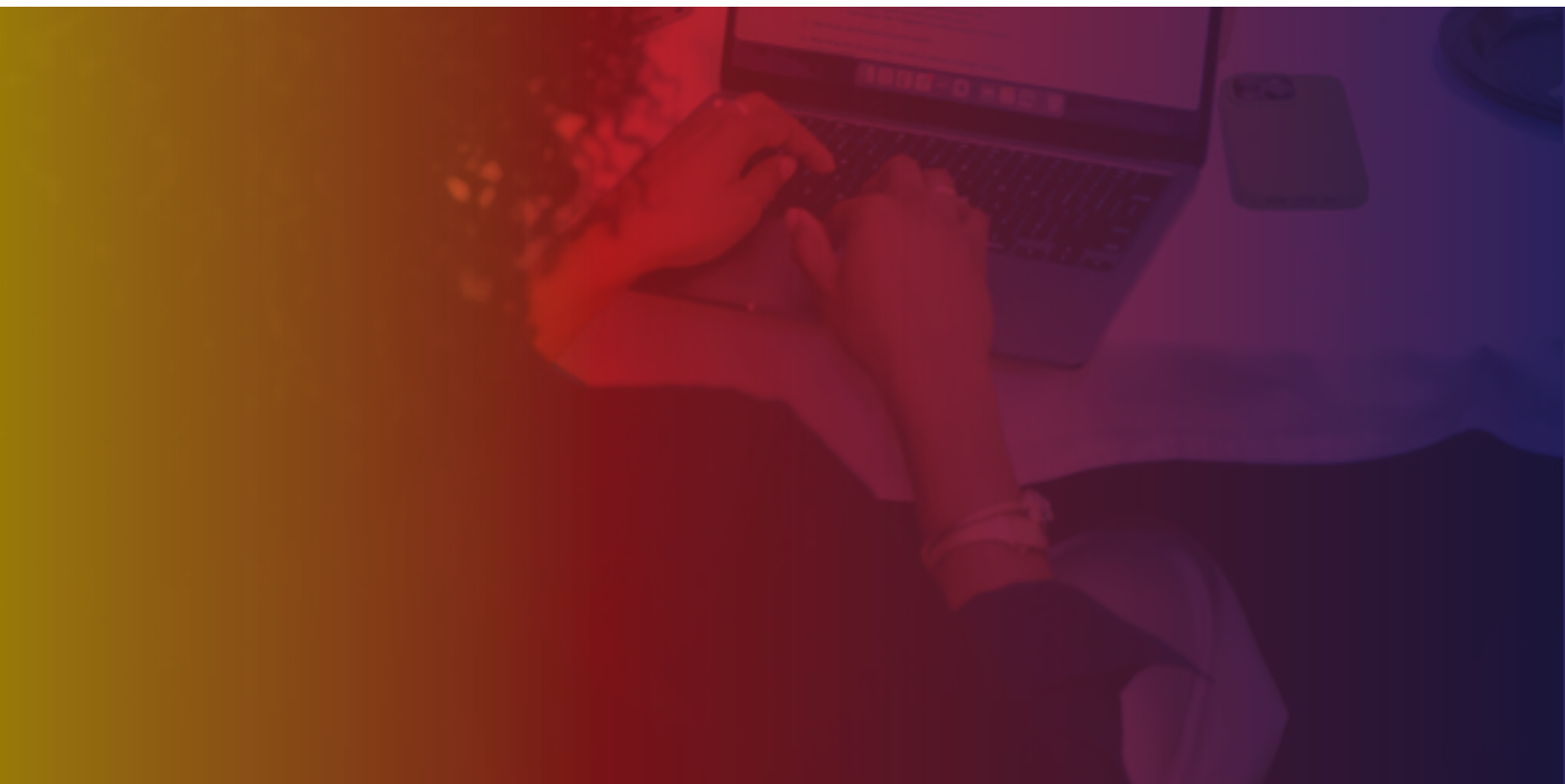




# CO-GOVERNANCE TOOL FOR A MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY

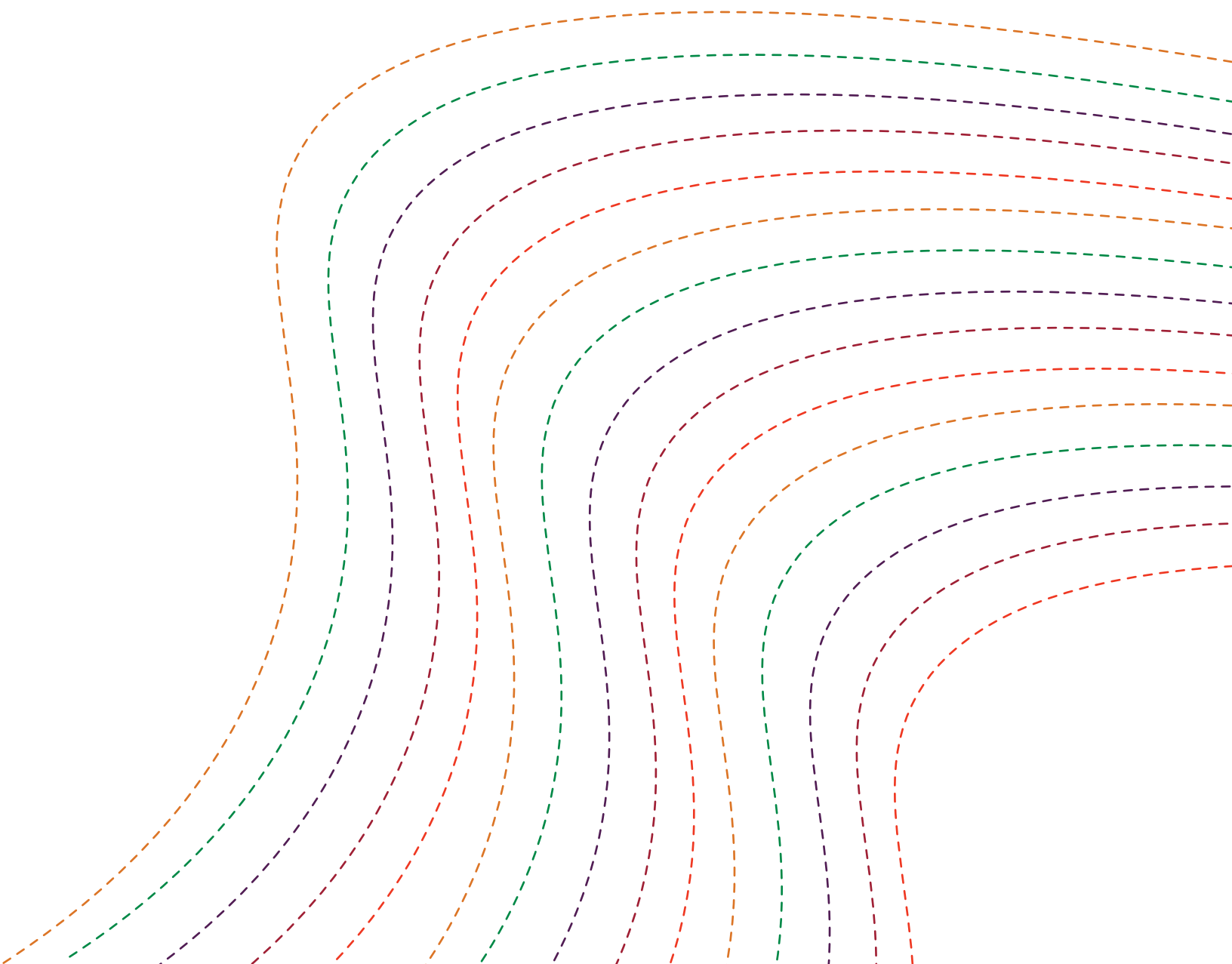


A guide for designing cross-sector  
collaborations rooted in racial justice



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## Introduction

**Co-governance is a collection of participatory models and practices in which government and communities intentionally aim to share power to drive fair and just outcomes.** This can work through formal and informal structures that support collective policy decisions, co-create programs to meet community needs, and foster accountability in implementation. When rooted in racial justice, co-governance is more than a mashup of the concepts of collaboration and governance. 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 Co-Governance tool?

