

Community Solidarity & Healing Through Action and Policies



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March 2026

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Introduction

Since the inception of this country, policies, practices, and laws have been used to enforce a false hierarchy of human value based on race and perceived difference to discriminate against marginalized communities. Such policies and practices have direct effects on the health of individuals and communities. For more than half a century, a number of impactful strides have been made to advance the goal of racial equity and justice at the local and state levels, but there is more work to be done. This *Community Solidarity & Healing Through Action and Policies* brief serves as an update to the foundational [2021 Healing Through Policy briefs](#) which was completed in partnership with the [American Public Health Association](#) and [de Beaumont Foundation](#). This update spotlights the exceptional, creative work done by leaders across the country over the past five years to foster healing and equity in alignment with the five pillars of the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation strategic framework:

1. Narrative Change
2. Racial Healing & Relationship Building
3. Separation
4. Law
5. Economy

This updated brief celebrates promising policies and practices that center solidarity, equity, truth-telling, and community-led solutions.

At a time when federal policies are shifting away from supporting racial and health equity and when access to critical federal datasets is compromised, this updated brief amplifies the importance of racial healing and supporting efforts at the community level. The National Collaborative for Health Equity sees the value in uplifting stories of success during a tumultuous time of political uncertainty and threats to racial and social justice.

Unfortunately, in some cases, racial and health equity programs and policies have been both intended and unintended casualties of the many federal actions taken since January 2025 that seek to limit or eliminate activities related to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA). While executive orders are typically applied to internal operations of federal agencies, the practices of the current administration have resulted in widespread anticipatory (and sometimes unnecessary) over-compliance by some state and local government agencies, non-profit organizations and private sector organizations, particularly those that have federal grants or contracts. There are many lawsuits challenging the legality of the orders; some have resulted in blocks or temporary rescission of some federal orders. For more information on these executive orders and implications for public health, see this resource from [ACT for Public Health](#).

We hope that this policy brief will provide inspiration and guidance to leaders committed to supporting racial healing and health equity.

1.

Narrative Change

According to the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) implementation guide, the concept of narrative change refers to the fact that the human brain is hardwired to capture stories and associated images to construct both conscious and implicit meaning and beliefs. Stories make up our individual and collective narratives about reality. Achieving racial equity and healing from the trauma of centuries of legal, institutional, and structural racial hierarchy requires transforming our experiences, stories, and understandings. We must create new narratives about the equal and inherent value of all humanity. Since the publication of the **2021 *Healing Through Policy* briefs**, we've experienced substantial societal changes in a post-COVID era. As of 2025, changes in the federal administration have created policy environments that are hostile to racial equity, health equity, and social justice initiatives. Changes at the federal level have also

impacted access to and the quality of public federal datasets, which has affected hundreds of racial and health equity leaders across the country.

This overview builds on the foundational work of the existing *Healing Through Policy* briefs by revisiting the progress of policies and practices previously highlighted. It also provides stories of success with current policies and practices that leaders can adopt to support racial healing and equity through narrative change. To this overview, we have also added recommendations on ways to safeguard federal data in recognition of the fact that these are tumultuous times that require a collective effort. While the practices and policies discussed in these briefs focus on local efforts, changes in federal data systems, policies, and practices have significant implications for local public health jurisdictions and communities.



Policies and Practices under the *Narrative Change* Pillar

- Declarations of racism as a public health crisis at the state, city, or local level
- Implementing racial impact assessments, frameworks, and other systems to achieve accountability
- Redesigning public spaces to honor shared histories
- Disaggregating racial and ethnic data



Stories of Success

Narrative Change Embeds Racial Equity into Institutional Fabric

Listening sessions and a survey of American Public Health Association members and state affiliates in summer 2025 revealed that narrative change strategies have been essential for embedding health and racial equity into organizations. This has helped to protect and, in some cases, deepen the work, even in hostile environments. Specifically, public health professionals from state and local government, as well as non-governmental organizations, noted that having declared racism a public health crisis facilitated building the infrastructure and internal capacity that allows them to continue their health and racial equity work at similar or slightly reduced capacity. In addition, the following practices to embed racial equity into institutional structures were referenced as efforts that are continuing:

- Racial equity impact assessments
- Health equity policy frameworks
- Integrating racial equity into strategic plans
- Related staff evaluations a lens for all decision making

Listening session participants and survey respondents also noted that many of these activities were not dependent on external funding, and, in some cases, were previously integrated into organizational budgets in demonstration of the commitment to advancing health and racial equity.

Declarations of racism as a public health crisis

- As of 2025, more than 268 state and local leaders have declared racism to be a public health crisis or emergency.¹ This is up from 200 in 2020 and 250 in 2022, showing that racism is an issue that local and state leaders have continuously been identifying as harmful to their constituents.
- As described above, in the summer of 2025, the American Public Health Association hosted listening sessions with its members to learn about the impacts of federal restrictions on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and the status of their health and racial equity work. Several participants from state and local government, as well as non-governmental organizations, noted that having a declaration of racism as a public health crisis has helped to preserve and protect their work in the space.

Implementing racial impact assessments, frameworks, and systems to achieve accountability

- In the time since the previous policy brief, more cities around the U.S. have created Racial and Social Equity Action Plans. San Jose, California's 2024–26 Racial and Social Equity Action Plans² and Culver City, California's 2024 Racial Equity Action Plan³ include actionable steps toward achieving racial equity, such as engaging with the community to learn about important issues, stakeholder convenings, and reviews of current city policies and processes.

