



STATE OF EQUITY
MAKING RACIAL EQUITY WORK LAST

Organizing Lessons from
California State Government

May 2026

A Capitol Collaborative on Race & Equity Report

CREDITS

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Julia Caplan, drawing on the collective experience of the CCORE, SARE, and GARE teams and the government practitioners at the heart of this work.

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Hundreds of state government racial equity practitioners, who have been our most important teachers.

Special Thanks

Dwayne Marsh and Julie Nelson, whose work on the GARE team helped launch CCORE and made this collaboration possible from the start.

A Note on How This Report Was Written

This report reflects the thinking, experimentation, and lived experience of many people over many years. The ideas were developed through shared work, dialogue, and practice. The CCORE and SARE teams at State of Equity put this work into motion day to day and shaped both the questions and the strategies reflected here. The GARE team built the foundation by insisting that governing for racial equity could be a national movement, and their openness to an early and experimental California partnership created the conditions for something new to emerge. Government staff and leaders piloted new approaches inside state government and called for statewide training in racial equity practices, work that set the stage for CCORE. Their courageous and visionary leadership from within public institutions shaped the practical lessons at the heart of this report.

1. Introduction: Advancing Racial Equity Through Organized Government and Community Power

The Capitol Collaborative on Race & Equity (CCORE) was launched eight years ago to help California state government advance racial equity in a sustained and practical way. That work is more important now than ever. Federal and state actions are rolling back civil rights protections and constraining equity-focused work inside public institutions. State governments have become a primary arena where these tensions play out, as authority, resources, and policy direction increasingly flow through states even as federal equity infrastructure, training, and funding has diminished. Meanwhile, communities of color, immigrants, and low-income families continue to experience disproportionate harm from policy decisions related to housing, health, climate, public safety, and economic opportunity. In this context, the central question is not whether racial inequities exist, but whether government has the infrastructure, relationships, and practices to address them consistently, including under political pressure.

CCORE is a joint project of State of Equity, a program of the Public Health Institute, and Race Forward's Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). It represents an eight-year investment in building durable racial equity infrastructure inside California state government.

In practice, advancing racial equity requires government to name racism explicitly, understand how structures produce unequal outcomes, account for harms committed by their institutions, and change systems to create better outcomes. It also requires moving beyond consultation toward genuine power sharing and planning with communities most affected by government action.

This report focuses on the less visible work that makes sustained change possible: relationship building, cross-agency organizing, practitioner support, and the inside-outside partnerships that connect government, community organizations, and philanthropy. These elements constitute what we mean by organizing. Organizing, in this context, is the deliberate work of building shared power among communities, government workers, and institutional leaders, so that racial equity becomes embedded in how government functions, not dependent on any single leader or political moment.

CCORE emerged at the intersection of two established approaches. California's Health in All Policies (HiAP) Task Force created a foundation for cross-agency collaboration around equity and population outcomes. GARE contributed a framework and practical tools for institutionalizing racial equity in government through organizational change and accountability. Together, these shaped CCORE's focus on cross-agency organizing, shared practice, and structural change rather than one-time initiatives. While relationships and collective practice are foundational, the work has also produced concrete and lasting changes. Over time, participants have translated relational trust into new structures, dedicated roles, formal commitments, and changes to how agencies hire, budget, and operate.

This report documents how that infrastructure was built and sustained across multiple gubernatorial administrations, shifting political conditions, and periods of both expansion and contraction. It draws on the experiences of hundreds of state government practitioners who have participated in CCORE's learning cohorts, leadership programs, planning intensives, and peer networks.

As the work matured, practitioners outside California increasingly sought connection to CCORE and State of Equity, citing similar challenges with institutional resistance, political pressure, and isolation. These requests confirmed that the conditions CCORE was responding to in California were not unique. In response, State of Equity partnered again with GARE to create States Advancing Racial Equity (SARE), a national strategy and power-building community for state government practitioners. SARE builds directly on the experiences of both GARE and CCORE and operates as a two-way exchange: national insights inform strategy in California, and California's experience contributes to field learning across states.

This case study is intended for state agency leaders, governors' offices, practitioners, philanthropy, nonprofit partners, and community-based organizations seeking to build or sustain governmental racial equity work over time. While grounded in California's experience, the analysis is intended to support state-based racial equity work across differing political, institutional, and regional contexts. The lessons described here show that durable change depends on long-term relationships, organizing, and sustained investment, especially in moments of political transition and heightened risk.