**Co-governance is a concept that thinkers and doers across our movement for justice have increasingly found valuable in their efforts to transform processes and outcomes.** There are a growing number of reports, case studies, and research designed to help those engaged in cross-sector organizing, policy-making and systems design. In our review, what was missing from the field was a robust resource aimed at supporting practitioners in the question of "how." How do you share power in decision making? How do you organize meetings so that they are productive toward a shared goal? How do we navigate conflict and challenges that will inevitably come up? This is why the team at Race Forward has worked diligently to introduce a new "Co-Governance Tool for a Multiracial Democracy" to our community of practitioners.

**The goal of this tool is to offer a guided set of considerations and resources to support leaders across government and community in the process of designing structures, relationships, and agreements that allow cross-sector collaborations to successfully unite their power to drive transformative, equitable results.** Drawing on the collective power of our community, this tool offers new thoughts and ideas generated from the Race Forward team, as well as highlights work that has been established by organizations and thought leaders across our field. By bringing these resources together, we hope that this new tool guides practitioners through a design process that results in a stronger civic infrastructure to drive change that improves conditions and outcomes for all of our communities.



# What does a Co-Governance tool help us create?

*This tool aims to help leaders across government and community work together to develop formal and informal structures, agreements, and relationships that support a “table” that is connected to cross-sector work aimed at building equitable change that communities can feel.*

## The Concept of “The Table”



The table is both a metaphor and a literal embodiment of a structure that allows collaboration and shared-decision making. The imagery of the table allows us to envision who sits at the table, meaning who is represented and included in our deliberative processes. It also calls into question who is not seated at the table, and thus lacking direct access to decisions made in co-governance relationships. It makes us think about what information is shared at the table and who has access to it and how information is a form of power and privilege. It can also be thought of as the gathering place where our cross-sector roles, responsibilities, perspectives, talents and resources meet with the intention of doing more together than we can do on our own.

This Co-Governance Tool should primarily be seen as a support to teams that are trying to figure out the question, **“How do we design our co-governance relationship?”**

## How do we use the Co-Governance tool?

*The “Co-Governance Tool for a Multiracial Democracy” is designed as a series of steps and considerations that community and government leaders can work through together to help them determine the best structures, agreements, and processes needed to support their cross-sector collaboration.*

<b>PRESTEP</b>	Determine readiness for engaging in co-governance
<b>STEP 1</b>	Align on the problem/opportunity
<b>STEP 2</b>	Design participation and inclusion at the table
<b>STEP 3</b>	Determine how decisions are made/the table functions
<b>STEP 4</b>	Define success
<b>STEP 5</b>	Build collective accountability
<b>FINAL STEP</b>	Build a shared governing document

The Co-Governance tool does not have to be used linearly or comprehensively. It can be used at the beginning of a design process to plan; it can be used during an ongoing process to help assess strengths and opportunities; or it can be used in retrospect to analyze what happened and determine lessons learned. We also include set of supporting resources that have been established by partners from across the field and from our team at Race Forward. We encourage leaders to access these publicly available resources and reach out to us or our partners when more dedicated support is needed.

### As teams work through the tool, keep in mind:

- » Co-governance is about sharing power - not just government making decisions or shifting the responsibility of decision making to community. It is about all parties coming together to share the problem and co-create solutions.
- » Co-governance is a promising strategy, but may not be ideal for your current context. Start with an assessment of how willing, ready, and able your team is to engage in co-governance.
- » Creating co-governance relationships involves thinking outward about the impact you hope to have and inward about the ways your partners work together. To support teams in considering both external and internal dynamics, the following icons will help teams recognize the shifts throughout:

#### INTERNAL

An icon with arrows pointing inward indicates the question is focused on internal dynamics and aims to help teams consider the people, processes, and power within the collaborative partnership.

#### EXTERNAL

An icon with arrows pointed outward signals the question is focused on external dynamics and raises considerations about the impact the collaborative partnership wants to make.

# Pre-Step

## Determine readiness for engaging in co-governance

To understand whether we are ready to build a successful co-governance table, it is helpful to collectively determine if we have the right conditions for co-governing for racial justice.