Embedding these systems of accountability has helped to preserve efforts to advance racial equity even as funding and resources have been reduced or eliminated.

Redesigning public spaces to honor shared histories

- In 2025, Georgia State University was granted a \$500,000 Mellon Foundation grant to develop archival, historical, and cultural research to protect Gullah Geechee heritage and communities in Georgia and South Carolina.⁴ The Gullah Geechee people are descendants of formerly enslaved West Africans forced to work on the coastal plantations of the southern U.S. and remained on the land after the Emancipation Proclamation.
- Cities like Williamsburg, Virginia, and Montgomery, Alabama, have taken steps to erect monuments honoring African Americans throughout history. The monument entitled, “The Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved,” erected in 2022, honors and brings awareness of the African Americans enslaved by the College of William & Mary,⁵ and the Mothers of Gynecology Monument honors the many women, among them Anarcha Westcott, Betsey, and Lucy, whose bodies were used to advance the science of gynecology without their consent.⁶
- The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, tells the story of American slavery and its legacy by traveling through 400 years of history from enslavement to mass incarceration through first-person historical accounts, interactive content, and a world-class art gallery.⁷

- In 2025, many higher education institutions were under attack by the federal government to force them to discontinue Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies and related offices that support staff and students.⁸ Despite receiving threats to have funding pulled from these schools, many of them refused to close their DEI offices. This points to a systemic shift in these institutions; they find that the value of DEI is something worth fighting for in uncertain times.

Disaggregating racial and ethnic data

- Many states have begun to disaggregate racial and ethnic data in order to identify the unique needs of populations that are often obscured by the current data collection standards. In 2025, 13 states passed laws that require the disaggregation of racial and ethnic data.⁹
 - California expanded its laws to require state agencies to collect disaggregated data for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. The state has also passed a law requiring the disaggregation of data between Latino groups and Mesoamerican Indigenous nations by 2028.⁹
 - In 2023, Illinois passed a law requiring all state agencies that collect racial and ethnic data to include the ethnic category of “Middle Eastern or North African” (MENA). The adoption of this law was led by Arab American Family Services of Illinois, which worked with legislators and elected officials over decades to revise this law to the point of implementation.⁹
 - New York State passed a law in 2024 to require the disaggregation of MENA from the category of “white” among state agencies. This is in addition to the state’s existing law that disaggregates Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders among state agencies.⁹

Safeguarding Federally Collected Data to Preserve our Stories

Data is an important asset for supporting change in policy and practice, and data collected at the federal level is often utilized at the local and state levels. In 2025, the federal administration cut funding to federal government datasets that do not follow the arbitrary regulations instated by the administration through executive orders, such as erasing language relating to DEI. Noncompliance has resulted in suspension of publicly accessible federal datasets until they are revised to align with the administration's requirements. Staffing cuts have resulted in reductions in staff skilled in reviewing and interpreting data, compromising the credibility and reliability of some data sources. This is further compounded by the existing distrust of federal data, especially from marginalized groups who have been historically harmed by the misuse of their data.



Looking Forward

Narrative change is necessary to achieving racial equity, yet the current federal administration is committed to erasing shared histories in favor of a white-washed history. To prevent this, we must continue the work done to promote narrative change. More schools, workplaces, and institutions need to fearlessly commit to DEI policies to support their employees and those that they provide services to. Residents and leaders should work with their local or state government to implement systems of accountability with achievable measures of success like Racial Equity Plans. We must all safeguard data that is important to achieving racial equity goals.



Additional Resources

- [Reconstruction Era National Historic Network](#)
- [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#)
- [Diversity Data Kids](#)
- [Government Alliance on Race and Equity \(GARE\)](#)
- [Living Cities: Narrative Change working group](#)
- [Open Society Foundations: "Building Narrative Power for Racial Justice and Health Equity"](#)
- [Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#)
- [Center for American Progress: "A 21st Century Privacy Act: Ending the Exploitation of Unlawfully Obtained Government Data"](#)
- [50 State Scan of Laws and Bills to Apply REIAs to legislative decisions](#)

2.

Racial Healing & Relationship Building

The Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) framework defines “to heal” as to restore to wholeness, to repair damage, and to set right. Healing a societal racial divide requires acknowledging the wrongs of the past, while also addressing the consequences of those

wrongs. Racial healing involves focusing on ways for all of us to heal from the wounds of the past, to build mutually respectful relationships across racial, ethnic and religious lines that honor and value each person’s humanity, and to build trusting intergenerational and diverse community relationships that better reflect our

shared humanity. Racial healing is a precursor to meaningful and sustainable policy change. Since the creation of the [2021 Healing Through Policy briefs](#), we’ve experienced substantial societal changes in a post-COVID era. As of 2025, changes in the federal administration have created policy environments that are not supportive of racial equity, health equity, and social justice initiatives. This overview builds on the foundational work of the existing briefs by revisiting the progress of policies and practices highlighted previously and providing stories of success with current policies and practices that leaders can adopt to support racial healing and relationship building.