Outcomes at a Glance

The CCORE program and the work of its participants have supported a wide range of outcomes, achieved across multiple gubernatorial administrations and through shifting political conditions:

- California's racial and health equity infrastructure has persisted across administrations spanning governors from both parties.
- Since 2018, more than 600 government workers across 60 California state departments, agencies, offices, boards, and commissions have participated in CCORE capacity building programs, developing common language, tools, and peer support. Nearly 40 state agencies have developed racial equity action plans, and more than 20 have embedded equity into agency budgets, including by creating permanent equity positions.
- The California Racial Equity Commission was established through years of coordinated organizing, advocacy, and partnership among community leaders, racial justice

"As a result of participation, we have revised our grant guidelines, revised our interview questions, formed an internal environmental justice team to formulate an environmental justice policy, added an environmental justice section to our strategic plan, developed new, language-appropriate material for the public, and have drafted an internal racial equity action plan!" — Anonymous CCORE Participant

organizations, policy advocates, government practitioners, and philanthropic partners. State of Equity and GARE contributed to this broader ecosystem by surfacing patterns across agencies, grounding practitioner learning in community priorities, and supporting the case for a coordinated, all-of-government strategy. The statewide Racial Equity Framework was finalized in December 2025 and is moving into implementation in 2026. Commissioners are currently exploring mechanisms to establish a permanent Office of Racial Equity.

- CCORE has remained adaptable and responsive, creating solidarity spaces, BIPOC-centered healing and learning environments, and rapid response programming as political conditions required.
- Many early CCORE participants now hold cabinet, director-level, and senior leadership roles in state and local government, extending CCORE's influence across administrations and policy areas while mentoring newer practitioners.
- CCORE's organizing model and practitioner network contributed directly to the launch of States Advancing Racial Equity (SARE), a national strategy and organizing community for state government racial equity leaders.
- The Sacramento Area Racial Equity Practitioners Network (SAREPN) was launched in 2024 by practitioners across state and local government including CCORE alumni and staff. The group supports peer exchange and collective problem-solving across jurisdictions.

“The most important result of [CCORE] is our organization's Racial Equity Action Plan that gives us concrete and attainable goals to reduce racial inequities.”
— **Anonymous CCORE Participant**

2. The Foundations of CCORE: Where HiAP and GARE Meet

CCORE was deliberately designed by practitioners who understood that lasting change in state government requires both institutional capacity and a clear framework for understanding and addressing racial inequity. Those elements came from two complementary sources: the Health in All Policies approach and GARE. Together, they explain why CCORE is structured the way it is and how it operates in practice.

The Role of Health in All Policies

California's HiAP Task Force was established in 2010 by Executive Order S-04-10 and sustained across multiple administrations. Its purpose is to improve health, equity, and environmental sustainability by aligning the work of state agencies whose decisions shape the conditions in which people live. HiAP is grounded in the recognition that outcomes such as chronic disease, housing instability, climate impacts, and educational inequity are produced by choices made across government, not by any single department.

HiAP advances five core principles that are also foundational to CCORE:

- Promoting health, equity, and environmental sustainability by focusing on outcomes for people and the conditions that produce inequities

- Supporting interagency collaboration around shared goals
- Creating mutual benefit for participating agencies so collaboration can be sustained
- Engaging communities and stakeholders in shaping decisions that affect them
- Embedding equity into structures, processes, and decision making rather than treating it as an add-on

Over time, HiAP changed how state government worked. It normalized cross-agency collaboration in a system where agencies had traditionally operated in silos. Staff began to see their work as part of a broader system, and executive leaders increasingly approached complex problems as shared responsibilities rather than isolated mandates.

By the time CCORE launched, HiAP had established shared baseline understandings across state agencies. These included recognition that health outcomes are shaped by social, economic, and environmental conditions; that persistent disparities are both unjust and preventable; and that government has the authority and responsibility to act. Health and equity had become part of the working language of state government, creating conditions that made deeper racial equity work possible.

These shifts were supported by intentional structural choices. The HiAP Task Force was housed within the Strategic Growth Council, a cabinet-level coordinating body, giving it cross-sector reach and access to senior state leadership. The California Department of Public Health contributed subject matter expertise, while the Public Health Institute, through its HiAP team, now known as State of Equity, provided staffing and coordination. This inside-outside partnership allowed the work to remain adaptive, relational, and durable. CCORE built on this model, carrying forward both its structure and its emphasis on long-term organizing.