**A**

### Are all of us committed to advancing racial justice?



- » Have we explicitly stated and shared our commitments and rationales for advancing racial justice?
- » Have we normalized the conversation around racial justice among our partners?
- » Do we have a shared list of values and alignment on what change we are trying to make?

**B**

### How strong are relationships between government and community?



- » Can we identify some examples of effective community/government relationships that you want to model or build from?
- » Are there particular issues (historical or present) that may impact the success of this work?
- » Do we have a shared understanding of the purpose and value of community engagement?

**C**

### Are we ready to use co-governance to advance racial justice?



- » What are our strengths and weaknesses in supporting a cross-sector collaboration?
- » Do members share an understanding and commitment to co-governance? Have we discussed the difference between co-governance and other strategies for collaboration?
- » Is there collective commitment to power building and power sharing moving forward?

# Step 1

## Align on the problem/opportunity

Alignment and clarity about the problem/opportunity is important to building a strong foundation for our table. Taking time to get clear about the problem will save our team a lot of time and increase the likelihood of success.

### A What is the problem we're trying to solve? Or, what is the opportunity we're trying to create?



- » What does change look like? Who needs to be better off by solving this problem?
- » How did we get here? We should do a systemic racism root cause analysis.
- » Why are we working on this problem/opportunity now? What is the status quo?
- » What governing power are we focused on impacting? (i.e. implementation practices, enforcement efforts, data collection, policy decisions, court decisions, etc.)

### B Can a co-governance strategy help address our problem/opportunity?



- » Is there a need for a dynamic, adaptive solution? (ideal for co-governance) Or, is this about improving a standard practice/process/service? (not ideal for co-governance)
- » Is it essential that multiple parties to come together to solve the problem at hand?
- » Are we able and willing to involve multiple stakeholders in designing the solution?
- » What is the value of engaging in a co-governance strategy for our group? For the people we want to impact?



## Step 2

### Design participation and inclusion at the table

When we decide who participates, it should reflect different ways people are impacted by the problem and what power and resources they bring to solve the problem. It is equally important that everyone who participates is committed to centering communities negatively impacted by the issues at hand. This will require all of us to be intentional in assessing and shifting traditional power dynamics that will impact our table both internally and externally.

#### A Who has been most impacted by this problem given current structural inequities?



- » What data will we collect and look at?
  - Make sure to disaggregate by race/ethnicity, etc.
- » What disparities and inequities do we see in the numbers?
- » What patterns of harm and inequities do we see in community narratives/feedback?
- » Who has access to key information we are missing?

#### B What do we need to solve the problem?



- » What would it take to build our solution?
- » What power do members of the table bring?
  - Let's consider experience, expertise, authority, influence, relationships, networks, talents/skills, perspectives/insights, resources, etc.
- » What power is missing from our table? How do we get access or connection to it?
- » Understanding the goal is to drive racial justice, who at our table represents communities that are most impacted by the issue at hand? Are they positioned and funded to help drive change at the table?
- » Given the people and power at our table, what can our collective do best/most powerfully together? What's the unique value-add of this collaboration?

# Step 3

## Determine how decisions are made

We will be intentional in building and sharing power at the table. This will take explicit agreements, practices, and norms that may challenge traditional systems and might initially be uncomfortable to embrace. This is a critical muscle for us to build as a team.

### A How do we build shared power?



- » Do we have a shared vision of what racially equitable leadership looks like?
- » What expertise and assets does each party bring to the table?
- » How will we collectively center people who are closest to the issue at hand?
- » How will we collectively stay proximate to people most impacted by the issue at hand?
- » Are we working together to ensure that all participants have what they need to fully participate?
- » How can we share/shift power to include folks who come with less positional power?
- » How will we educate one another on how our organizations work?
- » How will we build relationships across members, particularly across lines of difference?
- » What capacity building needs to be done at the table?

### B How will we make decisions that more equitably balance power dynamics?



- » How will we make collective decisions?
  - We need to consider models such as consensus, delegation, voting, etc.
- » What authority does this table have? Where is this authority coming from?
- » How will we consider and incorporate different viewpoints?
- » Who has access to key information to make decisions?
- » What information and data is being shared at the table?
- » What routine protocols, agreements, and structures will keep us accountable over time?
- » How are we structuring working groups/committees to ensure diverse perspectives?

