

# Transforming Organizations by Operationalizing Racial Justice

Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please read my Reflections of Practice on p. 4-6, in which I share more about what led me to update this document. My Acknowledgements (page 70) shares who reviewed and provided their insights and feedback and includes some of the people who influenced my thinking and my practice.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The uprisings and organizing<sup>2</sup> for police abolition and radical transformation for racial justice and liberation intensified during 2020, shook up how we did things and how we interacted with each other. It changed a few oppressive policies and laws even though more have since been created. There was an increase in more explicit language used to describe structural racism in the public sphere at the same time that those truths were being attacked and legislated against. The apparent voluminous divisions, though not new, found new public spaciousness, media amplification and deep pockets of covert and overt funding. There was increased attention, affirmation, and stoking of polarization by government leaders and media. We heard ahistorical perspectives, absent the impact of racism, spewed by mostly white people in social media as well as by conservative and also mainstream media companies. We also witnessed a vitriolic intensity of hate,<sup>3</sup> which led to violent acts, state sanctioned violence, and mass murders.

At the same time, there was an attack on what was being called critical race theory,<sup>4</sup> and a crusade to remove social justice books, with the rationale that these inconceivable actions would protect white<sup>5</sup> people's fragile emotions from hearing truths. Some communities, schools and organizations put their values on hold and acted defensively or out of fear and did nothing because they were concerned that there might be a backlash. Those organizing for racial justice did not always have the capacity to be proactive with the rapid response communication infrastructure necessary to counter the innumerable attacks, shifting narratives and new legislation.

It is important to also share a few of the significant racial justice strides that happened in the past few years. In some recent state and local elections, an increasing electorate voted for equity, choice, and democracy. President Biden's term started with an executive order "which charged the Federal Government with advancing equity for all, including communities that have long been underserved, and addressing systemic racism in our Nation's policies and programs."<sup>6</sup> Seattle voted to ban discrimination on the basis of caste.<sup>7</sup> African American Policy Forum and Transformative Justice Coalition organized a campaign to fight back against book bans across the country with a bus tour to mobilize "10 Million More Black Voters."<sup>8</sup> The NDN Collective launched the Land Back campaign<sup>9</sup> and recently, the City of Oakland returned five acres to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust<sup>10</sup>. The Police-Free LAUSD Coalition created a five-point plan to create safer schools through a community-based public safety initiative rather than through policing.<sup>11</sup> Two young Black state legislators in Tennessee were reinstated by their communities after being expelled for protesting in support of young people calling for changes in gun control legislation (while the white legislator who did the same was not expelled).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It is important to understand the uprising and protests in the context of a movement cycle, rather than a unique moment in time. Read more about in Frimpong, Allen Kwabena, "Movement Cycles in the Struggle for Black Lives," *Movement Net Lab*, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Introduction: The Year in Hate and Extremism Comes to Main Street." Southern Poverty Law Center, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Please use the [www.racialequitytools.org](https://www.racialequitytools.org) glossary for clarity on the terms listed in this document. The glossary can be found at <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#>

<sup>5</sup> In this document I use lower case for "white," and also capitalize the racial identity of each group of People of Color. One of the articles that articulates the recent discussions and also history is, Kim, E. Tammy. "The Perils of "People of Color"." *The New Yorker*, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Biden, Joseph R. *Executive Order on Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government*: U.S. Government, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Soundararajan, Thenmozhi. "A Historic Ordinance Could Ban Caste Discrimination." *YES!*, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> "Books Unbanned." 2022-2023.

<sup>9</sup> NDN Collective. "NDN Collective Landback Campaign Launching on Indigenous Peoples' Day 2020." news release, October 9, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Ixierda, Inés. "Sogorea Te' Land Trust and City of Oakland Announce Plan to Return Land to Indigenous Stewardship." news release, September 9, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Wisti, Erin. "Police Free LAUSD Offers a New Vision for Safer Schools: No More Cops" *Knock LA*, no. February 14, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Pugh, Catherine. "Black Lawmakers from Tennessee Reinstated." *The AFRO*. (2023).

One outgrowth of the past couple of years is witnessing, especially in the non-profit and philanthropic sector, organizations becoming increasingly interested in figuring out what to do and how to respond to the so-called 2020 ‘racial reckoning.’<sup>13</sup> Some organizations led with integrity, invested in a deep exploration and committed to transform systems. Many organizations implemented several activities (e.g., training, policy review, updated hiring practices), though their work seemed short-lived, possibly because they were addressing multiplying crises or lacked the internal fortitude and risk-taking muscle necessary for deep change. Some scrambled to do something that was immediate, but what they did felt performative.

Since 2020, some foundations responded with grants (some sizeable) to groups focused on racial equity. Based on the research presented in the publication from the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, *Mismatched: Philanthropy’s Response to the Call for Racial Justice*, those recent investments were often short-lived and limited. After countless research projects, reports, webinars, and conference panels, foundations and philanthropic organizations *should* know the basic equitable practices and be fully able to implement them (e.g., give general operating grants, simplify grant processes, increase payout, etc.) And yet, these practices are still not common operating procedures in the philanthropic sector.

Foundations whose missions focus on social justice can and should take the lead in creating sector accountability practices about the impact of philanthropy’s inequitable practices and should work for an organized response to invest in racial justice and democracy building. A recent opinion piece was written by key positional leaders from philanthropic institutions who used their platform to state that all foundations are good and are fully independent, therefore neither their decisions nor their actions should be critiqued as long as they conform with the law.<sup>14</sup> They also said that if feedback is warranted, they will define what type of feedback is acceptable. The article received some blog responses and likely some discussions behind closed doors. I question where the sector-wide accountability practice is to firmly address the full disregard of philanthropy’s relationship and accountability with community members, philanthropy’s history with injustice and exploitation that continues, and the double down of philanthropy’s privilege and entitlement. It is hard to imagine transformation of the sector, including redistribution of resources, when the necessary organizing and advocacy is not developing exponentially between foundations and philanthropic intermediaries.

While social justice language is being monitored and banned in schools, I have noticed that racism, privilege, and even the system of white supremacy is being talked about on all forms of media and more readily included in every aspect of most nonprofit and philanthropic conferences. These terms are no longer just brought up on a few more progressive panels and workshops. Organizations are using this language in external communication, social media, and requests for proposals (RFPs). Those interacting with organizations are reading the words not knowing whether they are just surface deep or there is commitment, substance, and accountability behind the terms.

As I reflect on internal organizational work focused on racial equity and racial justice, I question what is required to fortify institutional practices and ensure sustainability. What political force, crisis, or moral or spiritual quagmire needs to occur for nonprofits and philanthropic organizations to make a deep and sustained commitment, develop the internal stamina and take the bold action to transform? I ask this partly out of frustration, as is true for many of us, and also out of the belief that the commitment will not, and should not, come from an external force.

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<sup>13</sup> Norris, Michele L. "Don't Call It a Racial Reckoning. The Race toward Equality Has Barely Begun." The Washington Post (Washington, DC), December 18, 2020, Opinions.

<sup>14</sup> Le, Vu. "Philanthropy's Equivalent of "All Lives Matter"," Nonprofit AF. Vu Le NWB Consulting, 2023. Be sure to also read [Change Philanthropy Coalition Members' Statement](#).

We can and must move together collectively. Now is the time for all of us to act on our commitment to racial justice, to eradicate structural racism, colonization, and the system of white supremacy<sup>15</sup> from our organizations and non-profit and philanthropic ecosystems.<sup>17</sup> We must engage and be accountable to the community, specifically Communities of Color, in order to build power, co-create racially just and liberatory organizations, and fully support and contribute to the racial justice movement.

## Discuss

To shift the trajectory and to build our collective accountability, it is important to ask and discuss:

- How is your organization contributing to the racial justice movement every day?
- How is your organization boldly and tenaciously taking risks to advance racial justice?
- How is your organization being in right relationship<sup>16</sup> within your ecosystem and consistently being connected, communicative, and accountable?

## Reflections from My Practice – Why Update This Document Now?

I decided to update *Operationalizing Racial Justice in Non-Profit Organizations* soon after an intense and challenging engagement with an organization. I was seeing, in this and other organizations, a noticeable increase in raw emotion, generational tension, stealth gatekeeping behavior, and many staff demanding to go deeper. I was also experiencing hesitancy by many in positions of power who were afraid of a backlash. While many People of Color have understood, named, and led work to operationalize racial justice in organizations, since 2020 more white staff were increasing their knowledge and devouring podcasts, books, and blogs. Some staff discussed a more long-haul approach of transforming their organizations based on an understanding of racial capitalism, structural racism, colonization, and the system of white supremacy, while others expressed the urgency of taking quick action steps *now*. In some cases, they demanded it. The dynamics of the change process were evolving. After some of these experiences, I thought more about the scaffolding needed for a transformative change process and tried out some new things.

I don't have answers or a formulaic response about how to "handle" how the dynamics are shifting, or the impact of everything mentioned earlier about what's happened since 2020. I do know the paper I completed in July 2020 now feels somewhat dated. My offerings in this updated version are my attempt to share my reflections on my experience, give a synthesis of what I am learning, and share ideas about how to work to transform organizations based on 30 or so years of experience. I have added stories, a new section on trauma in organizations, more information on internal teams and assessments, more ideas about developing action plans and caucusing, new information about working with external consultants, and an updated list of curated resources. I hope this will continue the discussion of what we are seeing and experiencing regarding operationalizing racial

<sup>15</sup> For each of the terms mentioned in this document, please review [RacialEquityTools.org Glossary](https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary) for definitions.

<sup>16</sup> Grandoit, Alice. "adrienne maree brown on Creating the Future." *Deem* 20. (2020).

<sup>17</sup> Petty, Sheryl, and Amy B. Dean. "Five Elements of a Thriving Justice Ecosystem: Pursuing Deep Equity." *Nonprofit Quarterly* (2017).

justice and that there will be more opportunities for us to share what we are learning and our emergent work.

I also went back and forth about the ongoing consideration of whether my voice - that of a white cisgender woman - should contribute at this time by sharing my thoughts about organizational transformation. These last few years there have been so many provocative ideas and reflections being generated about racial justice organizational change and movement-building by Non-Profit Quarterly, and also by individual Writers of Color (I invite you to read the writings linked to their names), including [Cyndi Suarez](#); [Kad Smith](#); [Sheryl Petty](#); [Aja Couchois Duncan](#); [Elissa Sloan Perry](#); [Maurice Mitchell](#); [Dax-Devlon Ross](#); [Ericka Stallings](#), [Ananda Valenzuela](#), and [Trish Adobea Tchume](#); [adrienne maree brown](#); [Marcus Littles](#); [Ejeris Dixon](#); [Autumn Brown](#), and [Vu Le](#) (and many more). After discussing this question with colleagues who support and challenge me and reflecting and considering my own and our responsibility as white people to share our knowledge, lessons, and ideas, I decided to share my voice, perspective, and experiences for our collective work and echo the call to action for racial justice. And I began writing.

I will say, the years seem to get shorter as I grow older. I know I have so much still to do and experience and the perennial question about whether there will be ‘enough time’ is always ringing in my ear. As I get older, I increasingly lack tolerance for certain behaviors and my impatience grows. That probably comes through in some of my writing here, especially when there are numerous resources and tools available now for making progress on racial justice and people still say they are uncertain what to do or how to do it. Or when I am describing organizations who continue to “dip their toes” into a change process and just do the minimum while using all of the “right” words. At the same time, many who have a story to tell about their progress as well as their trials and tribulations remain hesitant, saying it is “because we are not far enough along,” or “what will our donors think of our work or our mistakes,” or because they are challenged to build consensus on the story to tell.

We continue to witness the destruction of democracy, the elimination of rights and freedoms (and now [affirmative action!](#)), and state sanctioned violence. I keep asking myself why the collective of organizations we’ve built hasn’t become a tsunami force to dismantle racist systems by using our brilliance and strength to transform what is happening. Some may say I am naïve to have expectations and hope for how we can be in a better relationship together to work collectively. I also understand the ongoing challenges for organizations and between organizations for sustained and ferocious movement-building. It speaks to why I have worked over the years to co-create or participate in networks of racial justice organizations and practitioners<sup>18</sup>. It is this very hope that keeps me going, as does my belief in what is possible. You will hear all those different voices, my frustration, my questions, and my hope, throughout this document. It may sometimes be frustrating for you as a reader, but hopefully this gives you some context.

