT ANALYSIS

Reviewed the equity work of other County departments and identified ways to work together more effectively.

GATHERING DATA AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY TO IDENTIFY PRIORITIES



MAINTENANCE ANALYSIS

Examined the current practices of Public Works' maintenance divisions and recommended changes for ongoing equity assessments.



COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engaged community members and other stakeholders in understanding Public Works' core services, as well as guiding how the work can be delivered in a more equitable way. Facilitated 55 activities with community members, resulting in 3,948 residents reached; conducted 28 interviews with organizational partners; and received 2,094 survey responses.

¹In January of 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14008. The order directed the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to develop a new tool. This tool is called the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool. The tool has an interactive map and uses datasets that are indicators of burdens in eight categories: climate change, energy, health, housing, legacy pollution, transportation, water and wastewater, and workforce development. The tool uses this information to identify communities that are experiencing these burdens. These are the communities that are disadvantaged because they are overburdened and underserved.

EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Based on everything that was learned from the research, analysis and community conversations, Public Works identified six priorities for focused attention over the next five years. These priorities are designed to work together to advance equitable investments, service delivery, and community outcomes. Within each priority area are strategies Public Works is either currently implementing or plans to implement over the next five years.

1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

Work closely with residents, local native communities, and tribal governments to form lasting relationships to make sure that infrastructure projects meet the needs of the communities they serve.

STRATEGIES

Already Underway

- **1.1** Create a process to coordinate ongoing engagement opportunities across the Department and between departments to reduce duplication of efforts.
- 1.2 Use the Service Requests and Incidence Report (SRIR) dashboard to analyze data quarterly to understand who is requesting services and how quickly Public Works responds and resolves the issues to identify equity implications.
- 1.3 Launch a web-based community events dashboard to keep track of Public Works events, including the meeting purpose, location, and outcomes of each event.
- 1.4 Work with the Los Angeles County Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative (ARDI) to create guidelines and training to improve community engagement, including:
 - outlining best practices for when and how communities will be engaged by Public Works from project start to finish; and
 - ensuring communications with community members are clear, culture- and language-accessible, and informative regarding Public Works' projects and services.

- 1.5 Assign culturally responsive Public Works community liaison teams for neighborhoods facing the most challenges to improve communication and partnership.
- **1.6** Maximize current funding sources to ensure Public Works has enough resources and staffing for effective, culturally responsive community engagement.
- Recruit a Tribal Liaison to engage with the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) and strengthen relationships with local native communities and tribal governments.
- **1.8** Create funding to work with community-based organizations for culturally specific community engagement, particularly in neighborhoods with accumulated and concentrated disadvantage.
- Create an ongoing process to consistently engage the community in each County Supervisorial District about Public Works' services and outcomes.
- **1.10** Work with equity specialists and people with lived experience to improve how Public Works communicates with all communities.

2. USE OF DATA

Make Public Works performance data more transparent to guide decisions focused on equity.

STRATEGIES

Already Underway

- 2.1 Gradually introduce a procedure, including community organizations, to monitor and assess performance data quarterly to determine where improvements are needed.
- 2.2 Create digital dashboards and other tools to help monitor and assess Public Works' performance. Ensure all employees are trained to use the tools effectively.
- 2.3 Advocate to hire data experts to support our work by creating strong performance indicators and outcomes, monitoring progress, and helping develop solutions.

- 2.4 Develop a method to prioritize projects to guide annual budgeting and grant applications.
 - Build on models such as the ARDI American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Los Angeles County Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) methodologies.
 - Tailor the prioritization method to each business area of Public Works.



3. WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Diversify the Public Works workforce with respect to gender, race and ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity, as well as diversity of experience and skills. Ensure that diverse staff perspectives and experiences are recognized and considered in decision making.