### C How do our decisions support healing?



- » How is the issue we are focused on connected to structural racism? How is the solution we are working toward connected to remedying systemic inequities?
- » How will we support healing and repair for both the stakeholders at the table and the communities we are trying to impact?
- » How will we build and sustain trust, understanding, legitimacy, and commitment?

## Step 4

### Define success

We need to set clear expectations of how we will define success both internally in our collaboration and externally for our community. It is important to consider the effectiveness of how our table can drive impact, how stakeholders are valued and engaged, and the collective buy-in of our decision making.



#### How will we know if we're advancing towards a meaningful and impactful solution?



- » What are the results we're aiming for? Is everyone at our table aligned?
  - Consider:
    - How much did we do?
    - # people served/ organizations engaged
    - # activities/services/ resources delivered
  - How well did we do it?
    - % common progress measures (i.e. % of target population served)
    - % activity specific measures (% attendance rate, reach, learning growth, etc.)
  - Is our most impacted/target population better off?
    - positive change in skills / knowledge acquired
    - positive change in resources/information/power accessed
    - positive changes in attitude / opinion
    - positive changes in behavior
    - positive changes in circumstance (in stable housing, job rate, etc.)



#### How will we make decisions that more equitably balance power dynamics?



- » How engaged are all table members in this work?
  - We can consider using surveys to collect feedback on sentiments and attitudes, tracking meeting participation, analyzing who is stepping into leadership opportunities, etc.
- » How are members' skills and capacity growing through this collaboration?
- » Are we building greater trust among members?
- » Can people see their contributions in the work?
- » Are we able to effectively influence decisions?
- » Are we able to effectively negotiate, iterate, and compromise?
- » Does our table result in increased resources and influence for participants who are most impacted?

# Step 5

## Build collective accountability

It's important for us to understand that a co-governance table, like many collaborations, is not something we can set up initially and trust it will move forward without internal and external challenge, conflict, and misalignment. It is critical for our sustainability to consider what mechanisms of support and resolution will be in place to keep our table accountable for living into our values and driving toward impact.



### Is everyone bought in? How do we know?



- » How do we celebrate wins together? How do we build momentum and a sense of progress?
- » How do we ensure all members stay supportive, even when the going is tough?
- » How do we ensure an equitable distribution of labor and time?
- » How do we ensure that all members feel purposeful and that they are making meaningful contributions to the work?



### When things don't go as planned, how will we address challenges and solve problems together?



- » How effectively are we at navigating conflict?
  - Conflict is inevitable. The goal should not necessarily be to avoid it, but rather to lean into our values and shared agreements when it happens.
- » How will we work to resolve conflict that arises at the table?
- » How do we discuss and build resilience around challenges?
- » How do we support members who might be struggling, feeling disconnected, or facing personal life crises?
- » How do we rally after setbacks?



### How will we ensure transparency?



- » How will we ensure stakeholders know how the collaboration works and how decisions are made?
- » How will we publicly share progress and report out, particularly to residents most impacted by the problem?

# Final Step

## Build shared governing documents

The goal of this tool is to help your team consider key questions and come to agreement on a co-governing structure that works best for you.

**As you work through the steps, take notes of key takeaways and ideas for how you want to capture your agreements into final governing documents.**

***A worksheet you can use is provided in the “Resources” section of this tool.***

Remember, as your team works through this tool, your agreements should be finalized in shared documents that reflect the structure, systems, rules, expectations, and commitments made as a result of the discussions and ideas brainstormed throughout this tool. This will ensure there is a reference point to return to as needed. The form of these documents can take a number of shapes. Some potential formats to consider for inspiration are:

» Governance Charters

- Alameda County Continuum of Care.(September 2023) “EveryOne Home Governance Charter.”  
<https://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Governance-Charter.pdf>
- Center for Nonprofit Excellence.(2016) “Sample Community Coalition Charter.”  
<https://thecne.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Sample-Community-Coalition-Charter.pdf>

» Other shared agreements

- National Equity Project.“Developing Community Agreements.”  
<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/developing-community-agreements>
- Communities of Opportunity.“Community Collaboration Toolkit.”  
<https://www.coopartnerships.org/comm-collab-toolkit>
- Alliance for Justice and Bolder Advocacy. (June 2018) “Coalition Checklist.” (Page 11)  
<https://afj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BA-Coalition-Checklist-1-2.pdf>

These should be seen as ideas, not limitations! Ultimately, whatever you produce should be meaningful within the context of your team and serve as useful support in facilitation of relationships and shared power aimed at driving meaningful results.