Though I have been doing this work for a number of years, my experience has been mostly with predominately white non-profits and philanthropic organizations and a few communities. I have been very fortunate over the years to work with people who like to nerd out with me and think through designs, scaffolding, organizational dynamics, facilitation practices, strategy to move the most obstinate and propel those ready, and dreams about what is possible together as we each do our institutional organizing to contribute to the racial justice movement. I am very grateful to all of them, especially Partners of Color, who generously extend themselves in our relationship and are

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<sup>18</sup> More info about some of the networks are located on these sites: [Within Our Lifetime](#), [Network for Alliance Bridging Race and Ethnicity](#), [Baltimore Racial Justice Action](#), and [Deep Equity Practitioners Network](#). Potapchuk, Maggie with contributing writer Lori Villarosa. [Cultivating Interdependence: A Guide for Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations](#). Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (Washington, DC: 2004).

patient with me, especially when I don't use my voice, make missteps, make assumptions about our relationships, or act without engaging an accountability practice with them.

Let me say upfront that this document is dense. Some may appreciate looking at another reference to review in the middle of a sentence and others may find that style frustrating. (I love sharing resources!). There are lots of questions I share throughout. The questions shared are partly because there is no single formula for this work, and you will need to adapt the information to your organization. I also like questions. They help me increase my analysis and provide accountability while doing the work. Some of this information may bring up different emotions for you because it may remind you of past incidents or current reality, or you may feel overwhelmed by all the information and question your hope and commitment for racial justice. Take time to pause and breathe as you read through the heavy text. Your commitment to racial justice, your persistence in transforming your organization, and your tenacity to face whatever challenges are ahead will bring you fulfillment, satisfaction, hope, and joy. We need to all be in for the long haul. Take care of yourself - we are on this path for racial justice and liberation together.

*“Solidarity is not a matter of altruism. Solidarity comes from the inability to tolerate the affront to our own integrity of passive or active collaboration in the oppression of others, and from the deep recognition that, like it or not, our liberation is bound up with that of every other being on the planet, and that politically, spiritually, in our heart of hearts we know anything else is unaffordable.”*

- Aurora Levins Morales, Writer and Artist

## Grounding in Key Concepts

To avoid confusion, I want to share how I am using terms throughout this document. Other people and organizations may frame this work differently; we each make sense of the terms differently and yet there is an overlap in how these key terms get talked about. Though I will share my explanation for some of the key terms, if you are curious about other's, I recommend checking the [RacialEquityTools.org Glossary](https://www.racialequitytools.org).

Throughout this document there are times that I use the term racial equity and other times I use racial justice. This is intentional. OpenSource Leadership Strategies has a clear definition of racial equity: *"a mindset and method for solving problems that have endured for generations, seem intractable, harm people and communities of Color most acutely, and ultimately affect people of all races. This will require seeing differently, thinking differently, and doing the work differently. Racial equity is about results that make a difference and last."*<sup>19</sup> The Center for Assessment and Policy Development describes the results of racial equity as *"[when] one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares...we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities not just their manifestation."*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This definition was developed by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc. All work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial. No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

<sup>20</sup> Center for Assessment and Policy Development, "Racial Equity." [www.racialequitytools.org](https://www.racialequitytools.org) Glossary.

Essentially the action of operationalizing racial justice is an invitation to reimagine and co-create a racially just and liberated<sup>21</sup> world that includes:

1. understanding the history of racism<sup>22</sup> and the system of white supremacy and addressing past harms,
2. working in right relationship<sup>23</sup> and with accountability in an issue, sector, or community ecosystem for collective change,
3. implementing interventions that center dismantling structural racism, use an intersectional analysis<sup>24</sup> and impact multiple systems,
4. centering Blackness and building community, cultural, economic, and political power of all People of Color, and
5. applying the practice of love<sup>25</sup> along with disruption and resistance to the status quo.

*“We start with the unapologetic recognition that catalytic love is an intentional decolonizing act. Our people are hurt. Our young live with daily pain that poverty and systemic disinvestment have caused. To love is essential if we are building power. The path to power has to go through love first. Power without love—deep love—is merely an ego-driven endeavor. Equally true is that to love without fighting for power is immature, short-lived, and bland. To love in the context of fighting for and building power in our communities requires courage, integrity, and a long view.”*

- Shiree Teng & Sammy Nuñez. *Measuring Love on the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper*

### **Clarification on How Racial Equity and Racial Justice are Being Used**

Now that I’ve shared the definitions I am using, I want to clarify their use throughout this document, as I know it may be confusing. When I use the term racial equity, I am describing the *process of change* to identify and interrogate the practices and culture which is creating and/or reinforcing racial inequities and white dominant behaviors. When I use racial justice, I am referring to *actualizing a vision and transformation* that is reflective of the components of the definition above. I refer to a racial justice movement and not a racial equity movement. It is critical to do racial equity work, yet that work is insufficient for us to achieve racial justice. Some examples of racial justice include being able to talk about how an organization knows not only the history of racism but also names and owns how its policies and practices are reinforcing racism and is ready to be accountable for them. They center relationships by slowing the process down and working collectively to be in right relationship - with mutual respect, trust, love, and an understanding of the impact of their actions. They don’t only name accountability but practice it by calling in colleagues whose words and deeds are reinforcing structural racism and working collectively for racial justice.

<sup>21</sup> “The progression toward or the conscious or unconscious state of being in which one can freely exist, think, dream, and thrive in a way which operates outside of traditional systems of oppression. Liberation acknowledges history but does not bind any person to disparate systems or outcomes. Liberation is a culture of solidarity, respect, and dignity.” Kapitan, Alex. [Radical Copy Editor](#).

<sup>22</sup> This racial justice definition is based on and has been expanded from the one described in Sen, Rinku, and Lori Villarosa. [Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens: A Practical Guide](#). Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (2019).

<sup>23</sup> “Being in Right Relationship acknowledges that relationships are built at the speed of trust and requires transitioning from transactional exchanges to relationships of mutual respect. When you are cultivating Right Relationship there is a deep understanding that harms done to one person consequently and unavoidably harm everyone.” Informed by adrienne maree brown and SheEO.

<sup>24</sup> Sen, Rinku, “[How to Do Intersectionality](#),” Narrative Initiative, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Teng, Shiree, and Sammy Nuñez. [Measuring Love on the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper](#). Latino Community Foundation (San Francisco, CA: 2019). Defining “*love as action that is done in community for positive power and justice in community.*”



While it's important to use terms with accuracy and consistency, as we learn it's normal that we will be inaccurate and inconsistent. I am still learning, still working on being accurate and consistent with my use of terms and my work continues to evolve.

### **A Few Words about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)...**

It is important to understand the organizational phases of change for working toward racial justice. There are frameworks that provide some grounding<sup>26</sup> and outline the stages to move from monocultural to multicultural to anti-racist to liberatory organizations (though each framework uses different descriptors). I see the DEI approach as happening between the initial stages in this framework of monocultural and multicultural organizations, rather than those moving beyond multicultural on the spectrum to a transformative organization.

As I have mentioned in earlier writings,<sup>27</sup> I share concerns about the potential harm of the DEI approach. Diversity and inclusion play a role in this work, but their outcomes are very limited and do not address nor dismantle structural racism<sup>28</sup> and the system of white supremacy. Some of the potential harm DEI can cause include:

- not addressing entrenched and accumulated racialized inequities in all qualities of life (such as health, housing, education, public safety, and work).
- not focusing on building and redistributing power.
- being used as an amorphous term and as a protective veil of inaction without accountability for impact or action.

**In my experience, it is important to understand the intent of a change process focused on DEI** and whether it is to truly work toward transformation and the movement toward racial justice. DEI work can contribute to laying groundwork and building internal will. It is important to be clear about the limitations of DEI, especially when it is transactional, minimal, and being used to 'cover' actions that on the surface can sound like progress but create no substantive institutional change (see story on p. 25). The harm of using DEI can be great for individuals in organizations; and organizations can lose credibility in the community and within their ecosystem.<sup>29</sup>

### **Addressing white Dominant Culture in Creating a Racially Just Culture**

Throughout this document I use the terms white dominant culture and white dominant behaviors using the definition that Gita Gulati-Partee and I shared in an article we co-wrote in 2014. White dominant culture *“refers to the dominant, unquestioned standards of behavior and ways of functioning embodied by the vast majority of institutions in the United States. These standards may be seen as mainstream, dominant cultural practices; they have evolved from the United States’ history of white supremacy. Because it is so normalized it can be hard to see, which only adds to its powerful hold. In many ways, it is indistinguishable from what we might call U.S. culture or norms ... white culture values some ways of thinking, behaving, deciding, and knowing - ways that are more familiar and come more naturally to those from a white, western tradition -*

<sup>26</sup> Just Lead Washington, and Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative. *REJI Organizational Race Equity Toolkit: Tool C - Race Equity Culture Continuum for Organizations*. Just Lead Washington and Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative (2020). Another example is *Continuum on Becoming a Transforming Anti-Oppression Organization*, adapted by AORTA from Crossroads Ministries "Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization.

<sup>27</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. *DEI Strategy Is Limited and Potentially Harmful: So Now What?* MP Associates (2021).

<sup>28</sup> Please use the [www.racialequitytools.org](https://www.racialequitytools.org) glossary for clarity on the terms listed in this document. The glossary can be found at <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

<sup>29</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. *DEI Strategy Is Limited and Potentially Harmful: So Now What?* MP Associates (2021). See chart on page 11.

while devaluing or rendering invisible other ways. And it does this without ever having to explicitly say so...”<sup>30</sup>

Over the years, I have used the terms white dominant culture and white supremacy culture interchangeably and also sometimes decided to use one term over the other.<sup>31</sup> When I started working specifically with organizations and communities on dismantling racism in the late-90s, the first version of Tema Okun’s<sup>32</sup> article, “white Supremacy Culture,”<sup>33</sup> became influential in my thinking and informed my institutional organizing strategy (though I didn’t use that term back then). How I introduce the white Supremacy Culture framework to organizations has changed over the years and reflects my own journey and learning. In the early years, when I was in my righteous stage, I pointed fingers at behaviors; later, I worked to meet people where they were and supported people and organizations to learn and understand. Now, I ask people (as I do later in this document) to imagine what a racially just organization would look like and how we can work collectively toward that transformation. Throughout the years, I began to deepen my own understanding of Okun’s framework through writing and creating different tools<sup>34</sup> to help me and hopefully others effectively identify and analyze how these default behaviors, policies, and practices have been normalized in organizations’ cultures. In creating a racially just organization, I believe there is a twofold approach to changing culture - collectively imagining and working toward a racially just organization, and identifying white dominant practices, narratives and ethos that create or reinforce racially inequitable consequences, marginalize and even control individuals, and cause harm and then intervening, modifying, and/or eliminating these practices.

Early on in my consulting practice, when I introduced Okun’s white Supremacy Culture framework to an organization, there was pushback, resistance, and often struggle as the organization tried to make sense of it. Now Okun’s framework is increasingly well known, especially since 2020. Many of the characteristics in her framework are recognizable and easily discussed by staff. In some cases, staff are also filled with righteousness and point fingers, often at leadership. I believe Okun’s white Supremacy Culture (WSC) framework is A useful framework/concept, not THE only framework or concept to explain what dominant practices manifest in organizations. It continues for me to be a resource for organizational transformation. I also use other frameworks to analyze how structural racism, power, and system of white supremacy are operating within an organization and to understand how all of this, along with system of white supremacy, is present in an organization’s culture. (See Resource section, p. 59).

It is important to note there have been discussions about and some strong critiques of how the white Supremacy Culture framework gets used in organizations. Some have been suggesting that this particular framework should no longer be used.<sup>35</sup> I agree with some of the primary critiques about how it is being used and discussed in organizations, including:

- that it has been used against both individuals and organizations, and specifically has been used to harm Women of Color leaders, especially those who are the “firsts,” in

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<sup>30</sup> Gulati-Partee, Gita, and Maggie Potapchuk. "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity." *The Foundation Review* 6, no. 1 (2014): 25-38.

<sup>31</sup> At some point, though not in this document, it will be helpful to discuss and explore the nuances and approaches.