Policies and Practices under the *Racial Healing & Relationship Building Pillar*

- Public acknowledgments of or apologies for systemic racial and/or health inequities
- Restorative justice practices in schools
- Building community spaces for racial healing and solidarity



Stories of Success

Public acknowledgments of or apologies for systemic racial and/or health inequities

- Since the writing of the last Racial Healing & Relationship Building policy brief, many cities and states have addressed past wrongdoings to Black and Indigenous groups and have followed suit with policy changes.
 - In 2024, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson apologized for the “historical wrongs committed against Black Chicagoans and their ancestors who have and continue to bear injustices.” The Black Reparations Task Force was also created to pursue reparations for Black Chicago residents.¹⁰
 - In 2024, California lawmakers passed a bill to atone for racism through public apologies and return land to or provide compensation for Black Americans whose properties were unjustly seized by the government. This landmark bill is a step in the right direction, and California lawmakers are continuing work with their Legislative Black Caucus to discuss funding and implementation options.¹¹

- California continued this work in 2025 by returning the ancestral lands of the Yurok Tribe that were taken over 100 years ago by timber companies.¹²
- New York City (NYC) lawmakers approved a bill in 2024 to study the city’s role in slavery and consider reparations to descendants of those who were enslaved. The bill would direct NYC’s Commission on Racial Equity to suggest remedies to the legacy of slavery and create truth and reconciliation processes to establish historical facts about slavery in the state.¹³
- In 2025, Illinois recently renewed \$4.5 million for its Healing Illinois grant, which addresses racial disparities by providing funding to organizations that are beginning or continuing work geared toward racial healing.¹⁴

Restorative justice practices in schools

- Restorative justice is an alternative to traditional discipline that focuses on repairing harm done through dialogue and collaboration between the parties involved. Because this practice often involves connecting the offender to the victim, it can be tricky to implement correctly. One school in Oakland, California, has been practicing restorative justice for years and has seen the positive outcomes of this program. After implementation, Fremont High School in Oakland has seen a 20% enrollment jump, a tripling of students who qualify for college admission, and a closer community.¹⁵

Building community spaces for racial healing and solidarity

- Programs like TRHT Places (local coalitions) and TRHT College Campus Centers prepare the next generation of leaders to break down systemic racism and dismantle beliefs in a false hierarchy of human value. Currently, the National Collaborative for Health Equity (NCHE) is collaborating with 15 TRHT Places¹⁶

and the American Association of Colleges & Universities is partnering with 72 institutions¹⁷ to implement action plans to embrace community and racial healing, build trust-based solidarity, and erase barriers to equal treatment and opportunities in their communities.

- The Bridging Divides Initiative is funded through Princeton University and is a collaborative between local communities impacted by political violence and policy practitioners. The goal of the Bridging Divides Initiative is to build a multi-racial democracy by addressing the barriers and political violence that divide us as a society.¹⁸
- The Love Your Block grant program was established and supported by the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovations at Johns Hopkins University. This program aims to reduce blight and improve public spaces through resident-led revitalization projects, such as building community gardens and creating art displays. Within its program, Love Your Block also contains the latent functions of building strong relationships between community members, strengthening social cohesion, and amplifying community voices.¹⁹
- The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that facilitates and promotes public deliberations of often polarizing public issues. Through its unique format, NIFI is able to connect and empower groups across racial and ethnic lines and build solidarity by strategically addressing issues that would otherwise likely divide groups.²⁰



Looking Forward

The work of racial healing & relationship building has been growing across the country, but there is still more to be done. Recognizing and publicly acknowledging the impact of slavery, genocide, and systemic racism on our communities is a necessary step that many cities and states should follow to aid in racial healing and build trust between constituents and their representatives. These efforts should be followed by plans for redress and/or reparations created alongside representatives of the community. Similarly, local representatives should come together to discuss what racial healing and relationship-building measures are needed within their communities. Every community is different, and some will benefit from practices such as restorative justice in schools while others will benefit from creating community spaces for healing. These grassroots efforts for racial healing and relationship building that rely on community input, data, and opinions can be powerful forces for policy and practice change.



Additional Resources

- [Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Implementation Guide](#)
- [Truth, Racial Healing, & Transformation Community Collaboration Sites](#)
- [*Democracy and Solidarity: On the Cultural Roots of America's Political Crisis*](#) by James Davison Hunter

3.

Separation

The belief in a hierarchy of human value is sustained by keeping people apart. In cutting off Indigenous people from their rights to self-governance and controlling access to such basic resources as food and water, colonization is the original form of separation, and it serves to benefit the colonizers. Within the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) framework, separation is defined as the division of groups based on a particular characteristic, including race and/or socioeconomic status. It is fostered by historic and present-day land use and development decisions that perpetuate racial inequities, such as segregation, colonization, and isolation, which lead to concentrated poverty and limit access

to opportunity. Since the creation of the [2021 *Healing Through Policy* briefs](#), we've experienced substantial societal changes in a post-COVID era. As of 2025, changes in the federal administration have created policy environments that are not supportive of racial equity, health equity, and social justice initiatives. This overview builds on the foundational work of the existing briefs by revisiting the progress of policies and practices highlighted previously. It also provides stories of success with current policies and practices that leaders can adopt to support racial healing and equity through transforming the systems that keep us separated.