### FINAL WORD

**Remember, democracy must work for everyone. The goal of this tool is to build bridges between community and government that help us move toward an equitable future. Stay connected at [www.raceforward.org](http://www.raceforward.org)**

# Resources

Below are resources designed to help your team answer some of the toolkit's questions. These are all free, publicly available sources from partners across the field. Remember, this is just a place to start. Your team can offer more resources that help you think through key considerations or create your own that are customized to your needs. Do what works best!

## Pre-Step: Determine readiness for engaging in co-governance

**This collection of tools aims to support you with definitions, frameworks, and shared language rooted in foundational concepts that undergird equity and collaboration**

- » Race Forward. "What is Racial Equity?" <https://www.raceforward.org/what-racial-equity-o>
- » Race Forward. Racial Equity Training Series.  
<https://www.raceforward.org/training-and-events/racial-equity-training-series>
- » Tamarack Institute. (July 2017) "The Collaboration Spectrum Tool."  
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Collaboration%20Spectrum%20Tool%20July%202017.pdf?hsLang=en-us>
- » Movement Strategy Center. "The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership." (Page 3)  
<https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf>
- » Liberatory Design. <https://www.liberatorydesign.com>
- » Race Forward. (April 2025) "Building an Enabling Environment for Racially Just Co-Governance."  
<https://www.raceforward.org/system/files/2025/05/Building-Enabling-Environment.pdf>
- » Kern, Michael and Murphy, Amanda. (2022) International Association for Conflict Management. "What Do You Expect?: Assessing Whether a Situation is "Ripe" for Collaborative Governance."  
<https://ncmr.lps.library.cmu.edu/article/429/galley/468/view/>

## Step 1: Align on the problem/opportunity

**Getting clear and on the same page about whether the problem you face is right for co-governance is an essential early step. Co-governance is not always the best strategy for every situation, especially if you don't have the commitment and resources across your partnership. These resources can support your team in getting clear and determining whether co-governance or another strategy is best to help you meet your shared goals.**

- » Race Forward. (April 2025) "Is Co-Governance Right for you?"  
<https://www.raceforward.org/system/files/2025/05/Co-Governance-Strategy.pdf>
- » USC Dornsife Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. "Changing States: A Framework for Progressive Governance." <https://changingstates.org/>

## Step 2: Design participation and inclusion at the table

Participation at your table should be shaped by a shared understanding of who is impacted by the issue at hand. This requires an analysis of both numbers and stories. There are several resources that can support you in this analysis; some are listed below. Other resources include your city and state health departments, the US Census, and local community organizations.

- » Race Forward. “Racial Equity Impact Assessment,” (2009)  
[https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment\\_v5.pdf](https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf)
- » Chicago United for Equity. “Racial Equity Impact Assessment.”  
[https://www.chicagounitedforequity.org/files/ugd/40a775\\_955535385b9942e1be1c3b9a8128c256.pdf](https://www.chicagounitedforequity.org/files/ugd/40a775_955535385b9942e1be1c3b9a8128c256.pdf)
- » PolicyLink and USC Equity Research Institute. “National Equity Atlas.”  
<https://nationalequityatlas.org>
- » Othering and Belonging Institute. “Power Analysis.” <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/power-analysis>
- » City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. (2022) “Equity Toolkit.” (Page 8)  
<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2022/bps-equity-toolkit-2022.pdf>

## Step 3: Determine how decisions are made

Being intentional about how your table makes decisions is critical. Co-governance tables require different ways of thinking about power than many traditional forms of collaboration. These resources can support your team in thinking through important choices.

