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Honorable Members of the City Council
City of Los Angeles
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Legislative Assistant

ARTS, PARKS, AND RIVER COMMITTEE REPORT RELATIVE TO THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION AND OTHER LOCAL AGENCIES PLAN FOR THE CITY TO ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS AND ACTIVITIES WITH REGARD TO RACE, ETHNICITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, DIVERSITY, AND MULTICULTURALISM

SUMMARY

This report provides a second update from the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department (HCIDLA) and the Human Relations Commission (HRC) in response to City Council motion (CF 15-0840; O'Farrell, Wesson, Harris-Dawson, Ryu) on the progress toward a plan to engage in conversations and activities throughout the City of Los Angeles, with regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, diversity, and multiculturalism. It includes a discussion of the plan's goals, objectives and policy outcomes, the approach for engaging the community and role of the various City partners to implement the plan. A full report is forthcoming.

BACKGROUND

The City Council introduced a motion instructing HCIDLA/HRC, with the assistance of the Cultural Affairs Department (DCA), the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to report on a plan to engage in conversations and activities throughout the city with regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, diversity, and multiculturalism.

The HRC and departments, together with local nonprofit service providers and community partners, established a planning roundtable in late 2015 to work on the plan. The purpose of this collaboration was to draft a community and municipal engagement plan centered on creating engagement around race relations, racial equity, sexual orientation, and diversity that would open up dialogue and discussion at the community level through the platform of artistic expression.

As the plan evolved, the working group included a municipal component that, based on previous community feedback and assessments, would examine the City's own internal infrastructure and how it compared to other municipalities, as well as an assessment of gaps in racial, diversity, and sexual orientation equity, and how to address these gaps.

The ultimate purpose of this project is to create and produce achievable goals and positive outcomes for community stakeholders and municipal partners that will: foster and promote racial inclusion in the civic life all Angelenos; promote mutual cultural understanding among community stakeholders; create awareness and reform strategies to comprehensively address institutional racial bias through the City's service delivery system to achieve racial equity for all residents; and result in a partnership with community members through artistic expression to begin a dialogue on methods of alleviating racial tensions in Los Angeles.

CITY COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The lead City Departments/Commissions include HRC, which is part of the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department, the Department of Cultural Affairs and the Los Angeles Police Departments (LAPD). Each of these City partners bring a strategic expertise to this process. The role that each play will be highlighted as the plan is described.

PLAN OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Our objectives are as follows:

- Assess the equitable and fair treatment of all residents;
- Gather public input, testimony, and solicit ideas for governmental reforms that could help to assist the City in its efforts to provide equity to all Angelenos;
- Develop and implement a detailed plan to facilitate structural changes to institutions to protect Angelenos from unintentionally-biased practices that persist; and
- Conduct a thorough investigation of internal policies, systems and programs to ensure that the City hasn't been unwittingly overseeing an environment that has been detrimental to communities of color.

These objectives are designed to achieve the desired outcome: To provide tools to bridge the gap between community and government; create enhanced and healthy relationships amongst residents, local stakeholders (i.e. service providers, local businesses), and law enforcement in order to collectively address racial and social inequities; and to develop community investment strategies based on feedback from program participants.

Therefore, the City Collaborative Partners propose a new way forward - to utilize the arts and artistic expression as a way to assess community beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of Angelinos in terms of racial equity, race relations, status of community-police relation, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) inclusion, ethnic and religious pluralism, and cultural and gender bias. We understand that opening dialogue about these issues has been a challenge in the past, but we believe that with our collaborative approach with our key partners (LAPD, DCA, and community service providers), we can develop safe and innovative platforms that would lead to the kind of systemic change and community cohesion that will bring Los Angeles closer to its civic engagement ideals.

THE PLAN

Our City Collaborative Partners understand that safer, livable, and thriving neighborhoods are not solely dependent on continued investment in one strategy alone. Rather, what is needed is a complex and multifaceted network of neighborhood and institutional resources and interventions. There must be both community participation and an institutional commitment that looks for innovative strategies that seek to eliminate or substantially reduce institutional bias and address internal barriers to racial equity that have become outdated or are no longer viable. Phase One of the plan focuses on an external dynamic Community Engagement process to identify, assess and address intra-community racial tensions. Phase Two of the plan focuses on an internal Municipal Engagement process to address unintentional and unaddressed biases in City service-delivery.

We will approach our community engagement assessment through artistic expression, an innovative way to address our public safety, economic equity, and social justice concerns. Our aim is that our collaborative, multi-faceted bottom up strategy and internal City reforms will help reduce racial and ethnic inequity at both the community and institutional level.

Community Engagement

Collectively, we propose the development of a comprehensive and multi-pronged community engagement process to address local racial equity issues by focusing on the grassroots collaborative approach in which HRC is highly experienced. HRC will lead the implementation of the community engagement process by bringing together residents, business owners, law enforcement, local arts organizations, City departments, community organizations, and service providers, as well as social media. These interventions will occur in four communities throughout Los Angeles:

1. Northeast Los Angeles (LAPD Northeast Division, Council District 1 and 13)
2. Pacoima (LAPD Foothill Division, Council District 7)
3. South Los Angeles (LAPD 77th St. Division, Council District 8)
4. Venice (LAPD Pacific Division, Council District 11)

These communities were selected because they all have a strong presence of immigrant populations, represent a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural cross section of Los Angeles, experience higher crime rates and low levels of civic engagement, and have low to substandard graduation rates. Additionally, these communities have not only been part of our local conversation, they are also part of a national narrative about the challenge of achieving social justice and equity.