Policies and Practices under the *Separation Pillar*

- Zoning innovation
- Just cause evictions
- Incorporation of equity goals into transit policy and planning



Stories of Success

Zoning innovation

- Inclusionary zoning (IZ) is an example of zoning innovation that requires or encourages the creation of affordable housing units when market-rate housing is developed, with the primary goal of providing opportunities for families at all income levels to move from low-poverty areas. Boston, Massachusetts, updated its IZ plan by increasing opportunities to include income-restricted housing in buildings by lowering the threshold of requirements for housing developments from 10 or more units to 7 units. In addition they increased the proportion of the project that is income-restricted from 13% to 17–20% - depending on the building size and the affordability of income-restricted units. They also set aside 3% of units within large rental projects for households with housing choice vouchers.²¹

- Many cities are finding ways to zone for food justice in neighborhoods experiencing a scarcity of healthy, affordable food. The Southside Community Land Trust ensures that Rhode Islanders can grow and enjoy healthy food. The state funds activities such as summer programs that teach children how to grow food in the city and care for the natural environment.²²

Just cause evictions

- Just cause evictions protect tenants from arbitrary, retaliatory, or discriminatory evictions by establishing that landlords can only evict tenants for specific reasons, such as failure to pay rent. Chicago, Illinois, recently introduced a Just Cause Ordinance backed by over 100 organizations after a two-month rent strike.²³ New York City (NYC) enacted its Good Cause Eviction in 2024 to protect tenants against evictions without a valid reason.²⁴

Incorporation of equity goals into transit policy and planning

- Cities like Boston, Massachusetts, and New York City (NYC) have committed to creating equity plans in their transit agencies. Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) created a public engagement team to cultivate sustainable, collaborative relationships with riders, community partners, and stakeholders. They are committed to holding public meetings and workshops for community members to facilitate dialogue and learn about the concerns of riders.²⁵ NYC has also prioritized a focus on transit equity but has yet to implement these policies into its Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).²⁶



Looking Forward

For too long, our policies have been used to separate people rather than bring communities together. Moving forward, other localities and states should look to the examples provided here as well as the examples provided in the previous [***2021 Healing Through Policy brief***](#) for inclusive policies and practices. Changing the policies and practices that separate us requires an overhaul of our current system. Cross-sectional collaboration is required between local leaders, policymakers, organizations, city and state departments.



Additional Resources

- [New upzoning guidelines in Boston, MA](#)
- [IZ measure passed by Arcata City Council \(CA\)](#)
- [Urban agriculture and land use planning working group in Prince George's County, MD](#)
- [Guide on zoning for urban agriculture](#)
- [Connection between racial equity, data, and food justice](#)
- [City of Boston: Urban Agriculture Recommendations Report](#)
- [Transit equity dashboard](#)
- [PolicyLink: IZ Equitable Development Toolkit](#)
- [PolicyLink: Equitable Transit-Oriented Development](#)
- [Poverty & Race Research Action Council and the National Coalition on School Diversity: "Model State School Integration Policies"](#)
- [Right to Counsel Primer for Public Health Professionals](#)
- [PolicyLink: Analysis of Right to Counsel Efforts](#)
- [Map: Tracking Right to Counsel Across States](#)

4.

Law

The Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Design Team acknowledges that the rights and liberties afforded to Americans during the creation of the United States were not meant for those whose basic humanity had long been denied by the Founders. The false belief in racial, ethnic and gender hierarchy has been infused throughout the U.S. legal system and operates in both blatant and insidious ways through laws, public policies, and accompanying practices and norms. This institutionalized belief in a false hierarchy of human value has enabled, sustained, or exacerbated unequal treatment. Since the publication of the

2021 Healing Through Policy briefs, we've experienced substantial societal changes in a post-COVID era. As of 2025, changes in the federal administration have created policy environments that are not supportive of racial equity, health equity, and social justice initiatives. This overview builds on the foundational work of the existing briefs by revisiting the progress of policies and practices highlighted previously and providing stories of success with current policies and practices that leaders can adopt to support racial healing and equity through transforming our current legal practices to make way for more fair and just practices.



Policies and Practices under the *Law* Pillar

- Reallocating police budgets to support alternative response teams
- Reclassifying laws, rights, and fee reforms for previously incarcerated individuals
- Welcoming city plans



Stories of Success

Reallocating police budgets to support alternative response teams

- After the murder of civilian George Floyd by a police officer in 2020, many cities around the U.S. committed to diverting funds from police departments to invest in alternative safety models.²⁷ Since then, many of these cities have backtracked and kept police budgets stable or even increased budgets.^{28,29} Despite this, all 50 states enacted some form of police reform between 2020 and 2024, and many cities have committed to alternative safety models.³⁰ These safety models serve as important examples of investments that work to protect residents. According to the Council on Criminal Justice, crime rates in the U.S. have dropped significantly, with 2025 data showing substantial declines in homicide (down 21% in 35 large cities) and other violent crimes to their lowest levels since 1900.
- In Eugene, Oregon, a 24/7 civilian mobile crisis response program known as Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) is dispatched to 20% of 911 calls, saving the city \$2.2 million in officer wages every year. Every CAHOOTS team consists of at least a medic and a crisis worker, making them better suited for a number of emergency calls than police officers.³¹ In February 2026, the city issued a RFP for a new provider that could replicate these services.

