

BUILDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR RACIALLY JUST CO-GOVERNANCE



Building an Enabling Environment for Racially Just Co-Governance

This resource is a supplement to the Co-Governance Tool for a Multiracial Democracy. Use this to analyze whether your existing environment will help co-governance efforts succeed.

Key Terms

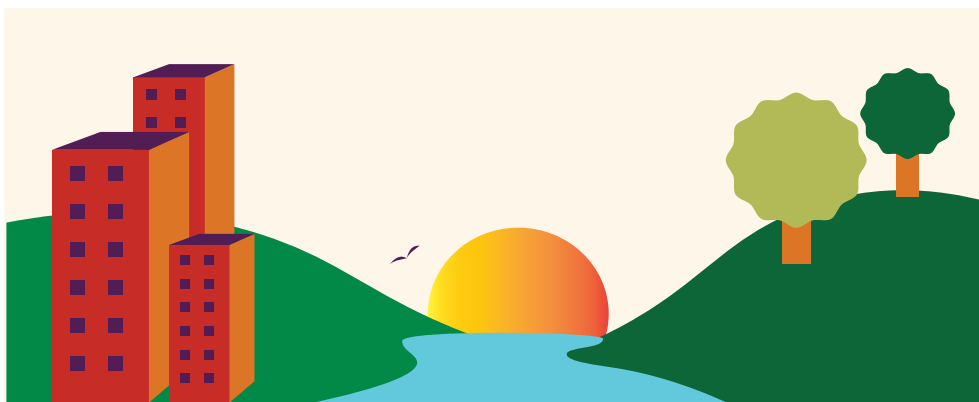
An **enabling environment** is a set of conditions that helps someone or something succeed. Think about an enabling environment as the water you swim in if you're a fish. The fish thrive if the water is clean and full of nutrients and sunlight. If the water is polluted or full of trash, the fish will struggle.



To advance a multiracial democracy, an **enabling environment for co-governance** is a set of conditions and current context that either helps or hinders successful partnerships between community and government to drive racial justice and deepen multiracial democracy moving forward.

Racial justice is a pursuit toward a vision and transformation of society to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation that ensures communities that have been most harmed by systemic racism have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive.

Racially just co-governance calls for sharing power and centering community leadership and impact, particularly with people who are most harmed by structural racism and systems of inequity.



Why do we need a strong enabling environment?

The strength of our environment helps build a strong foundation for success. We are stronger when we:

- » Understand the “water in which we’re swimming” to help us make more strategic decisions.
- » Know some of the advantages or challenges we will face on the co-governance journey.
- » Ensure all team members are aligned on the processes and systems to help us navigate difficulties



We often talk about “the table” when we discuss co-governance. Why? Because a table is where decisions are made, where community partners sit, where information is brought and shared. The table represents the infrastructure that holds the relationships that make up a co-governance effort.

How do we assess the strength of our enabling environment?

Stakeholders	Components to Consider	Key Questions to Answer
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strong leadership & commitment (senior staff buy-in, interagency coordination, dedicated staff, etc.) » Adequate city resources (money, political, staff capacity, etc.) » Effective culture of learning and capacity building around racial justice. » Existing equitable decision-making practices (Equity assessments, use of disaggregated data, setting goals and measuring progress, etc.)—The goal of justice is the all—it’s about helping everyone get to a shared outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Do you have the buy-in of your senior leadership? (mayor, commissioner, city manager, etc.) » What commitment do you need from senior leaders to succeed? (time/space for the work, public or private endorsement, support when there are conflicts with other teams, etc.) » Are government staff and management committed to advancing racial justice? Do they have the skills and competencies to do so? What resources do you have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff time? <input type="checkbox"/> Money/funding lines? <input type="checkbox"/> Political backing? » What systems/practices do you have in place for making more equitable decisions?