<sup>32</sup> In earlier versions of Tema Okun’s work she included Kenneth Jones as a co-author. In her recent [interview in The Intercept](#), she discusses that Kenneth Jones wished not to be listed as a co-writer. We are honoring his wishes. She shared the history of writing the article and who influenced her writing.

<sup>33</sup> Okun, Tema. "white Supremacy Culture." Updated June 2023, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. *Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool (TOCA)*. MP Associates (2021).

<sup>35</sup> Diaminah, Sendolo, Scot Nakagawa, Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, Rinku Sen, and Lori Villarosa. "How (Not) to Dismantle White Supremacy." *The Forge: Organizing Strategy and Practice*. (April 20, 2023).

predominately white organizations (amid other examples of how it has stalled progress).<sup>36</sup>

- that it has led some to assume that the characteristics Okun describes are tied to particular identities and therefore insinuate that there is a binary, with framework characteristics only associated with whiteness (e.g., good writing). The characteristics in the framework are also often seen as only individual behaviors rather than as policies, practices, and narratives within an organization's culture that are reinforcing, supporting, and in some cases labeling (and even punishing) what is good or bad.
- that it is being introduced and used by capacity builders and consultants and staff members (and others) as a diagnostic checklist focused on individual behaviors rather than as a systemic analysis of the characteristics of organizational culture.

### ***How to Use Frameworks to Address white Dominant Culture***

In the Getting Ready section below, I share more information about imagining racially just and liberatory culture. However, since Okun's framework is so popular, I want to share a few thoughts about how to use it and to address some of issues that have been raised about it. It is important to be thoughtful about how this framework is introduced and used, as we need to be for any framework being implemented in a racial justice organizational change process. We each have a responsibility, when we share a concept or framework, to understand it, and to use it with integrity and due diligence. This is especially true since systemic racism and white dominant behaviors show up differently in each organization's culture. Most of us, including myself, have gotten excited by a "shiny new tool" and have not always thought about how best to use it within a larger change process.

If your organization is using Okun's white supremacy culture framework, identifying characteristics should always be accompanied by individual and collective responsibility to address and ensure that there is work to change the organizational culture. Without a practice of accountability for making changes, the framework can be misused.

Two ways I've seen the white Supremacy Culture framework misused have been by individualizing the characteristics and not using an organizational cultural analysis or just doing the opposite of a specific white supremacy characteristic (e.g., changing a practice to one that says that deadlines should never exist because urgency is one of the white Supremacy Culture characteristics). I consider the intent of Okun's framework is to identify the root of the practice and to work collectively to be accountable in addressing dominant behaviors that are manifesting. The use of the framework can be helpful in moving organizations forward. However, as been discussed, experienced, and observed, the impact of using it incorrectly can also be significant and can include racialized consequences. Here are two examples of how to move it from individualizing to using an organizational culture analysis of how white dominant behaviors are manifesting:

- Every organization wants to be doing high quality work, yet Okun's framework includes a characteristic she calls "[perfectionism](#)." When I use the WSC framework, I interpret and discuss perfectionism by seeing if an organization's culture reinforces a narrative that failures and mistakes are only unacceptable individual actions and not opportunities for organizational learning. I also look to see whether there are consequences for mistakes, and if People of Color in the organization receive more severe consequences and backlash than their white colleagues. Then the focus is to work with the organization to create a culture in which experimentation happens,

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<sup>36</sup> Hosang, Daniel Martinez, LeAnn Hall, and Libero Della Piana. "[To Tackle Racial Justice, Organizing Must Change](#)." The Forge: Organizing Strategy and Practice. (January 4, 2022).

risk-taking is encouraged and people loudly share successes, failures and mistakes and work to learn from them. It is also critical to ensure that there are not racially disparate consequences when accountability for actions is needed.

- Some interpret Okun’s characteristic “urgency” as asking organizations to throw out deadlines or continually extend deadlines. Racial justice is urgent work. Yet, it is important to interrogate how deadlines are set up, who is driving them, and to consider Staff’s capacity and bandwidth to meet them. Deadlines can be set up as a way to ensure accountability to the community or to be used to exert power over and thereby minimize the engagement of the people most impacted by a campaign or policy. Reviewing a few past decisions regarding creating deadlines, and identifying the input and pressures involved will assist in being more thoughtful on ensuring racially equitable practices are included, and ensuring there is not racialized consequences or narrative for not meeting deadlines.

Finally, using Okun’s framework or another framework or tool to look at organizational culture provides an opportunity for organizations to identify how dominant practices are manifesting, assess whether there is a racialized impact, and then determine a strategy to create a more racially just culture. Here are some questions to use to interrogate practices to work toward organizational transformation:

- Are practices being used as “power over?”
- What is at the root of their use?
- What are the internal and external pressures that are reinforcing the practice, and possibly affirming it as well?
- What is the narrative within your organization about these practices? Does it define what is “good” and what is “bad” practices?
- Are there racialized consequences of using different practices?

We need to discuss and continue to question the white Supremacy Culture Framework, as we do other concepts and frameworks. The system of white supremacy is present in each and every organization. Each of us is accountable to develop our knowledge, skill, and intent in using any framework or concept. We also need to ensure that individuals, especially Leaders of Color are not harmed or pushed out of organizations by using these specific characteristics against people. Without this interrogation, we end up reinforcing the very practice we are trying to dismantle. Racism is not static. It is present and shapeshifts to keep the racial hierarchy and practices and narratives of dehumanization and marginalization concretely in place. Therefore, our racial justice work needs to be reactive, creative, emergent, and bold. As discussed later, we need to imagine what a racially just organization looks like, and then tenaciously co-create an organizational culture that will support it.



## 2. GETTING READY

*“Anything that reaches toward the sky must have a strong foundation to hold it up. That’s how I think of movements - movements reach toward the sky to achieve what has been deemed impossible. And in order to stay sturdy, they need a base - people who keep the movements anchored in the needs, dreams, and lived experiences of those who are directly impacted by the problem at hand.”*

*~ Alicia Garza, co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter and the Black Lives Matter Global Network, from [The Purpose of Power](#)*

If you are starting or continuing a process to transform your organization, the first thing to do is to envision what is possible and then realistically reflect on the work ahead through a series of questions. Some of the questions may be “big gulp” questions that may make you pause and wonder whether you can pick only doing some of the things necessary. Though it may seem like a lot, reflecting will provide you with clarity about the muscles that need to be built along the way and ideas about how to build the necessary internal will to take on this often messy and chaotic work. Later, I share information about how to organize teams and how to support their joint work as guides and catalysts for the change process, along with information about working with external consultants. Also included in this section are ideas for organizations with few staff on how to get ready.

### Organizational and Individual Reflection

I invite you to start by first, *imagining what a racially just organization would look like*.<sup>37</sup> This will provide space for you to consider how to begin or deepen your change process and to invite expansive possibilities, entry points and ideas about how to transform your organization. Folks’ ideas will probably be all over the place, since there is often not a common analysis about what racial justice means. Some people will just want to end discrimination, and others will want to create people-centered policies or will want to use a racial justice analysis in everything your organization does. Give space for all the ideas. I have found that starting here opens up the discussion and disrupts how business is typically done. The intel gathered will also inform where there is alignment on a vision and where there are divergent perspectives. Naming the alignment and the differences will begin to hold space so that people can understand individually and collectively the impact of structural racism, the collective work ahead, and also to be inspired by colleagues’ dreams and hopes.

<sup>37</sup> Bazant, Micah, "[How to Reimagine the World](#)." Forward Together, 2020.

## Racial Equitable Practices<sup>38</sup>

In one of the questions in the Transforming Organization Culture Assessment (TOCA) tool, there is a table with white dominant practices on the left side and then a list of racial equitable practices on the right side, that I believe support building a racially just culture. Here are few examples from the TOCA tool:

- **The organization invests** in and prioritizes relationship building. Relationships remain a priority while accomplishing the work.
- **Conflict** is considered a healthy part of the organization's culture.
- **The organization supports** different emotional responses to situations and provides thoughtful support.
- **Feedback** is provided regularly to each other with the intent to learn from each other. Making mistakes is considered part of the learning process.
- **Timelines** are determined based on different criteria, such as past work, prioritizing relationships, assessing the impact of pace of work, external variables, and ensuring that equitable practices are used. Timelines are adaptable as issues present themselves and changes are communicated.
- **Policies** are applied consistently, equitably, and transparently.
- **People with the most direct life experience** and/or who are most impacted by a decision are included in the decision-making process. Their input is prioritized and/or they are involved in reviewing a proposed decision prior to being final.
- **Power** to make decisions is distributed among people with different positional roles and responsibilities, bounded by trust, communicated transparently, and reinforced through established accountability practices.
- **Organizational budgets** are shared with staff, with opportunities for discussion and dialogue on how resources are being prioritized.
- **Resources for staff** (e.g., professional development, work tools, staffing) are distributed equitably and transparently.
- **The organization invests in and prioritize relationship building.** Relationships remain a priority while accomplishing the work.
- The organization assumes that **mistakes and failure** are part of the work and an opportunity for individuals and the organization to learn, make changes, innovate, and experiment and also to be accountable.
- **Progress** is assessed through different types of data and anecdotal information and is informed and determined by the people most impacted.
- Management works to **create a culture and practices** that support individual and collective wellbeing, including physical, emotional, and spiritual health. They may change deadlines to that end.
- **In external communications**, the organization discusses its racial justice commitment and its connection to the mission and work. Information is shared to educate stakeholders and to be accountable in operationalizing racial justice.”

<sup>38</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. [Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool](#). MP Associates (2021).

A racial justice organizational change process disrupts and stretches organizations in sometimes scary, chaotic, and also potentially unifying ways. After visioning with the imagining question, it is important to have a healthy and candid conversation about preparing to commit or deepening the commitment to this racial justice change process. *Here are some discussion questions to reflect on as a group:*

## Reflection Questions

- **What risks is our organization willing to take** to operationalize its value of racial justice? Is our organization willing to be explicit about naming structural racism, anti-Blackness, and the system of white supremacy?
- **How are we as an organization preparing to increase using our voice** to ensure our values are in alignment with our actions? In what ways will our organization use its power and privilege to make a stand and/or use its voice and standing in the community for racial justice?
- **How is our organization preparing for the potential disruption** in work, while policies, practices, and culture are being transformed to align with our value of racial justice?
- **What practices need to be put in place** for Staff and trustees to support each other, especially during times of complex change and uncertainty? How will our organization invest in and center building, repairing, and strengthening relationships? What types of supports will be put in place for Staff and trustees of Color, since they are often disproportionately burdened by the racial justice organizational change process - e.g., by its pacing, hesitations among white Staff and trustees, and the consequences when they share the truth about the impact of racism in the organization?
- **How is our organization building its backbone** for examining everything we do using a racial equity analysis? How are we preparing to hear candid feedback and to listen to different points of view and hard truths?
- **How are we preparing to discuss the history of our organization**, and how its decisions, policies, and/or actions may have caused racial inequities and direct or collective harm in the community, and for employees, and/or constituents? (Part of the organization building its backbone and increasing its tolerance for risk involves moving toward taking public ownership of missteps and sharing that they do not reflect our organization's current commitment of racial justice.)
- **Will our organization end or be willing to make needed changes** to program and services that are not moving toward racial justice, even if they might be considered successful and receive affirmation and/or funding? Is our organization ready to examine policies, practices, and partnerships to see if they are reinforcing white dominant culture or racial inequities?
- **After reviewing policies and practices**, if past or current policies or practices have reinforced inequities and/or caused harm, is our organization willing to be transparent about that fact in order to rebuild credibility, and willing to ensure that accountability is clear moving forward? How is our organization prepared to invest time and resources for needed healing work?
- **How will our organization respond** to stakeholders who may not agree with being explicit about racial equity, and/or centering racial justice? How are we preparing to deal with the potential backlash?