- Denver, Colorado, hosts their Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) program, a 24/7 community response team that directs targeted emergency calls to health care responders instead of police. This program, facilitated by the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment, produced a 34% decrease in criminal offenses in participating neighborhoods and cost the City of Denver one-quarter of what police responses cost.³⁵
- Minnesota has implemented 24/7 Mobile Crisis Mental Health Services across the state. This service ensures that individuals experiencing a mental health crisis receive the correct care and are less likely to face police intervention or criminalization.³²

Reclassifying laws, rights, and fee reforms for previously incarcerated individuals

- In 2024, Maryland Governor Wes Moore announced that the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services will cancel debt for outstanding mandatory, parole, and administrative release supervision fees and drug testing fees for those currently under the supervision of the agency's Division of Parole and Probation.³³
- In 2025, states such as Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Virginia have signed into law or called for the elimination of criminal justice fees and the creation of affordable payment plans for court debt in recognition of the fact that these fees play a role in trapping individuals in cycles of debt and never-ending punishment.^{34,35,36}
- Arizona, Colorado, Virginia, and other states have adopted laws to minimize barriers to employment for previously incarcerated individuals. Often licensing boards may deny licenses based on prior criminal offenses or incarceration. Jurisdictions have created review councils so that individuals can petition a review when their criminal offense is unrelated to the profession being licensed.³⁷

- States such as Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Colorado have passed various voting rights and ballot access reform bills for currently and/or previously incarcerated individuals.⁴¹

Welcoming city plans

- Despite efforts against immigration in this current political climate, many cities are committed to creating welcoming and inclusive environments for all of their residents, both new and old.
 - As of 2025, 28 U.S. cities are Certified Welcoming, a title that is earned through creating policies and programs that reflect a commitment to immigrant inclusion.³⁸
 - Cities such as Boston, Massachusetts,³⁹ Montpelier, Vermont, and Burlington, Vermont,⁴⁰ are pushing for more inclusive civic engagement by extending voting rights for local elections to noncitizens.



Looking Forward

Our legal landscape shapes our subsequent policies and practices, and these in turn shape racial equity. Advocating for legal reform that better aligns with the principles of racial equity is essential to protecting all Americans. Connecting with and learning from leaders who have been able to implement the changes described here, will provide insights and inspiration to support replication of these policies and practices.



Additional Resources

- [“A Guidebook for Reimagining America’s Crisis Response Systems: A Decision-making Framework for Responding to Vulnerable Populations in Crisis”](#)
- [“Reimagining Policing: How State and Local Governments can Work Together to Create Better, Safer Communities”](#)

5.

Economy

For centuries, people of color in the U.S. have been denied equal access to resources and opportunities. From the forcible displacement of Indigenous people, to the enslavement and exploitation of Black Americans, to the historic and present-day exploitation of immigrant labor and people of color in the workforce, inequity is created and sustained by U.S. economic policies and practices. Since the creation of the **2021 Healing Through Policy briefs**, we've experienced substantial societal changes in a post-COVID era.

As of 2025, changes in the federal administration have created economic policy environments that are not supportive of racial equity, health equity, and social justice initiatives. This overview builds on the foundational work of the existing briefs by revisiting the progress of policies and practices highlighted previously and providing stories of success with current policies and practices that leaders can adopt to support racial healing and equity through transforming our economic policies and practice.



Policies and Practices under the Economy Pillar

- Raising minimum wage, requiring livable wages, and implementing Universal Basic Income
- Enacting participatory budgeting processes
- Compensatory reparations
- Creating paths to address food insecurity



Stories of Success

Raising minimum wage, requiring livable wages, and implementing Universal Basic Income

- Many cities and states around the U.S. recognize that raising the wages of their residents is necessary to ensure quality of life and reach racial and health equity.
 - More than 20 states increased their minimum wage in 2025, including states that are indexed for inflation (meaning the wage automatically increases each year to adjust for inflation, although the increases are often not proportional to inflation).⁴¹
 - Maine recently proposed a bill to replace the minimum wage with a livable wage scale. If passed, this bill would use a calculator from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to determine how much money each person and household needs to pay for essentials such as housing, food, and health care. According to this calculator, the livable wage for a Maine resident with no children is \$23.22 an hour. This is an increase of more than 50% over the current minimum wage of \$14.65.⁴²

- Many cities and states, such as Saint Paul, Minnesota, Austin, Texas, and the State of Illinois, have instituted Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot programs. These programs provide low-income residents with monthly payments ranging from \$50 to \$1,000, and these residents and families can spend these payments however they see fit.^{43,44} Saint Paul experienced such positive results, including increased employment, improved mental health, and safer housing, that advocates and the Minnesota's House of Representatives are working to pass a bill to support the program at the state level.⁴⁵

Enacting participatory budgeting processes

- Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which residents are directly involved in deciding how public funds are spent. Cities like Boston, Massachusetts, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, have successfully implemented PB. Residents voted on projects that they deem important to their city, such as providing fresh food to food-insecure residents, reentry programs for incarcerated youth, and improvements for growers markets.^{46,47} Other cities like Ithaca, New York, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, are making headway or are currently in the pilot process of instituting PB.^{48,49}

Compensatory reparations

- A large number of cities and states have committed to studying the impacts of the U.S.'s enslavement and various forms of community displacement and/or destruction. Portland, Oregon, has agreed to pay \$8.5 million in settlements to Black families that were displaced by urban renewal projects after descendants of the displaced filed a federal lawsuit in 2022.⁵⁰

