

Established by Mayor Muriel Bowser in 2021, the Office of Racial Equity (ORE) focuses on developing an infrastructure for policy decisions and District Government programs to be evaluated through a racial equity lens.¹ To close racial equity gaps and improve the quality of life for all residents, ORE's racial equity theory of change is to:²

- Normalize the concept of racial equity within District Government by establishing a shared racial equity vocabulary and understanding of racial equity in policy and operations contexts through training and technical support.
- Organize to advance racial equity by meaningfully engaging community members and District Government partners to build internal and external capacity for change.
- Operationalize the use of racial equity tools that support District agencies as they incorporate and strengthen equitable practices in government operations.
- Assess the District Government's progress toward a more racially equitable Washington, DC by developing and tracking indicators of change across a wide range of issue areas.

ORE works to normalize, organize, and operationalize racial equity through the District's budget formulation process by promoting investments that hold the most promise to close racial equity gaps.

Normalize and Organize

ORE developed the Racial Equity Budget Tool (REBT) to help District agencies identify and develop budget proposals with the greatest potential to close known racial equity gaps. The REBT was first used in the FY 2023 budget. The term "REBT" refers to both the document and the process; it is a set of questions which requires agencies to purposefully consider disparate outcomes by race and ethnicity, focus on evidence, and encourage community input and involvement. The REBT also serves as the basis for ORE's review of agency budget proposals through a racial equity lens.

The REBT was developed through research on promising practices from other jurisdictions, academic literature, and conversations and prototyping with District Government partners to ensure the REBT is evidence-based and integrates seamlessly into the DC Government's existing budget process. REBT questions are reexamined annually to make small revisions, as needed.

Operationalize and Assess

ORE works with the Office of Budget and Performance Management (OBPM) to operationalize a racial equity lens across the District's budget formulation process. ORE presents the REBT during the annual Budget Camp Kickoff meetings and meets with individual agency teams throughout the budget formulation process to provide technical support and reinforce the use of a racial equity lens at the individual agency level.

Once agency budget proposals are submitted, ORE provides a technical review of agency budget submissions and makes recommendations to the City Administrator. ORE's review process helps standardize practices across the DC Government and track budget investments in advancing racial equity.

Racial Equity Budget Tool

The REBT contains six questions to help agencies keep racial equity at the forefront of their budget formulation process. The questions are included in the required documents each agency submits to OBPM as part of its budget packet.

The first two questions ask about the expected impact of the agency's budget on racial equity overall:

- What are your agency's racial equity priorities and how does [this year's] budget request help the agency address those priorities? Please list 2-3 priorities and expected outcomes of any enhancement requests in [this year's] submission.
- What constraints most inhibit your agency's ability to advance racial equity? Please list any agency budget enhancements [from this year] that directly address these constraints.

The remaining questions focus on the racial equity impact of individual budget enhancements requested by each agency:

- What racial inequity would this budget enhancement help to address? (i.e., a health disparity, educational gap, disproportionality in housing, bolstering existing community resources, etc.). Please be as specific as possible.
- What is the rationale for addressing the inequity in this way and/or with this program? (For example, is the enhancement in response to a legislative requirement or mandate, community engagement efforts, demographic data, or something else?)
- In what ways have you meaningfully involved internal and external community stakeholders in the development of your agency's budget request, including staff and communities who will be most impacted by it, if funded? (For a copy of the Meaningful Community Engagement Guide, please visit [ORE's website](#).)
- If this budget enhancement could potentially cause unintended benefits or burdens, please detail which groups of residents or communities might be positively or negatively impacted, including by race and ethnicity. (For example, the location for a new airport in a majority Black neighborhood could disrupt traffic patterns and create noise and air pollution that impact residents in the immediate vicinity and potentially worsen racial health inequities.)

Agencies that do not have racial equity-related enhancements are still expected to include summaries of their racial equity-focused work in their budget presentations to the City Administrator.

Enhancement Review Methodology

ORE developed a budget enhancement review methodology which it piloted in the FY 2023 Budget cycle. Based on the justification criteria laid out in the REBT, ORE reviews budget enhancements against four touchstones:

- The strength and quality of the evidence presented;
- A clear link between the proposal's potential benefits and known equity gaps;
- Discussion of potential unintended consequences; and
- The role of community engagement in the development of the agency's budget request.

ORE classifies each enhancement's potential to impact racial equity as either: strong justification to advance racial equity, moderate justification, promising justification, or demonstrates a rationale. Enhancements which are out of scope for ORE review are marked as not applicable, e.g., software license renewals. All other agency budget requests are provided with a classification and review narrative.

In instances where agency-provided evidence is insufficient to assess potential racial equity impacts, ORE may conduct additional agency outreach and desk research. Agencies which provide insufficient evidence are often limited by a lack of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, particularly in instances where enhancements are prospective and work has not yet started.

Notes:

¹ In its simplest form, a racial equity lens is a set of questions we ask in decision-making processes to bring the lived experiences of people who have been impacted by racism and those who will be most affected by the decision into the conversation.

² The Office of Racial Equity's theory of change is based on the systems change approach developed by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity ([GARE](#)), a national partnership between Race Forward and the University of California at Berkeley's Othering & Belonging Institute.