This is a challenging set of questions, and you may be left thinking, “we don’t have the ‘right’ answers - should we even do this?” YES, YOU SHOULD! Reflect with each other on what was challenging and any fears that came up. Discuss what you hope to change. This shared inquiry<sup>39</sup> helps you begin to understand the work ahead and continues (or begins) to share truths, build relationships, and strengthen the internal will moving forward. This (and any) change process requires a deep investment organizationally and individually. The question of whether you are ready is a constant question in the early stages. Your organization needs to know what is involved in terms of a financial investment, as well as what is needed to build the capacity of your team and to be prepared for emotions that will come and the tensions that may arise. No organization will have all their ducks lined up ready to go and be able to move forward with ease. These questions are designed to increase your understanding of what is ahead, begin to build your organizational muscles and strengthen your resolve to prepare you for the work. In the resource section (p. 58), there is a section with case studies. You can use these to read, discuss, share ideas, discuss questions and fears. Learn about the risks others took to make progress. Build your muscle to lean-in with strength and courage! I’ll share more about all of this later.

As you discuss the questions above as an organization, I recommend that each Staff and Board member also reflect individually on their own learning needs that will help them fully participate in this change process. Each person has a responsibility to create their own learning and action plan and to ask for support from colleagues and the organization to implement it. This is something an organization may want to do together - setting this expectation and creating a support structure like learning and accountability partners. I have found that it’s very important for leadership to share a strong message that operationalizing racial justice is everyone’s responsibility, and that the organization is acknowledging and highlighting the gifts and experience each person brings to the process. It’s also critical to acknowledge that everyone is on a learning journey and that folks will have individual as well as collective needs.

*“A rebellion disrupts the society but it does not provide what is necessary to make a revolution and establish a new social order. To make a revolution, people must not only struggle against existing institutions. They must make a philosophical/spiritual leap and become more ‘human’ human beings. In order to change/transform the world, they must change/transform themselves.”*

*~ Grace Lee Boggs, Activist, from [The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century](#)*

<sup>39</sup> For more and different organizational and individual questions, check out the questions at the end of this article: Epstein, Rebecca, and Mistinguette Smith. ["Paving a Better Way: What's Driving Progressive Organizations Apart and How to Win by Coming Together."](#) Nonprofit Quarterly. (May 15, 2023).



Here are a few questions to begin to guide and inform individual learning and action plans:

## Individual Reflection

- **How do I believe transformational change happens** in an organization?
- **What questions do I have** and/or what areas would I like to continue building my knowledge and skills about? (This can include things like learning about structural racism, power, internalized racism, and privilege.)
- **What supports do I need** to address racism, privilege, and power within our organization based on my racial identity, position, tenure, and role?
- **How am I using my voice in ways** that are effective in talking about racism and racial equity, and racial justice? Are there times I am unsure about what to say or that I miss an important opportunity to say something? Have I been given feedback about how my words, or my tone is heard by others? If so, what supports do I need to keep growing or helping transform our organization?
- **Have I experienced consequences** when I shared truths about the impact of racism on me or others? Going forward, how could our organization address the harm of those consequences and support me?
- **How am I embedding the values of racial equity and justice in what I do** and how I act at work? What has been challenging? What is confusing? What supports do I need? What issues am I struggling with in thinking about my role and contribution?
- **What is my appetite for uncertainty?** What supports do I need to be sure I can show up, since the change process will have much uncertainty?
- **What are my expectations for this change process?** How am I thinking about or expecting the pacing of the change process? It is helpful to consider your own needs while also moving to the balcony to reflect on the work ahead for your organization in order to attend to past harms, build knowledge and skill, and work on building internal will and collective vision.



## About the Stories

### STORIES FOR CHANGE

Throughout the document I share a few stories that reflect the messiness and complexities of the change process. There are no over the rainbow moments, though you will read about some of the progress made. Obviously, the details have been changed to ensure that the organizations cannot be identified. Also in the stories, I refer to “we.” I always work with Partners of Color in operationalizing racial justice in organizations. These stories, however, reflect my narrative and conclusions about what happened.

**One pattern you will notice** from the stories is that different leaders became gatekeepers and slowed the change process. There is a section on internal teams that can be strategic and helpful in addressing these situations. It is important for Board members to note what questions are being asked about the progress of the change process. Ensure you are hearing from different voices, including leadership, so you have a wide narrative of perspectives.

**I encourage you to use these stories** as an opportunity to discuss these situations with colleagues. Consider what is familiar. Brainstorm how you might address this situation. It builds your muscle to be proactive and increases your analysis and understanding of change processes.

**ONE ORGANIZATION WE WORKED WITH** had a Staff that included a strong group of Women of Color with a clear analysis of racial inequities, anti-Blackness, and manifestations of white dominant culture in the organization. They advocated for and initiated a change process; they took risks and shared their truths about some of the impact of racism that occurred, especially from senior leadership, and were the catalyst behind hiring external consultants.

Their Consultant RFP and the conversations we had with the selection committee reflected this analysis, although they didn't reveal the impacts of the harms during the interview process (due in part to the fact that the selection committee included people with different positional rank).

As we began our engagement with the internal staff and management teams and started gathering data and holding education sessions, the leadership team heightened their protective stance, and we witnessed the limitations of their commitment as more issues were discussed and challenged. When we slowed the process down and talked to them about what we were observing and how their current practices and messages were limiting the collective work, the internal teams pushed back on the feedback. Then the Leadership Team went in savior mode to protect, rather than leaning into this opportunity to address conflict, deal with the messiness of the change process, continue to build the internal will and state their expectations and commitment to this change process.

Though we believed it was a potential breakthrough moment, the Leadership Team had limited skills to work through conflict. The Executive Director ultimately ended our communication with the internal teams. They still wanted some of the deliverables but on their terms and with minimal contact. We wrote a lengthy written report because we wanted to be responsible and accountable for the truths we heard from staff. It was requested we send the report to the internal teams rather than deliver and discuss it with the full staff.

One of our strong recommendations was to implement restorative justice processes. The internal teams were not ready for that, and we respected their decision. Fortunately, a foundation had been laid, and we shared the truths we heard. Though the process continues to have challenges, they created an action plan, and the work is going forward. There is still much work ahead to address the dynamics and build the muscle for conflict. And as happens in many organizations, some people left the organization, and senior leadership's protective stance remains. ●

## Building Internal Will

Some of the questions I hear when folks want to understand the change process or during an interview are: What policies need to change? What training is needed? How do we talk about racism with trustees? And the one that always comes up - How will we know when we get there?

It can be challenging to determine where to begin or what should be the next phase in deepening racial justice work. There is no formula for aligning an organization's commitment to racial justice with its policies, practices, culture, and ethos. Doing this work organizationally is about building internal will. It is about living the value of justice so that even in the face of critical public feedback about an organization's actions, the work continues. It is about taking risks in word and deed. It is about working with integrity and being accountable to the people and communities most impacted by structural racism.

The journey is also about building individual will and confidence to do the heavy lifting of disrupting and transforming your organization's current policies, practices, and culture; leaning into not knowing, learning and discomfort; being willing to take risks to act; and supporting others to collectively create traction in moving toward racial justice. To build internal will, various organizations have used different entry points and strategies. Some I have observed include:

- senior leadership share your organization's commitment to racial equity/justice and express to Staff that they are expected to contribute and learn and connect the work to your organization's mission.
- a group of Staff organize and express the impact of current practices.
- different Staff members regularly introduce information about racism especially within the field at Staff meetings.
- a small set of Staff, many times mostly Staff of Color, meet regularly to discuss their observations and experiences and work on base building and expanding their group then leadership later follows as they saw the momentum growing.

People often ask how to address the sometimes vast differences in internal will and commitment by Board and Staff. Here's a description of one such instance we worked with:

STORIES  
FOR  
CHANGE

**THE MANAGEMENT TEAM AND THE BOARD WERE ALL WHITE.** It was an intense process as we worked with the internal team (already in place), coached senior leaders, facilitated all Staff educational sessions, and conducted an internal and external racial equity assessment process. One of the major tensions we continued to address was trust between Staff and senior leadership. Senior leadership had made some recent decisions with limited communication about their rationale, demonstrated a lack of confidence in their discussions with Staff about racism, and maintained a defensive stance. However, once a breakthrough moment happened in an educational session, there was an opening for relationships to begin to deepen and trust slowly began to build. We shared the results of the internal and external racial equity organizational assessment.

Concerns were heightened as the next phase of the work focused on the Board. The Board members had influential positions within the field and Staff were concerned about consequences if they gave direct feedback on Board decisions and actions. They were right to be concerned. Though the Board described themselves as committed to equity, they were significantly less ready to discuss the internal and external assessment. They were even less ready to make changes to Board membership and address how the bylaws replicated inequity to ensure there was no turnover on the Board.

The Staff did not realize the power they had in advocating for change. A few Staff took the risk and shared stories about their interactions with Board members, with support from senior leadership. Some of the Board members heard the stories of the racial 'microaggressions' by Board members. Many Board members respected the Staff and acknowledged the impact of the interactions, which led the Board to do more education. Some Board members spoke to their colleagues who had been responsible for some of the incidents.

It felt to many Staff like slow going, as the Board moved to being on a parallel track with Staff. However, this process created a significant shift for the organization and led to the organization going deeper and creating some accountability practices which helped build trust between the Board and Staff. It took about three years to get to this point in the change process. ●

I've seen other approaches to build internal will work as well. Sometimes pressure from stakeholders sets an expectation for an organization to build their credibility and trust by committing to working for racial equity. Other times, incidents occur within an organization that moves to a discussion and challenge current practices. I've also seen organizations collectively witness state sanctioned violence which provides a catalyst to be responsive beyond simply putting out a statement. The increase in discussions of racial equity and justice at conferences, webinars, and meetings can provide an impetus to build the focus for an organization as they see their peers in the sector prioritize racial justice work.

Organizations can be led by embarrassment, humility, or inspiration (or some combination) to move forward. Each of these provides a different entry point for change. These entry points are not without emotions or chaos. Many times, much of the labor in a change process is led by People of Color. Often white leaders defer to People of Color and inappropriately expect them to do the work, believing they are centering but rather are conceding their own responsibility. It is important for organizations to make the case for why they are committed to racial justice, why it is necessary and critical work to fulfil its mission, and that it is accompanied by the explicit expectation 'that this is everyone's work.'

Sometimes organizations move forward in the change process by replicating the way it might create a program or set up a service for constituents. The organizational case studies (listed on p. 58) counter this, and also many share their process of building the internal will and making the case.<sup>40</sup>

## Internal Teams Who Guide the Change Process

Staff Racial Justice Leadership Team (RJLT) • Senior Leadership Team •  
Board Racial Justice Team • Working Across Teams •  
Working with External Consultants to Support your Racial Justice Change Process •  
Being in Right Relationship with External Consultants

Many people ask how their organization can work on operationalizing racial justice when the people in it are already overwhelmed with work, or when the organization is moving from crisis to crisis. It can be overwhelming, whether you are starting, deepening, or sustaining the work. Everything organizations do is happening within the system of racism and white supremacy, so it is important to address your organization's role. I strongly recommend that organizations build the analysis to look at their everyday work while also taking a 20,000-foot view to see how their organizational system is working and reinforcing oppressive practices. This will help identify entry points for change.

In general, I recommend that you establish three teams critical to move this work forward:

- a Staff racial justice leadership team
- a Senior Leadership Team who adds to the collective bandwidth working with the other two teams on the racial justice change process, and
- a Board racial justice leadership team

I also include information about what to do if your organization works with an external consultant team and is considering sharing an RFP.

<sup>40</sup> To learn more, review resources on this page on RacialEquityTools.org, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/plan/action-plan/making-the-case>

## If your Staff is small...

**If your Staff is small**, you are likely already wearing many hats and each person will need to be invested in racial justice.

I have found that, to be successful, shifting the organization cannot be one person's job or just a team's job. It is important to integrate what will be discussed about teams below - building knowledge, skill, and leadership muscle, accountability practices amongst the Staff and between the Staff and Board.

Carve out some time for intense sessions, as this helps normalize these conversations. Though knowledge and skill building are important, use the agenda items in Staff meetings to pause and ask about the racial equity implications of a particular issue being discussed. You likely won't "have the answers," but it's helpful to jointly lean in to struggle with the questions.

Address power dynamics directly by naming them, setting boundaries and clarity about what is on the table, and strengthening your organizational culture for providing feedback so folks can share what they need in order to lean into this work. Work to consciously create an atmosphere that demonstrates that folks don't have to get it "right," but that there is an expectation that the staff will try and listen for feedback and be accountable to take action and change. Though the structure of these teams may not work for the size of your staff, I recommend that you still read about the practices, relationships, and work involved. These are important for guiding the process even though you may need to consider how you can adapt them and share the responsibilities.