Why the HiAP Team Partnered with GARE

As HiAP work developed, Task Force partners came to understand that health disparities had always been rooted in racism. The Task Force increasingly focused on these root causes and recognized that disparities were created and sustained by structural racism embedded in policies, institutions, and government practices over time. While HiAP helped agencies see how decisions across sectors affect health, it needed to bring in outside guidance and approaches to directly confront structural racism and for making internal systemic changes needed to dismantle it within government.

State agency staff needed more than analysis. They needed shared language, practical tools, and organizational strategies that would support sustained institutional change and set a permissive environment for that change. At the same time, the HiAP team saw an opportunity. GARE developed precisely this kind of framework, and was building a broad network of jurisdictions across California. But its work focused on cities and counties, and was not adapted for the realities of state government. State governments are larger bureaucracies, have different leadership structures, and more complex political dynamics.

The HiAP team recognized that adapting GARE's framework for a state context would require intentional partnership. The goal was not replication, but translation that fit California state government.

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity

GARE is a national member network of government entities working to advance racial equity through institutional change. Its work builds on a practical framework that helps government move from recognizing racial disparities and structural racism to changing the policies, practices, and decision-making systems that produce them.

GARE's approach is organized around four elements that are mutually reinforcing:

- **Visualize:** Visualize: Establish a clear, shared picture of what racial equity looks like in practice, providing direction rather than reacting only to problems.
- **Normalize:** Normalize: Build shared understanding of structural and institutional racism, using data and dialogue to support honest conversations about race and its impacts.
- **Organize:** Organize: Develop the internal and external infrastructure needed to sustain equity work, including staffing, cross-agency teams, training, and community partnerships.
- **Operationalize:** Operationalize: Apply racial equity tools in the places where government makes consequential decisions, including budgeting, policy development, program design, and implementation.

A central feature of GARE's framework is its emphasis on racial equity as an organizational responsibility, not an individual commitment. In government settings, this distinction is critical. Individual commitment is vulnerable to turnover, administration changes, and shifting priorities. Organizational responsibility can be embedded in all operations and decision making in government, including hiring, budgeting, performance management, and accountability systems. GARE provides shared language and tools that help practitioners make this shift and sustain it over time.

Integrating HiAP and GARE Through CCORE

In 2017, the HiAP team partnered with GARE to launch the Capitol Cohort, a year-long training and learning space for California state agency staff. It was the first time GARE's model had been adapted for a state government audience. Participation in the inaugural cohort exceeded expectations, with state government contracting for training services for nearly 200 staff from 19 departments. Philanthropy provided substantial funding for deep and intentional organizing, coordination, and operations to get this effort up and running.

Building on this momentum, State of Equity, the Strategic Growth Council, and GARE formally established the Capitol Collaborative on Race & Equity in 2018. The emphasis on "collaborative" was intentional because CCORE was designed as a sustained, cross-agency community of practice rather than a time-limited program or training series.

From HiAP, CCORE inherited the infrastructure that made cross-agency organizing possible, including backbone staffing, shared learning structures, long-standing interagency relationships, and an inside-outside partnership model. From GARE, CCORE inherited a clear racial equity framework, practical tools, shared language, and an organizational change model grounded in accountability.

"[CCORE has] connected me with an incredible network of passionate and brilliant CA civil servants and broken down silos across agencies and departments with similar missions to mine." —
Anonymous CCORE Participant

Together, these elements produced something neither approach could have achieved on its own. HiAP provided institutional access and cross-sector reach but had not centered racial equity as its primary organizing principle. GARE brought a strong racial equity framework but would have faced significant barriers operating across a complex state bureaucracy without existing infrastructure. CCORE integrates both, creating a more durable approach to advancing racial equity in state government.

The experience of translating and sustaining this integrated approach within a complex state bureaucracy later informed efforts to support similar work in other state contexts, where practitioners faced comparable structural and political constraints.

3. How CCORE Works: Why a Portfolio Approach Matters

CCORE's programs developed over eight years in direct response to practitioner needs and political conditions. Understanding both the programs and the infrastructure connecting them is essential to understanding how CCORE has sustained its impact. Each program serves a distinct purpose. The Learning Cohort builds foundational analysis and cross-agency connection. The Transformative Leadership Cohort supports advanced leadership development for BIPOC practitioners. The Planning and Preparedness Intensive provides rapid strategic support during uncertainty. Together, they form a continuum that meets practitioners at different stages rather than channeling everyone into a single pathway.