- In Tulsa, Oklahoma, officials announced the creation of a commission to recommend reparations for those affected by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, in which a white mob murdered more than 300 Black residents and burned Tulsa's Greenwood District to the ground. Reparations that have been discussed include a housing equity program for both survivors of the massacre and descendants of victims.⁵¹
- Maryland lawmakers recently approved a measure to study reparations for slavery this past April. They included in this measure a comprehensive list of possible reparations.⁵²

Creating paths to address food insecurity

- Food insecurity is a vital issue that is sustained by our economic policies and practices, and it often affects vulnerable groups such as low-income pregnant women. The Nourishing Beginnings program, based in Cleveland, Ohio, addresses food insecurity and the social needs of low-income pregnant women by delivering medically tailored groceries to these women and working with social workers to address their needs.⁵³
- Community Servings in Boston, Massachusetts, provides medically tailored, scratch-made meals to critically and chronically ill individuals and families. Their work is done while keeping racial and economic justice and health equity as priorities.⁵⁴
- Grassroots Groceries in New York City is a community-led initiative that addresses food insecurity in a number of ways, including delivering food directly to the doors of residents who face barriers in accessing grocery stores and installing community refrigerators across the city.⁵⁵



Looking Forward

For too long, our nation's economic system and policies have been rooted in the false ideology of a hierarchy of human value. Examples in this policy brief update reflect progress and meaningful change. Grassroots organizing and advocacy can also lead to economic change that constituents find useful to their neighborhoods, as is the case in PB and food distribution services. Reparations Task Forces play key roles in the creation and passing of reparations bills and can be a useful first step to those who want to see reparations for their communities. To create economic change, we must amplify the voice and concerns of community members.



Additional Resources

- [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#)
- [Basic Income Today: Community organizing to protect universal basic income in Texas](#)
- [Racial Equity Tools: Plan, Issues, Reparations](#)
- [African-American Redress Network](#)

Recommended Resources and Strategies for Action in 2025

Strategies to Support Narrative Change

One of the most important and urgent challenges in 2025 is overcoming the dominant media and political narratives about division and polarization in American society. The National Collaborative for Health Equity conducts an annual poll, the Heart of America Survey, which assesses levels of consensus across political, age, gender, and racial groups. The results have shown surprising levels of cohesion, agreement, and consensus in this nation. State and local jurisdictions are encouraged to conduct similar surveys or polls and lift up narratives that reveal the desire for unity and authentic healing. Results of the 2025 Heart of America poll reveal that there is a robust desire for diversity in the workplace. A significant majority, 78% of respondents, believe that promoting diversity is crucial for addressing the historical impact of racism in our country. The sentiment is strong across various groups: 89% of Democrats and 70% of Republicans agree on this point. Among different racial groups, 81% of people of color and 77% of white Americans also share this belief. These figures highlight a broad consensus on the value of diversity initiatives as a means of fostering healing and progress.

Equally crucial is education. An overwhelming 83% of Americans feel that educating children on the history of race and racism in America is important for racial healing. Additional information about the Heart of America Poll can be found on the National Collaborative for Health Equity [website](#). This data is also archived in the renowned [Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University](#).

Addressing Federal Data Challenges

To counter the federal government's recent actions against publicly available data, various organizations across the U.S. have compiled advocacy resources and strategies that can be used to protect access to data. Some strategies and resources include recommendations from *The State of Data Access*, a webinar by mySidewalk:

- Choose data sets that you or your organization cannot live without and fight to protect them. This includes looking into what the people you serve are asking for and fighting to include that data in your research, actions, and websites. This type of advocacy is illustrated by the case of the National Weather Service (NWS), where massive funding cuts led to layoffs that

affected the ability to properly predict forecast weather patterns including natural disasters. This in turn affected the health and safety of Americans, who along with the NWS advocated for restoring funding and resources.⁵⁶

- Save whatever data sets you come across and upload them to sites that are working to preserve federal data. Some of these sites include:
 - [Open Environmental Data Project](#)
 - [Safeguarding Research & Culture](#)
 - [Internet Archive](#)
 - [End of Term Web Archive](#)
 - [Harvard's Data.gov Archive](#)
- Create interconnected partnerships with city departments, agencies, and other organizations to facilitate better data sharing and target multifaceted problems. It is important to recognize that local and state data have been the primary sources for federal data. However, it is still important to give credit to federal data when it is used.⁵⁷ The more that people realize how often federal data is used, the more they will recognize its importance and advocate for its protection.⁵⁷
- Partition out sensitive demographic data from larger data sets to protect the privacy of those from whom the data is collected.⁵⁷
- Connect with legal counsel to learn about what kind of local, state, or federal privacy laws exist to protect the data in your collections.⁵⁷

Additional suggestions include:

- Keep up with sites that are archiving and updating important data for you or your organization, including:
 - [HOPE Initiative](#), which shows how each U.S. state performs across 27 indicators of health and well-being and examines disparities that need to be addressed to achieve health equity