- » Human Impact Partners. (April 2025) “Five Dimensions Toolkit.” (Page 28)  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OpBEWqcllVt7bEI\\_3Y45UfDu8N5Nuqoh/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OpBEWqcllVt7bEI_3Y45UfDu8N5Nuqoh/view)
- » Seeds for Change. “Consensus Decision-Making: a short guide.”  
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/shortconsensus>
- » Tamarack Community. (2017) “A Practical Guide to Consensus-Based Decision-Making”  
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Practical%20Guide%20for%20Consensus-Based%20Decision%20Making.pdf>
- » Lucid. “What is Fist to Five?” <https://www.lucidmeetings.com/glossary/fist-five>

## Healing Resources

- » Chicago Office of Equity and Racial Justice. (2022) “Chicago Year of Healing Guide.”  
<https://chicagoyearofhealing.org/#guide>
- » W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (June 2024) “Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Implementation Guidebook.” (Pages 27-30)  
<https://wkkf.issuelab.org/resource/truth-racial-healing-transformation-implementation-guidebook.html>

## Step 4: Define success

**Determining whether the work you do is having an impact is key. Co-governance strategies work to make changes in people’s lives, rebuild civic trust, and transform the relationships people have to power. This is complicated work and won’t always have immediate tangible impacts you can easily point to. However, there are still ways to demonstrate progress and ensure that partners want to continue being in relationship with one another. These tools can help you think about how you define and track success.**

- » Equity and Results. (2025) “Racial-Equity Centered Results-Based Accountability”  
<https://www.raceforward.org/system/files/2025/05/Racial-Equity-Centered-Results-Based-Accountability.pdf>
- » Race Forward. (2017) “Racial Equity: Getting to Results.”  
<https://www.racialequityalliance.org/viewdocument/racial-equity-getting-to-results-2>
- » Weaver, Liz. Tamarack Institute. “Accountability Matrix: Building an Accountability Matrix to Guide Your Collaboration.”  
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/accountability-matrix-building-an-accountability-matrix-to-guide-your-collaboration.pdf?hsLang=en-us>
- » Tamarack Institute. “Accountability Matrix Planning Canvas.”  
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Accountability-matrix-planning-canvas.pdf?hsLang=en-us>

## Step 5: Build collective accountability

**Your team will inevitably run into challenges and setbacks. How you agree to manage them will often determine whether you’re successful or not. Planning ahead for these “oops” and “ouch” moments will help make it smoother when they do occur and ultimately strengthen your partnership. These tools offer some different ways you can support all partners in building the kind of collective accountability that moves the work forward.**

- » Conflict Resolution Network. “12 Skill Summary.” <https://www.crnhq.org/12-skill-summary/>
- » Racial Equity Tools. “Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice.”  
<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/act/strategies/conflict-transformation-and-restorative-justice>
- » Collective Impact Forum. (February 2025) “Responding to Threats and Challenges Planning Tool.”  
<https://collectiveimpactforum.org/resource/responding-to-threats-and-challenges-planning-tool/>

## Final Step: Build shared governing documents

**Your team should record takeaways and ideas, come to a set of agreements, and write them into final governing documents.**

- » WORKSHEET for Co-Governance Tool for a Multiracial Democracy  
<https://www.raceforward.org/system/files/2025/05/Co-Governance-Tool-Worksheet.pdf>

# Acknowledgements

## Writers

Race Forward: Candace Moore  
LBurd LLC: Lauren Burdette

## Contributors

Partners for Dignity and Rights: Ben Palmquist and Kesi Foster  
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Race Forward: Cathy Albisa, Terrence Keleher, Ryan Curren, Jesse Villalobos, Nia Davis, Julie Nelson

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## Key References

Emerson, Kirk and Nabatchi, Tina. "Collaborative Governance Regimes" (2015)  
Urban Sustainability Director's Network & Kapwa Consulting  
Demos Economic Democracy Project and Case Studies  
New America Co-Governance Project

## Connections? Questions? Ideas?

We are eager to learn how this tool is supporting work in your local community! Please stay connected!

Visit our webpage at: [www.raceforward.org/place-based](http://www.raceforward.org/place-based)

Email us at: [place-based@raceforward.org](mailto:place-based@raceforward.org)