Small organizations must attend to relationship building, the foundation for moving this and all work forward. Members, or constituents, and/or racial justice organizations in the community can play a helpful role in influencing your change process by their work, messaging, and leadership. Consider how you might engage and deepen relationships with them to support your internal change process. It can be helpful to have an inside-outside strategy with community members being direct catalysts and accountability partners.

Each team needs to build their own knowledge and skills about working collectively to become a racially just organization; creating accountability practices; building their leadership muscle to take necessary risks; developing communication and feedback loops; and building, repairing, and strengthening relationships and trust with each other. While some team discussions may need to be kept in confidence (and agreements about that need to be made in advance), sharing team learnings and process with the full Staff and Board will support building relationships and internal will and will engage more people in the change process.

These teams must have a strong communication muscle which includes giving and receiving feedback, adopting accountability practices with each other, and being open to uncertainty and experimentation as they collectively work to operationalize racial justice. There is no set formula about when teams should actually come together. Sometimes it is based on the work that is happening and collaboration that is needed, and sometimes convening the groups will build internal will and expectations. I encourage everyone to enter the conversations leaning in, respecting the work of individual teams, and holding folks' behaviors and actions with grace and accountability.

Get the ground ready within the teams and eventually between the teams before you get into discussing training, assessment questions, and even policy changes. Talk over what you care deeply about in your organization, what changes you fear the most, what it feels like to be in conflict, what

your individual reaction to conflict typically is, what you have observed or experienced about how your organization handles conflict. As the change process takes root and evolves, the three teams are usually uneven, as you are in the midst of the heavy and complex dynamics of balancing and shifting power, building new practices, creating communication loops, and building trust. The three teams will also be dealing in real time with power dynamics and how to collectively build power and redistribute it. Folks may express their support of racial equity, but when they get into addressing power, may be concerned about disrupting the status quo. It is critical to name that up front and create practices that address how power is operating in your organization.

How the three teams work to be in the right relationship with each other and build their collective knowledge and skills is core to the change process and is integral to the work to operationalize racial justice. Without it, the process many times can be just a set of deliverables and check offs; progress will be made, and changes will happen and even may make a difference, but “to what end?”. As much as there are plenty of resources listed at the end of the document and I attempt to share some guidance here - you still will not know exactly what to do. You will only know by doing. What is suggested in various resources will look different for your organization. These teams are critical for moving through the uncertain waters, and building a strong base for the change process, and to attend to how to be proactive through their individual and collective insight and wisdom. The three teams are responsible for guiding and leading the shifts in power, moving toward liberatory and racially just culture, and defining and ensuring your organization’s role and responsibility to contribute to the racial justice movement. (See more info about this at the end of this section.)

*“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world.  
And you have to do it all the time.”*

- Angela Davis, Activist, Author, and Professor

## The Teams

### Staff Racial Justice Leadership Team (RJLT)

In the change process, best practices call for establishing a staff leadership team.<sup>41</sup> This team needs to include people across departments or work units, positions, identity groups, tenure, and informal/formal leadership. Be thoughtful about how you form the team. Some organizations create short applications that include questions about potential member’s gifts, hopes, and bandwidth. Others interview potential members. Others issue a call and whoever comes is on the team. As you can imagine, each of these (and other) methods can be helpful and also challenging. For those that are more formal, consider what filters you are using to determine who would be “best.” For those who are keeping the process loose, how do you ensure that individuals are representative of all of the areas mentioned above? In some organizations, supervisors need to sign off on members. If so, what type of conversations need to happen and what explanations of time and commitment are needed to prepare supervisors for this decision and to make sure they affirm the importance of membership on the staff team? The Executive Director can and should play a helpful role in educating supervisors. I encourage you to be strategic in ensuring participation by folks with

<sup>41</sup> Here are two resources that discuss the equity leadership team’s role: Keleher, Terry. [Racial Equity Core Teams: The Engines of Institutional Change](#). Racial Equity Alliance (2018). And [Urban Sustainability Directors Network. Driving toward Equity - Building a Racial Equity Team](#). 2015. [Equity and Driving Toward Equity – Building a Racial Equity Team](#), Urban Sustainability Directors Network. Read also the case studies listed in the resource section on p. 58.

different views, and by informal leaders with different groups, as a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives helps the team build the credibility to move the work forward.

**Invest in this team – provide time in people’s schedules to participate, build their skills and knowledge, and ensure Staff and other stakeholders have clarity about their roles.**

Sometimes a team is created and is expected to do all the racial justice work in the organization. Sometimes they are formed without authority or a clear relationship with those in positional power. Be explicit about the authority, decision-making, autonomy, responsibilities, and expectations of team members in your change process. If there are items that are off limits for this team to address, it is imperative for the Board and Senior Leadership to name them as early as possible.

Ensure that the RJLT is supported to do their work. It is generally a heavy lift, especially emotionally, as this team takes the lead on guiding the process and is often on the frontlines of addressing some of the challenges inherent in any racial justice change process - resistance, impatience, different types of emotions, and sometimes backlash. Specifically, ask (and continue asking) what each team member needs to fully meet the expectations for their role. Each person will have different needs based on their identity and positional role. Support can include things like adjusting job responsibilities, hiring outside coaches to provide support, compensating members with monetary support or additional personal days, and allowing members to take time to process challenging situations. [See SAGE’s video on their lesson.<sup>42</sup>] Be sure that support is provided equitably, keeping in mind the heavier burdens of emotional labor Staff of Color experience by contributing to the organization’s racial justice change process. Typically, they also experience different consequences for taking risks in a change process. During an organizational change process, a Staff person of Color shared, *“People of Color not only bear the brunt of harm from racism within the organization, but they also bear the brunt of harm from the racial equity process - of white people’s learning curves, of the slow pace of change, and of missteps large and small all along the way.”*

*Should members of Senior Leadership be on the Staff RJLT?* One of the questions that usually comes up is whether members of senior leadership should be part of the Staff RJLT. Every organization’s culture is different. For some, if an executive director is involved, everything will be centered on the executive director’s opinions, even if dialogue and consensus building processes are in place. For others, if the executive director is not present, the work of the team will not be credible within the organization, and the team will not be able to make progress. There are obviously varying scenarios in between, reflecting how power dynamics that are often not named or addressed can play out in organizations. It is important to have very candid conversations with people in different parts of the organization to determine whether and which members of senior leadership should be involved in the RJLT (if any). If some participate, these representative(s) need to be very clear about power dynamics and be ready to play the role of the bridge builders between the RJLT and Senior Leadership.

Here are some questions for your organization to discuss about the RJLT’s role and authority, and to develop accountability practices with the Senior Leadership Team:

- What decisions will the RJLT have the authority to make?
- What is the communication protocol, e.g., do emails from the RJLT to Staff need to be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team?

<sup>42</sup> Equity in the Center’s Video Case Studies – scroll to SAGE, and watch the 2nd video, Internal Pushback  
<https://www.equityinthecenter.org/video-case-studies/>

- What practices will the RJLT adopt to transparently address power dynamics in their relationships and decision-making processes with each other and with the Senior Leadership Team?

Setting up these equitable and accountability practices are not “one and done.” The group needs to continue to check in on how interactions reflect equitable practices and are responsive to the change process.

## Senior Leadership Team

**The Senior Leadership Team needs to be in a parallel process of building their own knowledge,** skills, practices, confidence, and accountability practices to create a racially just culture. It is extremely important for the Senior Leadership Team to have a candid conversation about each of the leaders’ roles for this process in the context of each individual person’s racial identity. They also need to discuss their collective commitment and expectations of each other. Sometimes I’ve witnessed critique from Staff and other stakeholders about an individual leader’s actions or messages. The reaction can be a large and full backlash from Staff, or a public call out, or a meeting in which direct feedback is given. Though one or two leaders might be involved, this feedback can impact the trust and credibility of the entire Senior Leadership Team. Staff and stakeholders will want to know how the rest of the management team showed up and whether they addressed what happened or just marginalized the person(s) involved.

### STORIES FOR CHANGE

#### AT ONE FOUNDATION, THERE WAS A TEAM OF 6 Senior Leadership Team members.

Each person was in a different place in their journey of understanding racial justice and committing to the change process. Though one white member was knowledgeable about racial equity, she was definitely not supportive of the process. We made several attempts to build the relationship. She started coming late or leaving early from sessions, sharing only what she knows, and critiquing the process, sometimes underhandedly.

We met with the executive director and spent some time coaching him on how he can support her learning, give direct feedback, and set expectations. We also discussed with her colleagues what they could do to address the person’s behavior since it was being discussed by staff, and how to be supportive of her and also hold her accountable.

The way she handled the feedback was to run out of a meeting or cry when it was given, or she was completely silent during discussions. Staff expressed in different ways their concern and frustration with the Senior Leadership Team, and specifically the Executive Director, for not holding her accountable. The trust and relationship between Staff and the Senior Leadership Team that had been built through the change process was now on very shaky ground. Eventually, a few transitions occurred, including the executive director, and the person in question.

No one could have planned for this in a change process. The time needed to address this person’s actions and the aftermath could not have been foreseen in any action plan. It is important to be proactive - invest in relationships, name expectations, develop feedback muscle, and normalize hard conversations on the team. And the reality is that even though we provided coaching, it doesn’t always result in change happening. >>



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The organization did not have a strong conflict muscle, there was fear of backlash from the senior person involved, especially by the people who reported to her, so most Staff were hesitant to take risks and others didn't have the confidence to act. Sometimes change happens when people leave. Seeing where this foundation is right now in their racial justice work, internally and externally, speaks loudly to having fertile ground for the seeds that were planted. And though there was this setback, the commitment of staff and board remained strong, and it led to much progress in their change process. This foundation is now more respected by its peers for its progress on racial justice and increasingly by many grantees and the sector in which they work. ●

### **Board Racial Justice Team**

The Board also needs to create a racial justice leadership team or committee. Some organizations expand the job description of an established committee (e.g., the governance committee), while others establish an ad-hoc committee or change the by-laws to create a new committee. Whatever the decision, this Board committee plays a similar role to that of the Staff RJLT - guiding the process, communicating the Board's role and responsibilities, and ensuring that Board members are contributing to operationalizing racial justice within the organization by doing things like examining Board bylaws and practices.

With most of the predominately white non-profits and foundations I have worked with and observed their internal process, the Board and Staff have undertaken a similar process. It generally takes time before they are on a parallel process and even longer before they are interactive. Each organization has different cultural dynamics that impact how these teams interact. Since most Board members are volunteering their time for regular meetings, committee meetings and other items they may need to be engaged in by the organization, this change process takes an additional commitment of time. It is critical to have a committee with Board members who help build the Board's internal will, ensure other committees are discussing racial justice, and work with the executive committee to set new expectations about how the Board will invest in this change process.

**In the meantime, the Senior Leadership Team, who typically has the most access to the Board, needs to be thoughtful about their communications with the Board,** and make sure communications come from a place of accountability. Since the Board may be in a different place with the work and obviously less involved due to their meeting schedule, some Senior Leaders believe their role is to ease the Board into the process and reassure the Board about the pace of change. Sometimes, meeting Board members where they are may be a helpful strategy. However, Senior Leaders have a responsibility and are accountable to the Staff and other stakeholders to bring the Board along on the racial justice work ahead. Senior Leaders must figure out how to support the Board to deal with their angst about the uncertainty and the level of risk ahead, and to engage in conversations about racism and power. Senior Leaders must, even though it may feel uncomfortable, invite the Board to imagine what a racially just organization looks like, while hearing where they are in their thinking about change. They must then work with them to collectively guide and be a catalyst for this change process. Being partners in this way is being responsible and accountable.

## Working Across Teams

Depending on how the change processes evolve on the different teams, it is helpful for all three teams to come together in order to:

- build relationships,
- share stories and lessons learned,
- consider how the teams can leverage their unique roles to deepen the organization's racial justice work collectively,
- experiment with different approaches that not only deepen the work but move to collective power-building and model racial justice practices for the organization, and
- discuss messaging that reinforces the organization's commitment and progress - both internally and externally.

