AGENDA REPORT

CITY OF OAKLAND

TO:	Jestin D. Johnson City Administrator	**FROM:**	Darlene Flynn Department of Race and Equity
SUBJECT:	The Department of Race and Equity Update	**DATE:**	February 6, 2026

City Administrator Approval   Date: Feb 13, 2026

Jestin Johnson (Feb 13, 2026 06:22:34 PST)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report On The Activities Of The Department Of Race And Equity, Including Recent Major Accomplishments, Interdepartmental Collaborations, And Current And Upcoming Initiatives.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The Department of Race and Equity (DRE) was created by ordinance passed unanimously by the City Council in June 2015. Initiated by Councilmember Desley Brooks, the ordinance added the new department to "City Agencies, Departments And Offices." The legislation amended Chapter 2.29 of the Oakland Municipal Code (OMC), specifically adding Section 2.29.170, to establish the department and its mission to integrate equity into city government.

The ordinance was passed alongside the 2015-17 budget, officially establishing the department to advance racial justice within city operations. The OMC defines equity as just and fair practices, meaning the City serves all residents by promoting fairness and opportunity and addressing inequities through actions developed using equity and racial justice practices.

DRE reports to the City Administrator and works with all departments to embed racial equity into policies, budgets, and operational plans. Unlike other Cities that focus almost exclusively on creating Strategic Equity Plans, Oakland's approach focuses on identifying opportunities and challenges in existing department systems, policy, procedures and plans in collaboration with department leadership and staff. This strategy relies on participation by City departments, leadership and staff that is focused on action and has the added benefit of cultivating equity practice within existing activities and decision-making processes.

ANALYSIS

Prior to the establishment of the Department of Race and Equity, Oakland had no standards or program focused on advancing equity in City activity outcomes. The department has established a City-wide, multi-level, systemically focused framework and functions as follows.

DRE WORK OVERVIEW

Since its beginning, DRE has intentionally cultivated a network of employees who have engaged in learning how to focus on internal systems and structures in their departments to implement equity. These volunteers populate Equity Teams and/or lead equity projects in departments too small to have a team and work closely with DRE staff to create Equity Action Plans for their departments. The Action Plan approach is designed to support departments in promoting equity skill building, supporting staff to understand Oakland's equity framework, and applying equity tools designed to support application to department operations. Through these activities, and with DRE support, Equity Teams and equity advocates lead equity-focused efforts in their departments. This entails increasing awareness and understanding about the root causes of disparities and supporting equity analysis on policies, programs and procedures that then inform needed change and action that advances equity.

To prepare Equity Team members and City equity advocates, DRE offers ongoing capacity building through the Advancing Racial Equity Academy. This four-part training course has always been mandatory for Equity Team members, was made mandatory for managers and supervisors in 2024 and has always been open to all staff. Since standing up the program there have been 4,118 attendees at Academy sessions. Results-Based Accountability and Racial Equity Impact Analysis training is also offered several times a year. This element of Oakland's implementation of equity is essential to standardize the City's approach for maximum impact. Coaching and technical support from DRE are also available to staff working on applying equity to organizational policies, programs and procedures.

In addition, DRE Team members engage as participants in working groups to shape Citywide policy and implementation such as the Equitable Climate Action Plan workgroup, Equitable Capital Improvement Plan workgroup, the Equity Administrative Instruction 580 workgroup and Inclusive Engagement AI 6802 Inclusive workgroup. These efforts have been recognized at the local, state and national levels. In 2024 the National Civic League recognized Oakland for the Planning and Building Department's Equity and Inclusive Engagement work on the General Plan Update, the Capital Improvement Plan Program co-lead by the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) and Public Works, and the Citywide Inclusive Engagement Workgroup for their work to draft internal policy guidelines, procedures and training to support staff in conducting inclusive engagement to remove barriers to participation for our community members.

DRE's ongoing work to deepen Citywide participation by building on departments' regular activities, identifying equity opportunities through periodic "look-ahead" conversations with department leadership and through Equity Team Action Planning and activities has proven to produce both short-term and long-term impacts. The goal of this practice is to transform city government through creating community-centered systems that contribute to increased equity in Oaklanders' life outcomes.

ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Equity efforts are comprised of data-driven, system-focused, community-centered and outcome-oriented processes and actions. Using DRE's equity framework and tools, major City efforts have begun to investigate and implement strategies to amplify positive impacts and mitigate negative impacts on communities most impacted by disparities in life outcomes. This approach has resulted in resources reaching historically disinvested areas of Oakland and has also helped the City to influence State, County and National policy decisions to support and benefit Oaklanders. While these are significantly impactful examples, they also represent sustained effort over time, and often cultivation of partnerships, as well as the diligent application of equity tools.

Digital Equity – IT Department
In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Oakland made a commitment to address the stark digital divide within the city, spurring the development of Oakland's digital equity strategy. DRE supported the IT department with the development of an equity analysis and a map to guide a program focused on working with community partners and tech to address these issues. In partnership with the Greenlining Institute, DRE supported the development of a grants program that offered community-led organizations the opportunity to promote low-cost Wi-Fi and Data plans, access to free devices, and basic computer skills training to those who needed it the most, along with a Digital Strategy to Advance Equity. These efforts set the foundation for #Oakland Undivided, a collective impact initiative whose partners include local government, schools, non-profits, philanthropy organizations, and businesses from across Oakland and California. They joined together to address digital access needs in Oakland's schools and neighborhoods.

A key component of Oakland's strategy focuses on improving Oakland's broadband infrastructure by pursuing opportunities within state and federal infrastructure programs. Improved access to fiber internet infrastructure is critical to catalyze Internet Service Provider (ISP) competition and investment, as well as to improve internet speeds and reliability for residents and the installation of additional fiber infrastructure to improve the reach of Oakland's public Wi-Fi system, Oak Wi-Fi. As part of this strategy, Oakland and #OU worked together to successfully advocate for fiber internet infrastructure in Oakland's underserved communities and funding for broadband infrastructure planning, resulting in a very successful strategy that got Oakland to be named a 2025 Digital Inclusion Trailblazer by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), in recognition of the City's efforts to close the digital divide. Oakland provided a model for other local governments and communities to build digital inclusion ecosystems. Oakland's approach demonstrates how digital access can be built into how the City delivers opportunity, and it brought the City access to infrastructure investments, including a $15 million Last Mile Broadband Infrastructure Grant to deliver free Wi-Fi to approximately 2,500 affordable housing units, State middle-mile investments connecting Oakland to California's open-access backbone and a $12M Digital Equity Competitive Grant awarded to a Bay Area coalition to expand digital skills training, device access, and technical support services.

Safe Oakland Streets (SOS) – OakDOT
SOS is a citywide initiative to prevent serious and fatal traffic crashes and eliminate crash inequities on Oakland's streets. OakDOT and DRE applied an approach to working across

departments, building partnerships with the community to implement the most effective and equitable strategies starting in 2020. In 2021, a work group began meeting, comprised of representatives from OakDOT, the Oakland Police Department, the Department of Race and Equity, and the City Administrator's Office.

The approach recognizes that life-changing and life-ending collisions on roadways are preventable with prioritized, targeted, and comprehensive strategies. The SOS equity approach and targeted solutions require the support of elected officials and City departments in the form of concrete actions to increase the delivery of traffic safety improvement projects, policies, programs, and partnerships. Thanks to this approach, in 2024 OakDOT applied for and was awarded two Highway Safety Improvement Program Grants from Caltrans for Safe Oakland Streets to improve safety for seniors and cyclists. Together these grants total almost 3 million dollars; projects will be implemented in the next few years. In addition, The City of Oakland is one of seven cities in the state authorized to pilot speed safety cameras. OakDOT staff worked with the State and other cities to add equity and privacy measures into the bill to mitigate the potential for inequitable outcomes and to prevent over-policing in communities. These measures include reduced fines, opportunities for community service in lieu of fines, cameras placed to only capture license plates, and strict regulations about data retention and safeguarding.

In 2024, OakDOT completed required preliminary work to establish the Speed Safety Camera Program, including hiring a project manager to conduct data-driven analysis to identify 18 recommended candidate locations and public stakeholder engagement to inform the required Impact Report and Use Policy for the program. To determine camera placement, OakDOT collected data on vehicle speeds at over 40 locations before narrowing down to 18 candidate locations, prioritizing locations with the most documented speeding, as well as proximity to sensitive land uses such as schools, senior centers, and commercial districts. Through all these processes DRE has worked closely with DOT staff and its equity team to intentionally center equity and prioritize investments that benefit all Oakland communities.