STRATEGIES

Already Underway

- **3.1** Fully implement the Public Works Strategic Recruitment Plan (2024) to diversify our workforce and ensure fair hiring practices. Efforts underway include:
 - regularly reviewing our hiring practices to ensure they are fair and don't unintentionally discriminate against people;
 - ensuring diversity on all interview panels by including people of different genders, races, and ethnicities;
 - highlighting Public Works' partnerships with organizations that support underrepresented communities, such as the National Society of Black Engineers and the National Association of Women in Construction;
 - supporting the Gender Impact Assessment to improve job opportunities for women in the workplace, including advocating for more female engineers, managers, and women in the field;
 - joining the National GEM Consortium (GEM) to recruit talented engineering and science graduate school applicants, and sponsoring two GEM fellows;
 - supporting the PLACE (Preparing Los Angeles County Employment) Program to train and hire people with high barriers to employment;

- exploring opportunities to hire from the Youth at Work Program to support young people in starting their career;
- continuing the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) Outreach Program to inspire and educate middle and high school students, with a focus on schools in areas of accumulated and concentrated disadvantage, to pursue careers in STEAM fields.
- 3.2 Continue to support employees in pursuing higher education through tuition reimbursement and access to educational opportunities.
- 3.3 Use findings from the Los Angeles County Assessment of Workplace Climate and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) surveys to develop strategies to improve workplace inclusion and belonging. Survey employees periodically and adjust the inclusion plan based on progress and areas for improvement.

- 3.4 Hire and promote individuals who have the competencies and adaptive skills needed for engineering and nonengineering roles.
- **3.5** Include knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in hiring and promotion criteria.
- 3.6 Create professional development programs focused on skill gaps and opportunities for advancement, with special attention to administrative staff.

4. POLICY AND PRACTICE

Ensure Public Works' policies and practices advance equity both within Department operations and in the services we provide to Los Angeles County communities.

STRATEGIES

Already Underway

- **4.1** Leverage Public Works' leadership in key industry groups (e.g., American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Industry Leadership Council) to shape national policy, practice, and equity standards in infrastructure. Advocate for those standards to be applied in Los Angeles County.
- **4.2** Implement a language access policy aligned with the recommendations from the Office of Immigrant Affairs to ensure Public Works' communications are accessible to all communities.
- **4.3** Work with ARDI and in alignment with the LA County Racial Equity Strategic Plan (RESP) to identify and address policies and practices that create barriers to equitable service delivery and outcomes.
- **4.4** Ensure adherence to Los Angeles County policy to support Local Small Business Enterprise (LSBE) by:
 - leveraging funds with other County departments for incentives that support mentorship for early- to midlevel minority-led enterprise contractors;
 - ensuring timely (within 15 calendar days) payments to LSBEs to support the financial health and stability of local small businesses;

- collaborating with Los Angeles County's Internal Services Department (ISD) and Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) on creating contracting opportunities for historically underutilized businesses;
- hosting outreach events each year with other County departments to help more underrepresented businesses have access to contracting opportunities;
- partnering with DEO to designate Small Business-Public Works (SB-PW) firms as LSBEs, so they have more opportunities to work on Public Works' construction projects; and
- working with DEO to specifically reach out to underrepresented businesses and those from communities experiencing concentrated and accumulated disadvantage, to equitably promote contracting opportunities.

- 4.5 Work with ARDI to develop a budget equity tool for Public Works to assess the impact on different communities during the annual budget process.
- 4.6 Create a policy to prioritize ongoing infrastructure maintenance at an enterprise-wide level, in accordance with industry standards and with an equity focus.
- 4.7 Work with the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office (CEO) to identify opportunities to advance equity in State and Federal infrastructure policies.

5. INTRA- AND INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

Strengthen collaboration within Public Works and with other County departments to better serve the community.

STRATEGIES

Already Underway

- 5.1 In partnership with ARDI, create a workgroup of key County department leaders (e.g., Regional Planning, Public Health, Parks and Recreation, etc.) to:
 - identify and prioritize shared initiatives and joint grant applications to advance equity in the built environment,gleaning lessons and examples from the work conducted through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), Department of Parks and Recreations, and the Los Angeles County Development Authority; and
 - create an agreement between departments to work together to ensure fairness and equity in projects that involve planning, design, and construction.

- 5.2 Meet with County departments that Public Works partners with frequently to create shared strategies and explore new ideas.
- 5.3 Support ARDI's role in creating and disseminating standards of excellence for all County departments for effective community engagement.

- 5.4 Leverage skills from other departments to improve Public Works' services, such as community engagement and workforce development through formal agreements.
- 5.5 Explore the Department of Parks and Recreation "peoplecentered approach" as a model for equity.
- 5.6 Clarify roles and responsibilities and outline processes for accessing data across Public Works systems.
- 5.7 Work closely with the Department of Public Health to identify barriers and solutions to ensure that the County's Complete Streets Policy is routinely implemented.



6. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Foster a workplace culture where all employees feel safe, valued, and empowered to contribute to equity.

STRATEGIES

Already Underway

- 6.1 Advocate for a high-level equity leader within Public Works, with support staff, to guide the implementation of the Equity Framework in coordination with Public Works leadership and staff, ARDI, the Board of Supervisors, community, and organizational partners.
- 6.2 Analyze the findings from the Los Angeles County Assessment of Workplace Climate and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) surveys, administered by ARDI, to establish a baseline for Public Works and identify additional targeted strategies to build on strengths and address areas for improvement. Reassess workplace climate annually or every other year to measure progress against the baseline and adjust strategies.
- 6.3 Launch a communications campaign designed to build a shared understanding and commitment to equity in the built environment for Public Works staff at all levels.

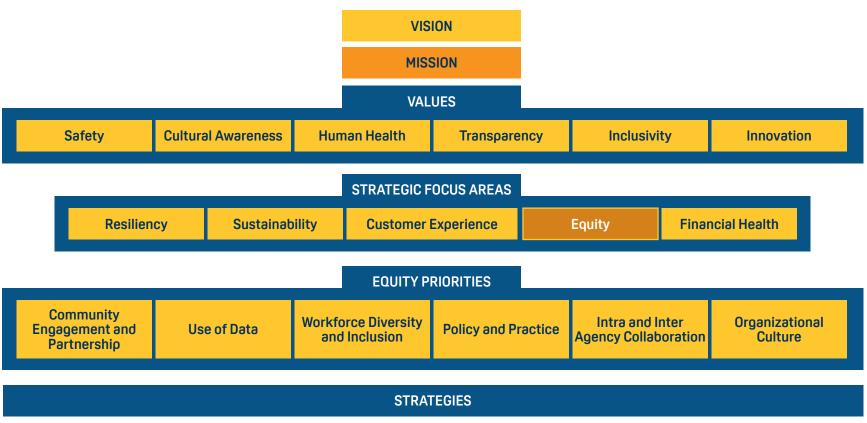
- 6.4 Work with ARDI to create and implement an equity training plan for Public Works that includes self-directed and group learning, with a focus on applying the training to their work.
- 6.5 In coordination with Public Works equity and communications staff, as well as ARDI, launch an Equity Ambassador program to:
 - establish a shared understanding of equity in the built environment and its application to the day-to-day work of staff;
 - change how staff at all levels think and act, which will encourage others to fully commit to putting equity strategies into their work.
- 6.6 Implement a cross-training program with Public Works and local environmental and social justice communitybased organizations to learn about each other and for Public Works' employees to learn more about how to provide culturally- and linguistically responsive services.
- 6.7 Establish an employee recognition process that celebrates the work of an individual or a team for demonstrating equity in practice.
- 6.8 Develop and implement a reflective supervision approach for supervisors to use in one-on-one meetings that discusses equity in each employee's daily work.
- 6.9 Advocate to County Department of Human Resources to integrate equitable standards into performance reviews.
- 6.10 Create a new employee affinity group, perhaps as an evolution of the Ambassador program and using best practices from Public Works' Women's Leadership Council focused on advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.



FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

This Equity Framework is a key part of Public Works' current 2022–2027 Strategic Plan. As shown in **Image 2**, equity is one of five strategic focus areas in the plan, and the Equity Framework outlines the equity priorities and strategies Public Works will use over the next five years.

Image 2: Public Works Strategic Plan Framework



STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Public Works will put the Equity Framework into action using the same accountability process as the Strategic Plan. The Department is divided into different "Business Areas," which are either public-facing Core Service Areas or Support Service Areas. Each Business Area creates an annual Business Plan. The Framework strategies will be included in the appropriate Business Plans (see Image 3), and each Business Area will outline the steps they need to take, key milestones, necessary partners, required resources, and how they will measure success.



BUSINESS PLANS

Image 3: Equity Framework Implementation

EQUITY FRAMEWORK

ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Public Works measures success using a method called "Results-Based Accountability" (RBA). RBA is a way of thinking and problem solving that focuses on improving the quality of life in communities. It starts by imagining the outcomes Public Works wants for our communities and then figuring out what strategies and actions are needed to achieve those outcomes.