CCORE also provides ongoing support beyond formal programs, including one-on-one coaching, small group convenings, and thought partnership tied to real decisions. These relational supports distinguish CCORE as a collaborative rather than a curriculum. As demand grew beyond California, CCORE's experience balancing depth, safety, and responsiveness informed the design of national peer infrastructures grounded in relationship and trust.

Learning Cohort

The Learning Cohort (LC) is CCORE's original program and primary entry point. Launched in 2017 in partnership with GARE, it brings together teams from multiple state agencies for a year of rigorous shared learning, skill building, and peer exchange.

Participants develop a shared racial equity analysis, work with GARE's organizational change framework, and create agency-specific action plans. Because many participants enter as one

of few equity-focused staff in their agency, the cohort is designed to reduce isolation and build shared purpose.

Cross-agency participation also makes systemic patterns visible. As participants compare experiences, common barriers emerge, including risk-averse legal interpretations, middle management resistance, and difficulty translating equity commitments into budget and policy language. This shared diagnosis helps reframe challenges and supports collective response.

“I feel empowered because of the tools and new communication skills I gained [through CCORE] to uplift the importance of addressing racial equity and understanding systematic inequalities.” — Anonymous CCORE Participant

Transformative Leadership Cohort

The Transformative Leadership Cohort (TLC) was created in 2022 to address a gap that mixed-audience programs do not reach. BIPOC leaders in state government often carry a disproportionate share of equity work, face heightened visibility and risk, and navigate pressures around representation and institutional resistance that their white colleagues do not encounter. TLC centers BIPOC leaders in a smaller, more intimate setting that integrates leadership development, political analysis, and healing. Participants build strategies for sustainable leadership while developing deep trust with peers. The program embeds wellbeing, healing, and liberatory frameworks to support BIPOC practitioners navigating the specific demands of racial equity work.

Planning and Preparedness Intensive

The Planning and Preparedness Intensive (PPI) launched in 2025 in response to an increasingly volatile political environment. As challenges to racial equity work intensified, practitioners needed practical support to protect and adapt work already underway. PPI is a three-month cohort for established teams. It focuses on anticipating risks, identifying strategic openings, and adapting approaches in response to leadership transitions, legal constraints, or political pressure. Preparedness is treated as standard practice, not crisis response.

5. Lessons from Eight Years of Practice

The lessons below draw on eight years of building racial equity infrastructure in California state government, and more than fifteen years of health and equity work more broadly. They reflect direct experience, practitioner feedback, surveys, interviews, and ongoing relationships with people doing this work inside government. They are offered not as a replicable blueprint but as hard-won guidance for practitioners and partners navigating similar conditions elsewhere.

Relational design is the work, not a support for it

Participants consistently identify CCORE's relational design as one of its most valuable features. Cross-agency cohorts reduce isolation in ways that agency-specific efforts cannot,

and the relationships formed through CCORE have supported practitioners through difficult moments, strengthening informal coordination across agencies and informing equity practices in hiring, budgeting, and policy decisions. Protecting that relational core requires deliberate pacing. There has been consistent external pressure to scale faster, reach more agencies, and expand programming in ways that can gradually displace the relationship-building that makes the work effective in the first place. Relational infrastructure cannot be built faster than trust allows, and treating pacing as a strategic choice rather than a logistical constraint is one of the more important lessons of CCORE's experience.

Executive engagement is high leverage but requires sustained attention

Where agency leaders have actively protected, resourced, and reinforced equity work, institutional change has been more durable. Many senior state leaders, including cabinet secretaries and agency directors, have participated in public briefings and discussions on racial equity, and their direct engagement has expanded the conditions under which staff can act. Securing leadership commitment early, linking equity goals to agency priorities, and revisiting those commitments through leadership transitions are among the highest-leverage actions available.

Leadership transitions introduce significant disruption and uncertainty. Even when equity language remains formally endorsed, practitioners often must reestablish trust, reexplain the work, and renegotiate permission with new leadership. The inside-outside partnership model reduces the loss of institutional memory that transitions produce because the nonprofit backbone carries continuity that government staff cannot. When agency champions leave, are reassigned, or lose positional authority, the relationships, analysis, and organizational history built through CCORE remain accessible through State of Equity and GARE.