- [Federal Data Forum](#), which provides a space to share messages, materials, and resources related to federal data
- [City Health Dashboard](#), which provides communities and leaders with regularly updated data that is specific to neighborhoods and city boundaries, such as life expectancy, park access, and children in poverty
- [Congressional District Health Dashboard](#), which provides similar metrics as the above-mentioned resource for those who want to know the health data of their congressional district
- [Criminal Justice Administrative Records System](#), which collects and harmonizes criminal justice data to provide a one-stop resource with public criminal justice data

Strategies to Support Racial Healing and Relationship Building

These times call for focused efforts for bringing diverse community members together in caring environments for connecting and building bridges of understanding and empathy. Rx Racial Healing Circles are recommended. These circles should be co-facilitated by two experienced facilitators from different backgrounds, and planned collaboratively with community members. Additional information on conducting Rx Racial Healing Circles can be found on the [National Collaborative for Health Equity](#) (NCHE), [American Association of Colleges and Universities](#) (AAC&U), and [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) (WKKF) websites.

An example of a statewide effort that could be replicated is [Healing Illinois](#). Healing Illinois is a program of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), managed in partnership with the Field Foundation. In 2024, the Field Foundation helped to distribute \$4.5 million in grants for nonprofit organizations to begin or continue the

work of racial healing in their communities. Since its launch in 2020, Healing Illinois has empowered organizations to bring racial healing to communities in impactful ways, from developing and implementing engaging programming to creating infrastructure to support long-term healing. At the core of this initiative is the belief that everyone in Illinois can play a role in healing by valuing each other's experiences and honoring the histories of the state's diverse communities. More than 200 organizations have received support for their healing initiatives.

Many local jurisdictions have also worked to implement Rx Racial Healing Circles as a first step to establishing local coalitions.

- Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) coalition leaders have recommended the following tips to creating successful and longstanding coalitions. These coalitions help to sustain ongoing efforts for healing and transformation:
 - Include 2–3 people who can represent each of the TRHT Pillars in your coalition.⁵⁸ The TRHT Strategic Framework Pillars are Narrative Change; Racial Healing & Relationship Building; Separation; Law; and Economy. More details on these pillars can be found on the [National Collaborative for Health Equity website](#).
 - Build an economic case for TRHT as well as a moral case to provide a wider catchment area for stakeholders.⁵⁹
 - Build a community racial history to create a shared understanding of your community's past and why racial equity and healing are necessary.⁵⁹
 - Have a clear and measurable vision that is shared by your community which can be assessed as progress occurs.⁵⁹
 - Find innovative ways to get into the community by engaging groups that are diverse in age, religion, culture, race, and more.⁵⁹

- Have a plan for sustaining your work over time. This may include reaching out for diverse funding options, budgeting for the future, or training partners to teach others how to do the work.⁵⁹

Strategies to Address Separation

- Advance local government housing and zoning innovation through cross-sector partnerships. Counties are uniquely positioned to facilitate housing growth. Coalitions and organizers can encourage jurisdictions to adopt similar collaborative models that integrate land use planning with racial equity outcomes. For example, the [National Association of Counties](#) has supported counties to increase housing supply through two strategies⁵⁹:
 - **Zoning and permitting authority:** Counties that control both zoning and permitting can accelerate or encourage the production of new housing by streamlining processes and providing incentives.
 - **County-owned land development:** Public-private partnerships can lead to increased housing supply when leveraging underutilized county-owned sites, such as parking lots, former schools and libraries, large open spaces, vacant office complexes, and leftover parcels from transportation projects. This can:
 - Generate revenue to provide county services,
 - Secure public benefits without taxpayer expense by selling land to developers, and
 - Create “natural affordability” by reducing land costs in the housing development process.

- Drawing from the [U.S. Conference of Mayors' Infrastructure Task Force recommendations](#), cities can formalize cross-jurisdictional transit compacts that explicitly set racial equity and anti-segregation goals. By ensuring that new transit expansions prioritize historically underinvested communities, local leaders can disrupt patterns of racial separation while improving economic mobility. As highlighted by the Urban Institute⁶⁰ and Salud America!⁶¹, cities can implement the following concrete strategies:

- **Engage communities:** Involve residents of historically underinvested communities in the planning and decision-making processes for new transit projects. This helps ensure that the final projects address the communities' actual needs and priorities.
- **Conduct equity analysis:** Use racial equity impact assessments to analyze how new transit projects might affect different demographic groups, particularly low-income residents and people of color. This helps identify and mitigate potential negative impacts, such as displacement.
- **Partner on development:** Coordinate with housing agencies to implement strategies that prevent residential displacement and promote affordable housing near new transit stops. This can include using tools like Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) funds and community land trusts.
- **Use data-driven systems:** Implement metrics to track transportation equity over time. This helps ensure that project outcomes are measured against the stated racial equity goals.

Communities are also using zoning laws, existing plans, and ordinances to block the location of new immigrant detention centers.