Instead of focusing only on what or how much an organization is doing, RBA also looks at how well an organization is doing and whether it's making a positive difference in the community. A key piece of the process is regularly checking the results, breaking down the data to see how different groups are affected, and making improvements where needed. This continuous improvement process involves bringing together workforce, community, and partners to better understand the root causes of problems and try out new solutions.

Each year, Public Works will prioritize strategies in the Equity Framework to focus on first. Since these strategies are connected and support each other, they will be rolled out in a planned order. The prioritized strategies will be added to the relevant Business Plans, and Public Works leadership will review the data every quarter. Each quarter, the Business Areas will review their progress, adjust their plans if necessary and continue working towards their goals. Public Works will continue producing Quarterly Business Updates and will provide annual progress reports to the Board of Supervisors.





FACTORS TO ENABLE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Several factors are critical for successful implementation of the Equity Framework. Like the equity priorities, these factors are connected and build on each other to create an environment that supports lasting change.

ONGOING SUPPORT FROM ARDI

Continued partnership with Dr. D'Artagnan Scorza, Executive Director of ARDI, and his skilled team, will be crucial. They will provide Public Works with invaluable training, technical assistance, and practical tools to support the implementation of the Framework.

DEDICATED AND SKILLED EQUITY WORKFORCE

While every Public Works employee has a role in advancing equity, dedicated staff with experience and knowledge in diversity, equity, and inclusion work are needed to support effective implementation. These staff members will continue to work directly with ARDI to guide and support the implementation of the Equity Framework. Further, Public Works will identify new liaison positions needed to develop closer relationships with communities and Tribal Governments.

INCREASED DATA ANALYSIS CAPACITY AND ACTIVE USE OF DATA

To make informed decisions and effectively use RBA, Public Works need staff with experience and skills in data analytics. Public Works is working to create an internal data analytics team that will focus on using data to achieve equitable outcomes.

CULTURE CHANGE AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

The culture of an organization influences how people behave. It includes the beliefs, assumptions, and norms that shape how employees, customers, and partners view the organization. Public Works will use an intentional change management process to encourage behaviors at every level of the organization to support the priorities in the Equity Framework.

Public Works is committed to working in partnership with communities, understanding their unique needs, and co-creating solutions to persistent disparities. Tackling inequities in infrastructure investment and service delivery, and ensuring all communities thrive, will require a coordinated effort across Public Works Business Areas and between the Department and partner county and city agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Public Works credits the Board of Supervisors for their vision in passing the Equity in Infrastructure motion and for their tireless support and guidance throughout the planning process. Public Works recognizes the groups and organizations below for their invaluable contributions to this groundbreaking plan to reduce inequities in infrastructure investment, service delivery, and ultimately, community wellbeing. And importantly, Public Works extends its deepest appreciation to all the customers, community members, and tribal communities who took the time to co-create this critical direction for the future of Los Angeles County.

Board of Supervisors

Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath, Third District and Board Chair

Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, First District

Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell, Second District

Supervisor Janice Hahn, Fourth District

Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Fifth District

Board Advisory Committee Members

County Executive Office Anti–Racism, Inclusion, and Diversity Initiative (ARDI)

Liberty Hill Foundation

Anchor CBOs

Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement

Active San Gabriel Valley

East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

Pacoima Beautiful

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy

County Departments Interviewed Los Angeles County Planning

Chief Executive Office, Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative

Chief Executive Office, Chief Sustainability Office

Los Angeles County Consumer and Business Affairs

Department of Economic Opportunity

Department of Public Health

Department of Beaches and Harbors

Los Angeles County Development Authority

Department of Arts and Culture

Internal Services Department

Department of Parks and Recreation

Stakeholders Interviewed

Accelerate Resilience L.A.

CDTech

Communities for a Better Environment

Center for Community Investment

Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians

Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians - Kizh Nation

Gabrielino-Tongvah Nation

Inclusive Action

Investing in Place

Los Angeles Waterkeeper

National Health Foundation

Prevention Institute

River Project

Rivers and Mountains Conservancy

Sacred Places Institute

Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education

UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies



For more information about the Los Angeles County Public Works Equity in Infrastructure Initiative, visit **equity.pw.lacounty.gov**