To create the needed level of change in an organization and to sustain it over the long term, a strong relationship needs to be developed *between* the Senior Leadership Team and the RJLT. I have too often seen these teams hold an adversarial relationship with one another. This is often related to how power is held in the organization, how harm has happened, and how decisions are made. Though teams may start out with adversarial relationships, they are not going to be able to co-create a racially just organization unless they work to develop and deepen relationships and build trust with each other across all levels, learn to engage in generative conflict, and own their collective roles in guiding the process.

Though in this section, I primarily discussed the three teams, the President/Executive Director also needs to increase their knowledge, skills, confidence, and appetite for risk. EDs are often gatekeepers. While gatekeeping behavior is not necessarily with bad intent, the impact on Staff who work on the change process can be severe. Sometimes gatekeeping happens when an ED's confidence is low, or when they are feeling uneasy with the uncertainty created by the change process and its impact on programmatic deliverables, or are concerned about how the process will be received by partners, donors, and other key stakeholders. Those are real considerations. If you don't know or are uncertain about how to lead, reach out to others doing similar work and get the support you need. There are many organizations at different stages in this process and many associations are starting to have resources to support organizations. This is not a time to be hesitant. Rather, it is a time to be BOLD and to work steadfastly.

Senior leadership messaging is integral in moving the work forward and lessening the adversarial relationships that may be present between the three teams. In the resource section, there is a section on leadership (p. 61). Leaders need support, whether from a multiracial group of Executive Directors, an identity caucus of Executive Directors, an equity coach, or a combination.

### STORIES FOR CHANGE

**FOR ONE NONPROFIT THAT WAS MOSTLY REMOTE**, we had invested considerable time working with the Staff racial justice leadership team (which included one manager from senior leadership). Team members built relationships with each other and with the consulting team. They worked through conflict, gave each other feedback, and supported each other's leadership. Though we had conversations with each of the management team members and met regularly with the executive director regarding our scope of work and change process, we did not invest the same amount of time in supporting relationship building among management team members nor with their relationship with us as consultants. >>

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One of the outcomes of our work was that we developed an assessment report for the organization (discussed later). As with any assessment report, there are some hard truths and bold recommendations we shared that needed to be addressed to operationalize racial justice. The internal RJLT embraced the report. They had questions about a few items and one of our observations did not resonate with them, though their focus was wanting to discuss the implementation and how it might play out since there were a few people on Staff who were hesitant about the change process. We took time to talk through concerns and ideas and discussed how to address and support the Staff members.

Senior leadership, on the other hand, had many more questions and took a defensive stance. The one member of the team who was on the racial justice leadership team was quieter than normal in these discussions. We also knew she was one voice, and we needed to own that we had not yet created the same depth of relationships with the senior leadership as we did with the Staff team. Some of the team's concerns were about budget and timing, but mostly they were challenged by some of our observations, focusing on making the case about why things were done the way they were in the past and why it had to continue. Since we had not established a solid feedback loop or trusting relationships, their stance evolved from defensiveness to protectiveness. This eventually led to the ED cutting us off from direct communication with the RJLT, even though we were about to engage the Board in an education process.

We learned after the engagement that the Executive Director took full control of Staff's access to the report. Every Staff member had to read the report with the Executive Director who then discussed it with each employee. On the surface it looked promising that the ED was going to have discussions with all Staff about racial equity. Unfortunately, as we heard from some of the Staff members, it was not a frank discussion. The Executive Director used her time to make the case regarding what should happen moving forward, regardless of what was in the report. Actions like this can be harmful. Staff members had shared their truths about the impact of years of inequities based on the organization's current policies and practices. In the discussions between the ED and Staff members, those truths and experiences were minimized. This action by the Executive Director had an impact on the relationships and trust built during the first phase of the process and sent a clear message about the boundaries of what can (and can't) be shared and what will be addressed by the organization. Though the Board was very engaged in their process, they took direction from the ED regarding the next steps for Staff.

The organization ended up working on a few low-hanging fruits (e.g., changing vendor policy and improving hiring practices) yet most of the recommendations made by Staff and our consultant team were disregarded. This reinforced longstanding messages and rationale about why particular practices exist and can't be changed. The racial justice leadership team was still early in its formation. They found it very challenging to move into an advocacy role in the organization and instead dialed back their involvement in the process since members were unsure of the consequences of speaking their truths. Many of the internal team members left the organization since they witnessed the limitations of the organization's commitment to racial justice. Yet the external narrative the organization promoted about their work on racial equity was truthful - an assessment had been conducted, an internal team was created, the Board and Staff had training, and some recruitment and hiring practices were updated. Check, check, check, and check. This built a false understanding of their commitment to their members in communities across the nation. If time is not invested in developing group norms, a shared analysis, and deep trusting relationships across the organization, and if accountability practices are not in place, deliverables from a process will be minimal, with no depth or sustainability to transform an organization. Also, it is important for the ED to do their work, prepare for the truths shared and be responsive to them. ●

## A Word about RFPs

Devon Davey, Heather Hiscox & Nicole Markwick wrote *Reimagining the Request for Proposal*,<sup>41</sup> challenging the RFP process and typical requests. (I'd recommend reading it!) I have found that organizations sending out consultant RFPs with a set of deliverables without tying them to the organization's context, dynamics, history, or racial justice vision is not helpful. This sets up consultants to be transactional and primarily focused on deliverables. The racial justice change process is emergent work. My hope is that this RFP process will lessen and there will be a different practice of engagement when seeking external consultation support. We know that will not happen anytime soon, especially with government entities who have state or federal policies and laws to change.

Organizations can start engagements by building relationships, being more transparent, and sharing much more information upfront - not just for potential consultants, but also as we collectively think about a relationship-centered ecosystem. Organizations can create a document with information about their racial justice change process such as:

- the history of discussing and working on racial equity and racial justice
- the conflicts and tensions confronted in doing the work
- the infrastructure currently in place (e.g., internal teams, ongoing education)
- the different perspectives on Staff and Board's internal will and commitment
- the areas where there may be struggles or barriers based on current and past harms and inequities
- progress made and changes to policies, practices, relationships, and culture
- hopes and ideas moving forward
- reflections on what worked best based on previous engagements with external consultants (pushing yourself on the items that might have been uncomfortable)

Once you've done this, set up meetings with a few consultants you may want to engage in providing support and thought partnership and invite them to offer some reflections back, ideas, and perspective on the scaffolding that may be necessary for starting or deepening a change process. Your organization will learn a lot about itself from hearing different perspectives and you will begin creating relationships with folks - some you may work with now or at another point in time. (Please compensate them for their time and preparation.) Again, let me reinforce that this is an emergent process and creating artificial deadlines, especially those wrapped around a Board meeting, does not provide the time for the connective tissues and muscles to develop which are critical for this work to be sustained. (Some of the stories have made this case.)

When I reflect on my own consulting work and the times I responded to RFPs, I know I made some promises to deliver that I wasn't sure I could fulfill. Sometimes I thought I could renegotiate a contract once I was "inside" and had a relationship. Other times, as we did the work and learned more about the complexities and dynamics, how power was operating, and past/current harms, it became clear that different scaffolding was needed to move the work forward. Many times we were successful in making the case for a different process and some times the deliverables remained the priority of the organization. Twice when that happened, I ended my participation because I thought there was a lack of accountability or integrity within the process. I still respond to RFPs, but I challenge the premise and the process in my response and share ideas about how to scaffold a process, rather than assuming these are *the* deliverables. The organization then has an opportunity to reflect and consider whether they will modify their process to better align with their racial justice values and center relationships. ●

<sup>43</sup> Davey, Devon, Heather Hiscox, and Nicole Markwick. "Reimagining the Request for Proposal." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer (2022): 57-58.

## Working with External Consultants to Support your Racial Justice Change Process

I wanted to provide a few reflections about the three teams and their relationships with external consultants based on my years of practice. (In the resources section (p. 59), there are a few articles from colleagues sharing their perspectives. I would recommend that reading those as well before engaging consultants.)

At certain points in an organization's change process, it may be helpful to have external consultants who can support the organization and provide specific expertise such as reviewing policies, guiding an organizational assessment process, or facilitating educational sessions. Consultants should support the work of the teams and the people within the organization, not lead the work. If you find that the consultants are doing most of the work, discuss your organization's investment of time and commitment and adjust the roles and responsibilities of the engagement. The last thing you want is to go from consultant team to consultant team without fully building the internal muscles. It is critical for a consultant group to work with internal teams to build a collective effort that can withstand the internal and external challenges and pressures.

**Funders should INVEST in internal racial justice change processes** – meaning providing general operating support. So many organizations are forced to make hard decisions regarding the change process because of limitations of funding and bandwidth. Invest in internal racial justice change processes as part of building ecosystem of whatever issue a foundation cares about - food justice, reproductive justice, arts, and culture. Racial justice work includes investing in individual organizations to operationalize racial justice in everything they do.

## Being in Right Relationship with External Consultants

Consultants you engage should not be thought of as merely vendors delivering a service. They are your thought partners, critical friends, provocateurs, cheerleaders, balcony observers, guides, and coaches. It is important for the leadership teams and external consultants to build strong relationships and work together to be in right relationship with each other. Centering and investing in developing these relationships needs to radiate through the entire organization. The messiness of the process described throughout will need this foundation as the change process evolves within and between the Staff and Board.

Any time external consultants enter into a relationship with a client partner, they immediately observe, witness, and experience, to differing degrees, how an organization is manifesting practices that reinforce racial inequities or white dominant organizational characteristics. Our job is to hold up a mirror and share our observations while providing support and coaching to address the issues we observe. Many times, an organization has limited experience with generative conflict or with sharing and receiving feedback, so our observations are not always well received and sometimes the behavior we observe is replicated in relationship with external consultants. I have experienced and witnessed the backlash and consequences when intense feedback is given by a consultant team. One of the immediate reactions can be moving into a protective stance and keeping the consultant team at arm's length, with limited communication and access to certain groups or people.

Just pause - the first thing to consider is how this kind of behavior or response is replicated within your organization when hard truths are shared. Do those responses harm Staff? How? It is important, especially for senior leadership, to remain open and notice the response to challenging conversations. Recognize this "mirror" discussion is itself an intervention. Focus on the bigger picture - your commitment to racial justice. This is such a special opportunity to practice working through things with external consultants and with fellow team members who are more positioned to give you grace and coaching. Most importantly, understand the implications when this behavior is replicated throughout your organization. As the racial justice change process deepens, the feedback

will increase and more perspectives about the impact of racial inequities will be shared. Use this moment to practice centering the relationships.

Keep in mind that your organization is responsible for the impact of the responses and accountability to external consultants. As a white consultant, there is less consequential impact on me when this response occurs and less possibility that my credibility will be challenged because of my privileges and access. I have been a witness and confidant to partners of Color about how these consequences differentially impact them, especially when a narrative about their work is shared within the organization or beyond. Those actions impact a Person of Color's livelihood and credibility. Part of doing this work is understanding how we hold each other's humanity, how we focus every day on aligning our actions with our values, and to continuing to be partners together in our collective work for racial justice.

The next few sections will discuss some of the important components of the change process that develop the foundation to sustain the work, build knowledge and practices, and then move to action planning.



### 3. RACIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS

The framework below describes the change process I use. The following section focusses on the right side of the chart below, discussing some of the foundational components of a change process. We then move to the left side and focus on building knowledge and skill and conducting a racial equity organizational assessment. There are many frameworks for racial equity and justice work. Explore them! This is just one; it is how I make sense of the process. You may want to compile a number of different sources that make sense for you and choose one to try. (See page 59)



## 4. FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENTS

Centering Relationships • Generative Conflict •  
Addressing Trauma in Organizations and Being Responsive for Healing • Accountability Practices

*“Transformative relationships are formed when we exchange pieces of our humanity with each other... Transformative relationships are not neat, clean, and efficient like transactional relationships. No, transformative relationships are messy, confusing and time consuming, but are always worth it because they create deep connections between us, force us to see things about ourselves we hide from, and cultivate parts of ourselves that we didn’t know were possible.”*

~ Shawn Ginwright, author, professor, and activist

Centering relationships, generative conflict, addressing trauma and being responsible for healing are the foundational components of a change process. They are critical in developing a racially just culture and often get ignored after a challenging situation happens. It is important to name and think about how to develop the practices for each component, as well as to normalize it as part of the culture of your organization. This process is sometimes described as *creating a container* and describes holding a process for a group “to be challenged though not traumatized. Creating a container doesn’t avoid conflict and emotions or to create a false sense of “safe space.”” Rather we build a space to lean in and work through issues while also recovering from challenges, a space to “encourage people to bring their best selves, be respectful, assume good intent, be respectful provide grace to each other while using accountability practice. A container is created through developing a set of group norms, building a shared analysis, and focusing on a shared commitment for collective action for racial justice.<sup>44</sup>

Stating your intention and your organization’s commitment is key because it builds internal will and the organization’s credibility. It is also important because it sends a strong message to Staff and Board members that there will be organizational guardrails and supports. It makes clear that this process is not only about changing policies and practices; it is about changing the culture and the ethos of the organization.