City General Plan Update/Planning and Building Department
The internal work supported by DRE at the department level is starting to be reflected in most major City planning processes and plans. Our model requires continuous evaluation and process improvements that benefit the communities most impacted by racial disparities, and that takes time. DRE works with departments to identify long-term planning processes, have specific actions and measurable outcomes in plans and recommend ways to address disparities in policies and procedures. Most recently DRE supported Planning and Building in the adoption of the General Plan Phase 1, which included the adoption of the following items: the Environmental Justice (EJ) Element, the Safety Element Update, the 2023-2031 Housing Element, Phase 1 Planning Code Amendments, and the Phase 1 Final Environmental Impact Report (PDF, 24MB). All elements and the inclusive engagement processes that were part of the process Plan include equity and inclusive engagement best practices.

Equitable Lead Paint Hazard Program – CAO, Housing, Planning & Building
DRE has participated in the ongoing lead-based paint settlement workgroup from the beginning of negotiations with Alameda County to reach a distribution agreement. The DRE Director managed the Equity Impact Analysis consultant contract for the City Administrator's Office that created the basis for increasing the City of Oakland allocation to a fair share distribution. The work on this project is ongoing, and DRE is now working with Housing and Community

Development Department on finalization of the Equitable Lead Paint Program to be launched by year end.

Gender Equity Recommendations – City Auditor
DRE supported the City Auditor in drafting the Citywide Pay Gender & Equity Audit and recommendations. The objective of this audit was to review pay among employees Citywide by race and gender to identify significant differences in pay and identify potential drivers of significant differences in pay. The audit found that differences in pay among City employees across different demographic groups were largely due to the compensation of their job classifications, with the job classifications showing evidence of "occupational sorting," a term used to describe how people may work within certain fields and industries based on widespread norms about work and society, oftentimes stemming from historical and societal discrimination.

DRE has designed a workforce equity dashboard to visualize current city workforce equity outcomes, which queues up next steps that involve supporting Human Resource Management (HRM) and other key departments on additional investigation of root causes of disparities and problem solving to address issues the Auditor flagged.

Workforce Equity – OakDOT
DRE staff also worked with the OakDOT equity team and leadership on a 5-year analysis of their hiring and retention outcomes, resulting in a memo with recommendations to address issues that have been shared with the HRM department for follow-up.

In addition, they collaborated to design a first-in-the-City, formalized Intern Program, including a selection process and onboarding training with an equity component, delivered by Equity Team members. This effort has increased diversity of representation and provided meaningful preparation that enhanced intern capacity and performance.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost of the Department of Race and Equity to the City's General Fund provides three full-time staff, including the director who also delivers technical assistance and direct support to departments. These efforts are supported by a modest operating budget.

This current level of DRE resource is reduced, impacted by budget reductions in first quarter of 2025, when one administrative staff was laid off and one vacant data analyst position was cut. This has resulted in remaining staff absorbing administrative functions and that has affected productivity in technical activities. Subsequently, the City Council restored one administrative position, effective FY 26/27, and that help is gratefully anticipated. DRE's ability to support departments in establishing and tracking meaningful equity outcomes will, however, continue to be limited without the data analyst position that was eliminated.

DRE's fiscal contributions, while difficult to quantify comprehensively, include favorably impacting two previous bond rating processes because the equity program was considered a positive indicator of City progress, successfully supporting increased allocations of fair share lead-based paint legal settlement and Measure W funds flowing to the City of Oakland, and have enhanced State grant applications where equity has been a factor in awards.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

DRE was established with considerable community support and continues to receive good marks for its ongoing work and responsiveness, and among some is known as the "Tiny Mighty" team for the impacts achieved with small resources.

DRE Website: https://www.oaklandca.gov/Community/Race-Equity-in-Oakland

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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For questions regarding this report, please contact Darlene Flynn, Director, at 510.238.2904

Respectfully submitted,

Darlene Flynn
Darlene Flynn (Feb 10, 2026 15:49:19 PST)
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Darlene Flynn
Director of the Department of Race and Equity