Peer exchange reduces isolation and introduces visibility

Peer exchange has functioned as an important organizing strategy. When practitioners recognize shared barriers across agencies, individual struggles become collective problems that can be addressed strategically rather than absorbed personally. The same dynamic that made peer exchange valuable in California has been echoed by state practitioners in other parts of the country who lacked comparable peer infrastructure and sought connection through national spaces such as SARE. Cross-agency peer relationships also increase practitioners' visibility. As people act collectively and share analysis across agencies, their work becomes more conspicuous and therefore more vulnerable to scrutiny. Maintaining spaces for candid peer exchange while managing that exposure has required careful attention to confidentiality, convening design, and communication practices.

"I left with a feeling that I wasn't alone in my journey and that there are so many others on the road with me. I'm bringing a lot back to my organization, but also keeping a lot for myself." —

Anonymous CCORE Participant

Maintaining racial equity analysis under pressure requires ongoing recalibration

Sustaining a clear analysis of structural racism while adapting framing to shifting political conditions is one of the most demanding aspects of this work. Connecting equity to existing agency priorities, including health, transportation, climate resilience, education, and public safety, has helped sustain the work in contexts where explicit equity language has been challenged. Adapting framing without diluting core analysis requires judgment, peer support, and ongoing strategic alignment across the network and with movement partners.

Philanthropic investment stabilizes work and carries risk

By funding backbone capacity, peer learning, and rapid response that government cannot easily support, philanthropy has enabled continuity through lean periods and political transitions. Early philanthropic investment helped establish proof of concept, demonstrating that a cross-agency, organizing-grounded approach to racial equity could work at the state level, which in turn helped make the case for state investment.

Philanthropy also provides protection. Requesting institutional funding for racial equity programming can draw scrutiny and political risk. For BIPOC staff, being publicly associated with resource requests for equity work can carry professional and personal consequences. By underwriting key elements of participation, philanthropy reduces the need for practitioners to expose themselves to access learning, community, or support.

Philanthropic funding is also subject to shifting priorities and economic conditions, and funding reductions and delays have strained staff and partnerships. In these times, the work has been sustained through trust and shared purpose. Investments in relationship-building, peer networks, and backbone capacity are what allow equity infrastructure to endure uncertainty, though these returns are rarely visible on short grant timelines.

Government systems were not designed for this work

Contracting, procurement, and compliance frameworks remain a persistent structural constraint. This is a structural problem. Government contracting is designed for bilateral relationships between a single agency and a vendor. A multi-agency cohort model, where participants from dozens of agencies learn and organize together, has no natural procurement home. No single agency can easily contract on behalf of others, and the administrative complexity and political coordination required to do so has proven prohibitive. Government leaders who want to participate and have funding available to support the work often cannot access a mechanism to pay for it.

The practical result is that organizations doing this work are frequently left choosing between seeking contract exceptions for smaller, narrower scopes of work, or relying on philanthropy to fill a gap that government funding could theoretically cover. Neither option fully reflects the scale or ambition of what agencies themselves say they want. Organizations seeking to replicate this model should treat contracting as a central design challenge that requires early

engagement with legal and procurement staff and should expect that solving it will require ongoing creativity rather than a one-time administrative fix.

Safety and care are prerequisites, not afterthoughts

Government racial equity practitioners, particularly BIPOC staff, face real consequences from Public Records Requests, FOIA inquiries, political targeting, and external surveillance. California practitioners have navigated these threats throughout CCORE's eight years, and conversations with practitioners in other states have surfaced similar patterns and foreshadowed risks that California is increasingly facing. Protecting state workers requires deliberate design choices at every level of program delivery.

Practices that have proven essential include following practitioner guidance on risk rather than assuming what is safe; designing convenings to reduce exposure through off-campus locations, non-standard hours, and careful calendar management; treating information security as a baseline requirement rather than an optional precaution; limiting documentation to only what is necessary and avoiding recordings, transcripts, and AI note-taking tools; covering travel and participation costs directly so practitioners are not required to seek employer approval in ways that can invite scrutiny or retaliation; and staying flexible enough to adapt program design as political conditions shift. BIPOC practitioners face heightened visibility and scrutiny that their white colleagues often do not, and they are best positioned to assess their own exposure. Centering their judgment in program design decisions is a prerequisite for ethical practice.