HRC anticipates that the community engagement approach will be innovative in ways that addresses public safety, economic equity, and social justice concerns by bringing together stakeholders at opposite sides of the table and collaboratively developing strategies by which to address racial inequity.

The City has frequently attempted to engage the public in these very delicate, but necessary, discussions through conventional methods with limited success. We believe that through the creative process the City can develop safe and innovative platforms that would lead to the kind of community cohesion and connectivity that will bring us closer to our civic engagement ideals.

The Collaborative Partners recognize that healthy communities need sustained investments in the “creative economy” as a way to open up conversation at the grassroots level about race, racial bias, and human relations. In this vein, arts and culture have the power to strengthen families, build empathy, and foster community and civic pride. Through visual arts, dance, theater, media arts, literary arts and music, whole communities – and youth, in particular - can connect to the inexhaustible possibilities that exist in their immense capacity to be creative.

DCA’s contribution to this important initiative includes identifying qualified cultural practitioners, nonprofit organizations, and artists experienced in using arts, culture and creativity as a vehicle to engage in complex cultural conversation. To that end, DCA plans to issue a Request For Qualifications for cultural service providers whose mission and core competencies are geared toward fostering a dialogue about race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and diversity. Establishing a qualified list will enable the DCA to identify service providers to lead projects in each of the four pilot communities in collaboration with the LAPD Divisions. The DCA will also collaborate with the HRC and LAPD to contribute ancillary programming, panel discussions and community dialogues as part of the City’s community arts centers and public art programming, and to identify funding through public/private partnerships.

DCA is currently conducting an inventory of existing programming and initiatives that are actively engaged in the conversation of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and diversity. Examples of this programming include:

- 50 Years and I Still Can’t Breath – Watts Towers Arts Center
- SKIN – Municipal Arts Gallery
- Heritage Month Celebrations
 - Latino
 - African American
 - Asian American
 - Native American
 - LGBT
- The Arts Activation Fund – Hyper local community-based arts projects addressing ethnic and geographic community pride.
- Promise Zone Arts – a cultural treasure-mapping program with cultural sharing events that address LA Promise Zone goals.

GOALS OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

IMMEDIATE GOALS

- i. Through the four target neighborhoods, activate a social engagement strategy that actively engages residents, LAPD and arts groups to collaboratively examine, prioritize and address racial inequities and tensions at the community level amongst community members;
- ii. Recognizing that a strong barrier to racial justice and structural racism change is unconscious bias, design a template that addresses this bias by utilizing multiple learning modalities and arts-centered exercises, adaptable for use in multiple neighborhoods;
- iii. Engage in a bottom-up approach that partners with grassroots community members as essential partners to demonstrate arts as vital in assisting this process of acknowledging and utilizing the neighborhood's unique cultural diversity for strengthening community collaboration; and
- iv. Develop an assessment tool that will be utilized at all program intervention events via all program partners. These include community surveys, event evaluation forms, social media outputs, and community and institutional partner evaluations.

LONG-TERM GOALS

- i. Publish and disseminate community engagement outcomes and findings in a comprehensive report on status on race and racial equity in Los Angeles;
- ii. Assess the resource allocation process used by the City to fund grassroots community building efforts;
- iii. Develop a community tool kit for addressing racial and ethnic tension in the four pilot communities and build community capacity to address racial disparities throughout the City;
- iv. Highlight best practices framework on how to engage the public in conversations about race and race equity;
- v. Lay the groundwork for a Citywide Race and Social Justice Initiative that addresses systemic change for racial equity within Los Angeles' municipal programs, its community service delivery system and City policies that directly impact racial tension and feelings of exclusion; and
- vi. Create a plan and implement ongoing strategies to engage communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities in long-term, reciprocal and mutually-defined /beneficial relationships.

PROPOSED POLICY GOALS

- i. Explore reforms to the equitable distribution of City resources and budget by promoting and supporting non-punitive methods by which to resolve conflicts in our communities;

- ii. Ensure that LAPD conducts extensive and on-going roll call trainings on racial bias in all divisions and stations and ensure that hiring and policing practices include methods by which to root out bias;
- iii. Thoroughly assess LAPD's service provision model to determine how to break the punitive model of community conflict resolution and establish models and policies to break the cycle of arrest and conviction;
- iv. Ensure that LAPD collaborates with other law enforcement agencies such as the District Attorney's Office to institutionalize less punitive measures, such as diversion and community courts, to ensure that families and communities are not torn apart by overly-punitive incarceration cycles.
- v. Ensure that LAPD accounts for civil asset forfeitures and has an accessible and efficient non-judicial mechanism to ensure that individuals may re-acquire their property after it is determined that they have not engaged in illegal activity; and
- vi. Make the mechanism by which to dispute or exit a gang injunction more concise, accessible, streamlined and understandable.

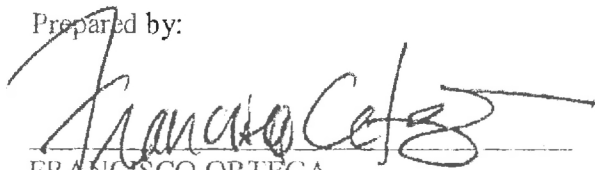
CONCLUSION

The collaborative partners of LAPD, DCA and HRC firmly believe that through these comprehensive and multi-pronged interventions, the City can begin to address racial tension. By partnering with numerous City departments and community organizations, resources can be leveraged to build intra-community understanding. The City must invest in moving forward to mitigate the impacts of community violence that is often embedded with racial tensions.

FISCAL IMPACT

No resources are required at this time. The fiscal impact is still being reviewed by the members of the working group and will be addressed in the forthcoming implementation report.


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