### Centering Relationships

In many organizations there is a constant drive for results through producing deliverables, meeting timelines, achieving benchmarks, and publicly sharing achievements, with much less of a focus on building trusting relationships. To be a mission-driven organization working to operationalize racial justice, a core value and practice is centering relationships. Centering relationships is usually not one of the processes included in achieving an organization’s mission nor is it generally tracked to see if progress is being made. When a grant is made, the investment of time to center relationships is typically not mentioned nor is it financially supported.

Some may read this and wonder, what difference will relationships make if our organization is not meeting deliverables or focused on making progress on mission fulfilling work? Some say prioritizing relationships takes so much time and we are barely getting to the deliverables. I would argue that to accomplish your deliverables, sometimes you need to go slow in order to go fast. In my

<sup>44</sup> Gulati-Partee, Gita, and Maggie Potapchuk. "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity." The Foundation Review 6, no. 1 (2014). p. 31. This is a modification of the definition in this article.

experience, if the relationships are not built or centered, progress may be made but will be short-lived and collective transformation will not happen. What happens down the road if trust is not built? That is what repeatedly stops a process in its tracks. Take some time to pause and consider when your organization has made significant progress and sustained it. What were the factors? How would you describe the relationships? What were the processes used to center relationships? Kad Smith shares why centering relationships at CompassPoint was so critical to their change process, *“Embodying racial justice and equity means rejecting the notion that taking the time to make room for personal stories, voices, and experiences isn’t valuable. Transitioning from a community built on extractive relationships to one of mutual care and support means making room for courageous conversations and healing. It means sharing our politics in the deepest sense by inviting us to share what drives us to make change in the world. It means fundamentally thinking about the way we relate to one another, finding safety in our similarities and solidarity in our differences.”*<sup>45</sup> I encourage you to read the whole article.

By actually slowing down, there is space to think creatively and adopt practices that reflect the value of racial justice. Prioritizing relationships means setting up inclusive and equitable processes for working together; centering Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Multiracial leadership; practicing accountability; and building authentic relationships.<sup>46</sup> *The Black Space Manifesto* shares a set of practices such as: *“Move at the speed of trust, seek people at the margins, center lived experience, and reckon with the past to build the future.”*<sup>47</sup> Building relationships is a central part of racial justice work, not an addition to it.

*“A society where all belong requires that we are cared for in the ways that we need. It is by following this thread through cultures of care—the one that centers love and relationship while refusing exploitation and isolation—that we can imagine a path from the dance floor to a society rooted in belonging. These are evolving and responsive forms of care that center rest, joy, intimacy, trust, reciprocity, and cultural sovereignty. ...”*

— *Othering and Belonging Institute, Cultures of Care*

## Generative Conflict

Many organizations have a conflict-averse culture. In almost every organizational assessment I have been a part of, addressing conflict is one of the lowest ranked areas. Staff will share that they have insufficient skills for dealing with conflict or that leadership clamps down immediately when conflict occurs - either moving to consensus quickly and not unpacking the issues at hand or more importantly, not identifying or addressing the root issues. Discussions when differences and tension are present are closed down and Staff are implicitly or explicitly given the message to “just get over it.” Conflict aversion manifests as an inability to address or allow for differences or disagreements and as having a narrow bandwidth for expression of emotions within a workplace. This conflict-averse approach is seen by many as a characteristic of white dominant culture.<sup>48</sup> There is an assumption that individuals

<sup>45</sup> Smith, Kad, "We Can't Work toward Racial Justice and Equity without Working on Relationships," *CompassPoints of View. CompassPoint*, June 13, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Pace, Karen, and Dionardo Pizaña. *Qualities of Authentic Relationships across Differences*. Michigan State University Extension (2004).

<sup>47</sup> BlackSpace. "Black Space Manifesto." (2020).

<sup>48</sup> Okun, Tema. "White Supremacy Culture." Updated June 2023, 2021.



or organizations must employ specific tones, followed by questions about who determines which tones are appropriate. It is critical for organizations to spend time on this work.

Constructively engaging in conflict is not a soft skill. Only building a culture that supports, holds, and embraces generative conflict will lead to racial justice. Yotam Marom, an organizer based in New York City shares, *"...conflict avoidant groups stay on the surface in order to protect themselves. Conflict avoidant groups appease each other, shy away from the details. Conflict avoidant groups look for compromises over sharpness, choose the easy way out instead of going together into the fire. Conflict avoidant groups don't tell the truth. The forces we're up against are more powerful and more violent than any pharaohs or emperors before them. But there is an opening, too, a door cracked just a bit, an opportunity to intervene and create a possibility where it seems too dark to exist. We are being called to rise to the challenge: to build movements at the scale of the crisis, build organizations healthy enough to develop good strategy and strong enough to carry it out. Conflict avoidance is getting in the way, and we are often aiding and abetting it. Moving toward conflict in a generative way is hard. It requires awareness, courage, and skill. It is dangerous, and sometimes it hurts."*<sup>49</sup>

Though there may be increased commitment to and investment for change, those who are fearful of change, or are less invested can sometimes become more vocal or become gatekeepers to making progress. Specifically, while launching a racial equity assessment process, truths about harm from past and current practices and individual racial microaggressions will be revealed. People's responses to learning these truths will run the gamut and organizations may move immediately into legally protecting themselves. All of this can further escalate conflict, especially if issues are not addressed or there are not processes in place to constructively work it through. Often, a conflict is buried under a false consensus that preserves existing cultural norms, protects feelings, and reinforces white fragility<sup>50</sup> and white dominant behaviors. Go slow; there may be brittle interpersonal dynamics which can be a precarious foundation for racial justice change work.

Unaddressed and/or poorly managed conflicts rarely produce clearer thinking that illuminates the path to meaningful change. Often, an organization will shut down or temper a change process based on a conflict exceeding the current culture's norms. This ends up prioritizing individual comfort, and many times centers white people's comfort instead of addressing racial inequities and unjust power dynamics. It also ends up maintaining the current organizational conflict-averse norms and works against creating a culture in which people can speak their truth. Continuing these organizational behaviors especially harms Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Multiracial identified staff whose voices are frequently marginalized. Some People of Color may respond defensively, based on seeing conflict avoidance play out so many times before, and be concerned that there will be racialized impact from the conflict - again.

It takes time and persistence to shift organizational culture to embrace generative conflict. There is much discussion now about "calling in" and "cancel culture."<sup>51</sup> Sometimes folks marginalize the person being called out<sup>52</sup> when it is a time to support, address, learn from each other, and strengthen an accountability practice. Organizations need to be responsible for how they hold this when it happens - especially predominately white organizations when a Person of Color (including in a leadership position) is called out. There is obviously an individual impact when someone is called

<sup>49</sup> Marom, Yotum, "Moving toward Conflict for the Sake of Good Strategy," The Medium, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> "White Fragility" is a term coined by Dr. Robin DiAngelo, which describes a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Dr. DiAngelo discusses the term in several articles and in her book: DiAngelo, Robin. White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> brown, adrienne maree, "Learning and Untangling," adrienne maree brown, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Bennett, Jessica. "What If Instead of Calling People out, We Called Them In?" The New York Times (New York, NY), Nov. 19 2020.

out, and there is also a professional impact that is different and more intense for People of Color than for those who identify as white. For white people, the call out may be interpreted as a mistake or incident and tend to be rationalized by noting that they are still on their learning curve, so grace is given. People of Color in leadership positions, especially those leading equity processes, may get called out for individual actions or messages, but are sometimes called out because they are not making change “fast enough,” are not addressing every issue or are “too far ahead.” Leaders of Color<sup>53</sup> are generally not given the same grace white leaders are given. They are supposed to “get it.” Common narratives about leaders of color include that they should be making immediate changes or are expecting too much. Some of these critiques are unfair and can follow the person throughout their careers. When this happens, it is typically without context or an understanding of the limitations of or gatekeeping practiced in the organization. The leadership team needs to organize facilitated conversations to understand how callouts play out in an organization and impact individuals. They need to strengthen relationships and address the pacing of the change process.

STORIES  
FOR  
CHANGE

**WE WERE WORKING WITH A SMALL GRANTMAKING ORGANIZATION** who would be described as at the “101”<sup>54</sup> stage in their change process. Our engagement involved forming the two internal teams, one for Board and one for Staff, education sessions for Board and Staff, an assessment process, and supporting developing their action plan. We had been working with them for about 10 months, had delivered the assessment report and facilitated some basic educational sessions on race, racism, power, and privilege. When we started looking at reflections about their organizational culture from fellow Staff in the assessment report and began to lay the foundation to specifically discuss white dominant culture, one of the few Leaders of Color (who was also the point person on racial equity for the organization) shared how some interactions with Staff impacted her and specifically how the organization reinforced which Staff voices matter. A white Staff member took offense to her story and shared that she thought her interactions with this person were positive and felt everyone was treated well. When the Leader of Color responded and spoke her truth and talked about impact, the white woman got agitated and ran out of the room. As has been repeated so many times in organizations, the energy and support of Staff largely went to taking care of the white woman, while the Leader of Color was marginalized and her feelings and the impact of speaking her truth was ignored. This is a frequent pattern. We named this dynamic in the group, though it escalated the conflict and people became defensive.

In the next session, we facilitated an exercise on building awareness of feelings and also understanding racial identity development stages.<sup>55</sup> The group was still early in learning to identify how racism and power were operating in their group. They were more versed in how it was happening in the community. The organizational culture’s norms focused on comfort with a very limited spectrum of emotions allowable in the workplace. When conflict happened in the organization, tensions were swept under the rug and people retreated to their like-minded smaller groups. It took some time for the Staff to see and process what happened and to name the dynamic. We needed to slow down to focus on creating more internal supports, invest more time in education and do some racial identity caucus work. We also needed to support the Staff to call each other in, have hard discussions, and be responsive and accountable to each other, especially when a Person of Color shares their truths about the impact of the organization’s policies, practices, and culture. This example shares how easily a timeline can shift, how messy this work often is, and how important it is to build the muscle to have generative conflict. ●

<sup>53</sup> Thomas-Breitfeld, Sean, and Frances Kunreuther. [Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs: A Race to Lead Report on Nonprofit Executives of Color](#). Building Movement Project (2022).

<sup>54</sup> Petty, Sheryl. [A Change Management & Deep Equity Primer: The What, Why, How & Nuance](#). Movement Tapestries and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2023). See page 73.

<sup>55</sup> Scroll down to the box, title Racial Identity Development Theory on this page of [RacialEquityTools.org](#)

Stacie Haines talks about generative conflict in her book, *The Politics of Trauma*, saying “Generative conflict does not mean it will always work out. It does not mean we won’t have any more conflict. ... It does mean that how we do conflict creates more possibility and it does not create more damage. Generative conflict tends to leave relationships with respect, albeit differences, rather than people feeling trashed, shamed, or discarded. Conflict that is generative can radically deepen a group’s commitment and clarity. ... It can help us all practice more centered accountability. It can cultivate more wisdom. Generative conflict leaves us in better shape and more trusting for the next conflict.”<sup>56</sup>

Though an organization may be calling for increased dialogue about racism, typically the processes, relationships, and skills don’t keep pace with the demand and need for digging into possibly emotional and complex discussions. Conflict, most of the time, can be a positive sign of growth, investment in each other, and increasing trust in the organization. There can also be simmering tension, as the organization’s work must continue, while at the same time, we are interrogating the work to see how it reflects white dominant culture behaviors and reinforces racial inequities. Change processes are messy, exasperating, and yet soul-enriching and fulfilling.