Healing and community voice are integral to the work

Integrating healing and restorative practices into program design has been essential, particularly for BIPOC practitioners carrying disproportionate personal and professional costs. The TLC's explicit attention to wellbeing created space that participants described as uniquely sustaining. Across programs, attending to the human dimensions of this work has proven to be a strategic investment, helping practitioners stay engaged and effective over time. Centering community voices has similarly strengthened the quality and legitimacy of practitioner learning. People most impacted by government decisions should be present in and shaping learning spaces, not consulted afterward. That presence grounds practitioners in lived experience, reinforces accountability to the communities the work is meant to serve, and helps sustain the moral clarity that this work requires over time.

6. Guidance for Practitioners and Partners

Different actors bring different leverage to this work. The guidance below reflects what each can do given their distinct role and position.

If you are a state executive

Your positional authority shapes the conditions under which equity work is possible in ways that no other actor can replicate.

- Protect time and institutional permission for organizing, learning, and peer exchange, and communicate consistently about equity commitments so staff are not left to defend the work on their own.
- Establish safety and confidentiality protocols and create space for honest conversations about risk among your staff.
- Use your authority to remove barriers for internal champions and to signal that this work is legitimate and valued across the agency.
- Fund participation in learning and peer exchange as a standard budget item, not an exception requiring justification.
- Ensure that community-centered perspectives shape agency guidance and training, and set clear expectations that centering impacted communities is core to the agency's work.
- Recognize and credit the labor that staff are carrying.

If you are a funder

Your greatest contribution is investing in infrastructure and flexibility.

- Fund backbone capacity, preparedness, and peer learning alongside programmatic work, recognizing that these are what allow organizing infrastructure to persist through political transitions and lean periods.
- Prioritize long-term unrestricted funding and reduce reporting burden where you can.
- Cover participation and travel costs as standard practice, recognizing that these costs carry protective value for practitioners who might otherwise have to seek employer approval.
- Treat healing and restoration as core capacity building, not supplemental programming.
- Invest in organizations that build networks, sustain practitioners, and support power-sharing, because those investments create conditions for durable change that program grants alone cannot.

If you are a nonprofit or community partner

You are positioned to engage in powerful inside-outside organizing and prepare community members to engage with government systems in ways that are strategic, informed, and on their own terms.

- Engage state systems strategically without subordinating community priorities to government timelines or frameworks.
- Co-design approaches that center what communities have defined as their priorities, and build relationships across agency functions, not only with program staff.
- Insist that community voices shape practitioner learning and strategy development. People most impacted by government decisions should be present in the spaces where practitioners develop analysis and make decisions, and treat that presence as a design requirement.
- Treat safety and privacy as non-negotiable in all aspects of partnership with government.

- Advocate for legislation that aligns with equity work happening inside government institutions. When racial equity comes onto public agency agendas, mobilize community members to submit public comments and show up in those processes. Visible public support strengthens the hand of practitioners working on the inside.
- Take time to understand government budget processes and constraints, and work alongside government practitioners to identify strategies that make it easier for budgets to reflect community priorities.

If you are a government practitioner

Your daily decisions, relationships, and presence shape what is possible in ways that no outside partner can replicate.

- Build safety, care, and flexibility into program design from the start, and adapt language and tactics as political conditions change while holding firm to core analysis.
- Treat peers as strategists and partners, and practice co-governance by sharing decision-making authority with participants and community.
- Understand that every operational decision, however routine, carries an opportunity to apply equitable considerations, and look for the spaces where you have real sovereignty to create change rather than defaulting to risk aversion.
- Recognize the distinction between your official government role and your identity and agency as a community member. You are well-positioned to support organizing and building coalitions outside of formal work hours. This is one of the ways that practitioners build the collective power needed to shift institutions over time.
- Draw on peers and state entities that have been successful in advancing racial equity as sources of strategy, analysis, and encouragement.

7. Funding CCORE: A Blended Model

CCORE has been sustained through a combination of philanthropic grants, state contracts, and organizational investments, with State of Equity serving as the backbone organization responsible for coordination, staffing, and fiscal management. Each funding source has played a distinct role.

Philanthropic grants have supported both specific programs and the less visible backbone infrastructure, including staffing, facilitation, and relationship-building, that makes the work possible. The California Endowment supported the launch of the Health in All Policies Task Force and later invested in CCORE's development. Blue Shield of California Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation provided sustained support over time. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported national expansion through SARE.