Strategies to Address and Reform Systems of Law

- **Use the Welcoming Standard framework:** [The Welcoming Standard](#) is a comprehensive roadmap for communities to become more welcoming places. The criteria in the Welcoming Standard reflect programs, policies, and practices that local governments and community organizations can implement to ensure that everyone, including immigrants, belongs. Communities can use the Welcoming Standard to guide their next steps in building a welcoming community.⁶² For example:
 - Advocates can use the Welcoming Standard to shape their policy agenda.
 - States can use the Welcoming Standard to inform the assistance and resources they provide to communities.
 - Local governments and community-based organizations can use the Welcoming Standard as an evaluation and planning tool.
 - Nonprofits and local government entities can also [join the Welcoming Network](#) as a member to receive technical assistance and resources that assist communities working to meet the Welcoming Standard.
 - Local governments can be assessed by the Welcoming Standard to become a [Certified Welcoming](#) community.
- **Institutionalize community-based first response models:** Building on recommendations from the [National League of Cities' \(NLC\) Reimagining Public Safety Task Force](#), jurisdictions can implement 24/7 mobile crisis units, behavioral health co-response teams, and community mediation programs. These approaches not only reduce over-reliance on police, but also align with calls for laws and policies that center healing and reinvestment in

communities rather than use of excessive force or punishment. Behavioral health resources are particularly valuable in response to increased stress associated with aggressive immigrant deportation strategies. The Task Force’s recommendations report, [A Path Toward Safe and Equitable Cities](#), is a toolkit that provides extensive context and examples for city leaders to replicate, reference, and adapt as they implement reimagined approaches to public safety that work well in a local context. This toolkit outlines five high-level recommendations for city leaders to help improve the ways they ensure the safety of all residents:

- Direct municipal government leadership toward providing safety and well-being for all.
 - Balance the respective roles of government agencies, residents and partners.
 - Significantly expand the use of civilian-led and community-based well-being and prevention-focused strategies.
 - Embrace full and transparent oversight and accountability for law enforcement.
 - Seek guidance and support from peers and experts with the assistance of the National League of Cities.
- **Reducing fines and fees in county justice systems:** The National Association of Counties and Public Financial Management (PFM) partnered together to create resources for county officials on reducing and eliminating criminal justice fines and fees.⁶³ The [Reducing Fines and Fees in County Justice Systems](#) brief explains how fines and fees are administered at the county level and provides solutions on what counties can do to effectively address fines and fees. Counties can implement a number of policies and programs that hold

people accountable for minor infractions while also protecting public safety and improving outcomes. Examples include instituting ability-to-pay determinations; creating caps on payment; allowing flexible payment plans or creating other mechanisms to pay off debts; eliminating fees related to criminal justice system involvement; prohibiting warrants and jail time for unpaid fees; and adopting practices that can help minimize failures to pay or appear in court.

Strategies to Advance Economy

- **Local wealth-building initiatives:** Drawing from Brookings Institution research, particularly Andre Perry’s Score Card,⁶⁴ local leaders can implement targeted wealth-building initiatives that address disparities in home-ownership, entrepreneurship, and access to capital. Strategies include supporting community development financial institutions (CDFIs), expanding down-payment assistance, revising credit scoring systems, and ensuring equitable appraisals of property in majority-Black and -Brown neighborhoods. These actions directly confront systemic undervaluation and create measurable opportunities for economic inclusion.
- **Adopt wellbeing budgets to guide local spending:** Inspired by the [Wellbeing Economy Alliance](#) and international models such as [New Zealand’s Wellbeing Budget](#), cities and counties can adopt spending frameworks that prioritize health, equity, racial justice, and sustainability over narrow GDP growth. By embedding wellbeing metrics into budget decisions, local governments can align public investments with the needs and aspirations of historically excluded communities.

- **Institutionalize participatory economic governance:** The Brookings Institution⁶⁵ and The New School's Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy⁶⁶ call for governance models that elevate community voices in shaping economic policy. Expanding participatory budgeting, co-designing investment priorities with residents, and embedding racial equity assessments into economic planning processes ensures that policies address the lived experiences of those most affected by inequity. Such governance reforms reinforce principles of truth, transparency, and community-led solutions.

- **Reparations as a path to economic redress:** Reparations remain a vital strategy for repairing past harms and dismantling systemic barriers that have created generational inequities in wealth and opportunity. Local governments can follow the lead of cities and states that have established coalitions focused on reparations, developed housing equity programs, provided direct compensation, or returned stolen land.^{67,68,69} Incorporating reparations into local policy not only addresses historic injustices but also builds the foundation for a more just and inclusive economy.

Conclusion

As illustrated in this updated brief, the pursuit of racial equity and solidarity is both a present imperative and a long-term endeavor. Across the nation, local leaders, advocates, and communities are driving innovative values-based change. This revolutionary work is withstanding the current times despite immense political headwinds and resistance to our nation's progress over the many decades. Examples ranging from statewide healing efforts, transformative zoning, and inclusive economic reforms to the safeguarding of public data and the defense of equity principles are testaments to what is possible when equity is centered in policy and practice.

The stories of success across all the TRHT Pillars are important not just because they show us that

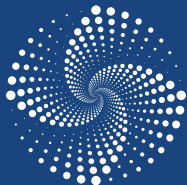
work is being done to advance racial healing and equity, but also because they convey the creativity, resilience, and determination that leaders have committed to in order to build and sustain success. Now, more than ever, it is important to envision the future of racial equity and strive toward that future using community knowledge and power. We hope that the resources and examples within this updated brief will catapult leaders into action and sustain the momentum of the past five years. Whether we are rewriting local ordinances, protecting our data infrastructure, cultivating spaces for racial healing and solidarity, or investing in economic redress to support well-being, let this brief serve as a tool to help dismantle structural racism and build a just, inclusive tomorrow for all.

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