Stakeholders	Components to Consider	Key Questions to Answer
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strong community organizing & power-building » Effective community governance practices » Adequate community resources » Sufficient community alignment on priorities » Strong power & influence of community groups in city/county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How are you connected to other community organizing and member-based organizations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What structures do you have to keep folks updated? Do you have an open line of communication? <input type="checkbox"/> What lines of accountability do you have to people in the community? » Is this issue and effort something you and your partners are able and willing to spend time on when balancing other projects and competing priorities? » What support do you have from residents most impacted that this issue is a priority for them? » How are you sharing power within your community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are residents able to be part of decision-making? » What resources do you have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff time? <input type="checkbox"/> Money? <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing support? <input type="checkbox"/> Coalitions? » Who can you influence to ensure the work keeps going? Whose “ear” do you have? (city council member? business leader? state rep?)

What do we do once we have determined the strength of the enabling environment?

Based on your team discussion of the questions above, you may have landed on one of the following three categories for your environment:

Weak

The team is missing some significant components of a strong environment. There is significant concern that you may not be ready.

Suggestion: Focus on building a stronger environment as a first step. Drawing from a strong environment can help ensure the table is strong.

Average

Some areas of the environment are weak, some are strong and ready to launch a project together.

Suggestion: Identify key areas you think the group should build/strengthen. Given this, are you ready to move forward? Or should you try to strengthen the environment?

Strong

Most of the components above were answered in ways that indicate there is a strong environment to support success.

Suggestion: Great! You have a lot to draw from. But remember, equity is not a point in time; it's a process. Check in along the way to ensure that the strength in the environment is still there.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need everything on the list above before we start our co-governance effort?

- » No. This resource is designed to help you think and plan; it is not a set of requirements or a checklist. We encourage the full team to be part of brainstorming answers to the above questions.
- » If you determine elements of your enabling environment are weak, this means you will have a challenge you need to overcome. Determining how you will work toward strengthening and supporting areas of weakness is key to the success of your initiative.

Is there one element listed above that is more important than the others?

- » Not necessarily. Talk to your team to decide. It will depend on the work you're trying to accomplish and the context you are working in.

What do I do if there is a key element of my ideal enabling environment missing?

- » Name it and organize with your partners to strategize on how to work together to develop or strengthen elements that are missing.
- » Example: If the issue is financial, consider how you can weave together resources to create a “bigger” collective pot that can help meet critical needs. Consider government resources/grants, philanthropic funding, community investments, in-kind resources, etc.
- » Example: If the issue is “buy-in,” consider developing a narrative and/or communications strategy to raise awareness of the importance of the problem/opportunity you are working on.



Practice Scenarios

These fictional scenarios are designed to help you think through potential situations that may arise related to an enabling environment. We encourage you to work together as a team in thinking through how you would respond if this happened.

“Missing Mayor” - Imagine you have a coalition with city administrative staff and community representatives at the table willing to work on a transportation issue, but you find out the mayor isn’t supportive. How might that impact your ability to move forward? What are some ideas of what you could do?

“Fractured Community” - There is a lot of support for more affordable housing in your city, and the city is ready to collaborate with community to design a solution. One coalition of community members supports prioritizing more rental housing, and a separate coalition wants to prioritize more affordable homeownership. How do you address this division?

“Differing Definitions” - Your community and government partners have agreed to work together, and that everyone shares a value of centering equity, but at the first meeting, you realize there are different understandings of equity. What would you do?

“Stakeholder Confusion” - Your co-governance table has been meeting for two months. One stakeholder at the table doesn’t understand racial equity, and you feel like you have to revisit and teach content at each meeting, which is slowing progress and making other members frustrated. How would you address this individual?

“Shifting Priorities” - When the team is first formed, all stakeholders are aligned on the need to prioritize environmental justice issues through a co-governance strategy. After 8 months of working together and making progress, however, buses of migrants begin arriving. The government staff has to start prioritizing support for these new arrivals. What can you do? What if the priorities shift among community members instead of the government?