“State of Equity has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for racial and health equity in California government practices — we wouldn't be where we are today if not for their efforts and partnership.” — Anonymous CCORE Participant

Before grant funding was secured for SARE, both PHI and Race Forward's GARE made strategic investments of their own unrestricted funds to establish proof of concept. This reflects the kind of institutional risk-taking that is rarely visible in funding narratives but is often what allows new infrastructure to get off the ground. State contracts have also conferred legitimacy, provided institutional access, and signaled that racial equity work is part of the state's own responsibilities. Navigating government procurement frameworks, which were not designed for long-term, relational, cross-agency organizing, has required sustained effort and creativity.

Together, these funding streams have allowed CCORE to remain flexible and responsive across multiple administrations and through periods of significant political uncertainty.

8. Who Can Do This Work: Staff Qualities and Qualifications

Because this work is relational, unpredictable, and often politically exposed, it cannot rest on any one person. An effective backbone staff team will share the analysis, distribute the workload, and hold one another accountable, including across differences of power and positionality such as race, class, gender, and organizational role. Staff need to be flexible enough to fill in for one another, step in when capacity shifts, and make decisions collectively, since new work and changed conditions affect the whole team. Hierarchy within the team should not determine who contributes or who defers. The qualities described below are both a standard for how staff work together and for what individuals bring:

- **Grounded racial equity analysis.** Staff need a working understanding of structural racism, its historical roots, and how it operates inside government institutions. This includes fluency with organizational change frameworks, racial equity tools, and the practical realities of translating equity commitments into policy, budget, and operational decisions.
- **Relational capacity.** Much of this work happens through relationships built over time across institutional contexts that include government agencies, community organizations, and philanthropy. Staff need to contribute meaningfully in each of those settings without holding a formal role in any of them, which requires judgment, humility, and the ability to read and adapt to different environments and cultures.
- **Facilitation skill.** Staff facilitating learning spaces must be able to hold complexity, address harm in real time, and create conditions where practitioners feel safe enough to be honest. This requires experience working across identities and a clear personal grounding in racial equity practice that goes beyond familiarity with frameworks.
- **Comfort with ambiguity.** Significant portions of this work do not map cleanly onto deliverables, timelines, or measurable outputs. Staff need to sustain relationships, stay responsive to emerging conditions, and contribute to long-term organizing without always being able to point to a concrete work product as evidence of progress.
- **Political fluency.** Staff need to understand how state government works, including how decisions are made, where power sits, and how political conditions shape what is

possible at any given moment. This includes the ability to adapt framing and strategy as conditions shift without losing analytical clarity or compromising core commitments.

- **Commitment to practitioner care.** Staff working with BIPOC practitioners under pressure must attend to safety, wellbeing, and the cumulative costs of this work. Designing programs with care, following practitioner guidance on risk, and recognizing that the sustainability of the work depends on tending to the people doing it are not peripheral concerns. They are central to responsible practice.

9. Conclusion

The ecosystem that has grown around CCORE points toward what is achievable at scale. Hundreds of state workers, many of them BIPOC practitioners carrying this work at significant personal and professional cost, have built racial equity skills and used them to change how public institutions operate. Dozens of agencies have integrated racial equity practices into programming, community partnerships, and grantmaking. Workers who built skills and relationships through CCORE now hold senior roles across government, community organizations, and philanthropy, carrying shared analysis into positions of influence.

*“CCORE’s work is really the laboratory or the foundation on which the State work is going to be informed.” — Anonymous
CCORE Participant*

Philanthropic foundations, nonprofits, government leaders, and community-based organizations have teamed up for a complex approach to inside-outside organizing that has included strategic investments, network weaving, capacity-building, peer exchange, and simultaneously building public pressure on government to serve the common good while also building government’s capacity to meet that demand. CCORE demonstrates that change is possible, even through political transitions, leadership turnover, and sustained attacks on equity work. Several new structures have grown out of or been influenced by CCORE, including the California Racial Equity Commission, the statewide Racial Equity Framework, SAREPN, and SARE as a national network.

The conditions that make this work possible are not California-specific. They are transferable principles that practitioners and partners in any state can draw on, adapt, and build from: long-term relationships, cross-sector organizing, sustained investment in backbone capacity, and genuine care for the people doing the work.

The national moment is difficult, but it is also generative. Practitioners across the country are navigating similar pressures and seeking connection, peer support, and shared strategy. That demand is real, and the infrastructure to meet it exists. What is needed now is sustained commitment from funders, state partners, and community allies to resource that infrastructure with urgency and a long-term view.