“Consider that how you act or don’t act in this moment is part of setting a precedent for how movement responds to attacks on those who love us. If you won’t protect a Black leader from white supremacist attack because you also have critiques of or questions about how that leader’s movement work is unfolding, examine that. How does that align with the world you dream of?”

— adrienne maree brown, St. Louis Racial Equity Summit, 2021

## Addressing Trauma in Organizations and Being Responsive for Healing

Multi-generational trauma lives in each of our organizations, and it affects the Staff of Color differently and more intensely than white Staff. Ongoing trauma can occur in all organizations by the impact of ‘micro’aggressions, and from oppressive supervision, damaging power dynamics, racist policies, and decision-making that consistently and oppressively privileges white Staff and marginalizes People of Color. Currently, people are labeling more things trauma, harm, and healing in the workplace. It is important to understand each of these terms because mislabeling can have a severe impact on situations, people, and organizations. Prentis Hemphill,<sup>57</sup> founder of the Embodiment Institute, describes the concept of trauma and also healing, “...trauma is an overwhelming situation that breaks safety, belonging, and dignity; healing is any set of practices or processes that restore a felt sense of safety, the capacity and desire to belong, and a sense of dignity as evidenced by a reduction of shame and increase in agency. ...Healing also increases our capacity for authentic relationships with one another, and therefore opens up to a power inside of our movements that we have not seen before.”<sup>58</sup>

How an organization responds or doesn’t respond to harm and trauma from policies, practices, and culture is a core responsibility for organizations working for racial justice. This includes how conflict and emotions are held in an organization. At the same time Maurice Mitchell reminds us in the

<sup>56</sup> Haines, Staci K. *The Politics of Trauma: Somatics, Healing, and Social Justice*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2019. p. 325 and 327.

<sup>57</sup> "Prentis Hemphill." 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Hemphill, Prentis. "Transforming Our Systems, Transforming Ourselves: The Pivotal Role of Healing in Social Change Work." *Nonprofit Quarterly*, no. Winter. (February 13, 2023): 114-19.

article, *Building Resilient Organizations: Toward Joy and Durable Power in a Time of Crisis*, “Organizations generally do not have the specialized skills to provide emotional or spiritual healing. Workplaces can provide a salary, benefits, paid time off, and other resources to help individuals access the support and care they require. Workplaces can also promote a culture of care and encourage individuals to care for themselves. Workplaces and colleagues cannot replace medical professionals, spiritual supports, or other devoted spaces of care. But no organization can take on the emotional labor that is squarely in the domain of the individual. This distinction is critical. Additionally, discomfort is part of the human condition and a prerequisite for learning. Violence and oppression are to be avoided but not discomfort. The ability to discern the difference is a form of emotional maturity we should encourage.”

I have a few reflections based on experiences witnessing what has recently been happening in organizations. The emotions and the impact of these past couple of years have not dissipated. There are often raw emotions - pure heartache and grief. More people are speaking their truth, clearly describing unacceptable behaviors, and setting higher expectations of the type of culture they want to work in. More people are calling their leaders in on their behavior or their lack of action (some in very public ways), and more Staff are unionizing to claim their rights, wages, and a more equitable workplace. Folks' personal trauma and grief is even more present in the workplace. The mental health structure in this country has not been able to keep up with the demand. This is especially true for People of Color since mental health services are not always accessible or culturally responsive. Many organizations are trying to understand what trauma and harm they are responsible for addressing and how to ensure that individuals receive the referrals and benefits they need. It's especially complicated for organizations who don't have a conflict muscle and are trying to figure out how to create a culture of support while also setting expectations and boundaries. Some organizations are responding, as expected, in flight, fight, freeze or fawn mode, which can escalate what is happening to people internally. One of the basic things your organization can do is to name what is happening and share observations about how your organization is responding to trauma and tension. Until you name the response, the default response seems to be what is comfortable or “right.” When more issues are moved to the forefront, there is greater opportunity to address them, especially if your organization relies on its agreed upon norms and values. The previous section shares more info on generative conflict (p. 31).

Organizations are desperately trying to figure out boundaries and responsibilities and are also trying to communicate them to their Staff. I don't have answers about how best to do this. I am still learning and considering my own role and responsibility when I enter different organizations. A few things I am doing that you may want to consider doing while looking at the present dynamic within your organization include asking:

- How are people talking with each other - what is the body language that accompanies it?
- How are people responding to questions about their work? Are they in a defensive, leadership, or guarded stance?
- How are people expressing how they are feeling - does it feel guarded or being vulnerable, and if the latter how do people receive and hold a person's vulnerability with affirmation or flight?
- When an intense discussion happens, do people respond in fight/flight/freeze/fawn mode or do they lean in and express their truth, and be willing and open to listen and move through the intensity with others?
- If people are expressing frustration with the organization, is it being expressed in fight mode, shaming and/or blaming, or are they inviting accountability or moving to problem solving mode?

Some of these behaviors themselves are not “bad” - they just are. These responses may reflect what is going on personally for an individual, though they probably have much more to do with what is going on in your organizational culture and the impact of the system of racism and white supremacy. None of this will be fixed with a team building activity nor will it be a fast fix. The responses to these questions will help inform how to attend to building a culture of support and accountability. It may be time to attend to relationships more intensely or take time to talk about generative conflict in your workplace. It is awkward to hold what’s emergent, especially when much cannot be controlled, when you are trying to be strategic and are committed to deepening the work in an organization that is not set up to hold or support a range of emotions. Try to balance grace and fortitude and know that you are not in this alone. There are some resources (p. 62) to support your organization as you seek to understand more, develop practices, and identify your responsibilities going forward. I would recommend learning more about the services and resources of a few groups: [Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective](#), [Fireweed Collective](#), [Vision Change Win](#), [Leaving Evidence](#), [National Queer & Trans Therapists of Color Network](#), [SOILTJP](#), and [Generative Somatics](#).

*“What it means to be responsible with power does not change and what is true is that I think too often in our movement spaces, we give each other passes because somebody’s done went through something and even though they’re a tyrant and desperate, we say it’s okay girl because you’ve been through some things you can beat everybody up. Now, you can’t do that. ... And my vision around that is for us to say yes inside of our movements and organizations. We authorize people to have more power because they listen deeply. We authorize people to have more power because they are self-critical. They are willing to be vulnerable about what they have done and have not done. We authorize people to have power because they enact the things that we as a collective have asked for, and not just what makes them comfortable and what they want. That’s why we authorize people into power.”*

~ Sendolo Diaminah - Facing Race Plenary, Race Forward Conference. November 2022.

## Accountability Practices

Creating accountability practices is one of the critical elements of developing a racially just organization. So many organizations have recently issued statements of support for #BlackLivesMatter, but those statements are only credible if they are backed up by sustained action to interrupt and address anti-Blackness, structural racism, and white dominant culture. When you discuss accountability, reflect on who your organization is accountable to. While it is important to be accountable to the different communities and members that are involved in your organization’s mission, the centering and accountability should be focused on those most directly impacted by the system of racism - Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Multiracial identified staff in your organization as well as those who are your stakeholders, members of partner organizations, and people who live in the communities in which you work. Your organization’s accountability is about how you align your actions with your commitment by working to transform systems to be racially just and doing what you said you will do - making the investment in making your organization racially just and ensuring that you have the bandwidth to succeed.

It is also about what internal accountability practices are adopted and held by your organization. Organizations often think accountability is only the annual review between the Staff person and a

supervisor, ideally with specific expectations on how one is contributing to the change process. It is more than that. There are growing resources on accountability (see resource list below on page 62).

Building a racially just culture is also building a community of practice and action to work collectively together for racial justice. Accountability practices are critical to align values with actions. Too many times people associate accountability with punishment - it is not. Piper Anderson in her essay, *Building a Culture of Accountability* shares that, *“The difference between accountability and punishment has to do with relationships. Punishment breaks a relationship; it’s rooted in isolation, shame, and disconnection. Accountability, by contrast, requires communication, negotiation of needs, the opportunity to repair harm, and the chance to prove that we can change and be worthy of trust again. Organizations committed to racial equity must recognize that this work requires new practices for talking about race and racism and new strategies for addressing acts of racial harm that seek repair and strengthen trust.”*<sup>59</sup>

Centering People of Color’s voice and leadership is foundational to building a racially just culture that includes accountability practices. By doing so, your organization is acknowledging the racially inequitable system that marginalizes People of Color while intentionally disrupting it. White dominant culture is everywhere, though invisible to many (especially white people), and is the default culture in our society. It is important to flip the script on everyday work in order to open new ways of thinking and doing. Some organizations have moved from taking votes on decisions to prioritizing the voices of those most impacted by a particular decision. By doing this, they jumpstart a process of shifting voice and building power. Some organizations use racial/ethnic identity-based caucuses in which people can do individual work and receive support from colleagues. White caucuses formalize their accountability practice with the People of Color caucus by committing to things like how they share their work, their action, and how they will be in right relationship<sup>60</sup> with each other. (For more about this, see p. 51). Another resource to explore is *The Nonprofit Quarterly’s* series on [Building Pro-Black Organizations](#).

Here are some questions for organizations to discuss to build their accountability practices:<sup>61</sup>

## Discussion Questions

- **Who is the organization’s work going to benefit** if it succeeds? Who will benefit if the work does not succeed?
- **What are the feedback and accountability processes** in place? How are you in communication with the individuals/groups you are accountable to? How do you share your work with those individuals and groups and what is your pattern in responding to their feedback?
- **How are you addressing any burdens** of resources or time with these individuals/groups to whom you are accountable and in a relationship with?
- **How is your organization accounting for risks** and unintended consequences of your work, especially those that may be potentially harmful to Black and Indigenous people and all People of Color?
- **What is your organization doing** to ensure the goals are met as promised?

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, Piper. "Building a Culture of Accountability." Stanford Social Innovation Review (2021).

<sup>60</sup> Being in right relationship means - "Rooted in the Principle of Oneness, the interconnectedness of all things, and a recognition that it is not possible to compartmentalize. It asserts that everything is relationships. Being in Right Relationship acknowledges that relationships are built at the speed of trust and requires transitioning from transactional exchanges to relationships of mutual respect. When you are cultivating Right Relationship there is a deep understanding that harms done to one person consequently and unavoidably harm everyone." Informed by adrienne maree brown and SheEO.

<sup>61</sup> These questions are based on, [www.racialequitytools.org](http://www.racialequitytools.org), [Accountability](#) page, MP Associates, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and World Trust Educational Services.

It is important to mention that each of us needs to have continual self-accountability practices as well - including how I show up, how I contribute, how I follow through, how I commit to respond after receiving feedback, how I own mistakes or missteps, how I am working to be in right relationship, how I am aware of the impact of attitudes and behaviors, and how I am continually curious and learning - all focused on fully contributing to the organization's racial justice change process.



## 5. BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

### Collective Learning: Developing Shared Language & Analysis • Conducting a Racial Equity Organizational Assessment

*“The current emphasis in our field on trainings, assessments, and curriculum -which are all good and necessary components of intersectional racial equity and can be catalytic, if used in the full potentiality - are too often leading people into thorny thickets and near cliff edges where they give up, abandoning the journey, or work go back from whence they came. This is not say that these entry points are not useful ways of understanding our contexts and our own behavior in them, but they are insufficient in supporting the integration and embodiment of new ways of being, understanding, and engaging with the world. When we practice the elements of liberating ecosystem, we enable the seeds of training and assessments to meet the nutrients and environments need for them to take root and grow.”*

~ Aja Couchois Duncan and Elissa Sloan Perry, [Change Elemental](#)<sup>62</sup>

I often recommend that people read the organizational case studies (listed in the Resource List below on page 58) as a group and discuss the different practices, lessons, and interventions that can inform your organization as you move forward. The case studies are from different types of organizations and highlight various methods, processes, and pacing of the work based on particular organizational cultures, demographics, past work, internal will, commitment, and leadership. None of them provide you with a formula; they do, however, provide ideas and rich lessons, some relatable to your organization, some not. Let them inspire you to adapt. Sometimes case studies are disregarded if the organization described is not in your sector or is a different size, or for another reason. Just because an activity “worked” for one organization doesn’t mean it will land in a similar way in yours. One act of accountability your organization can take is to invest in writing the story of your organization’s process and lessons learned - this is being accountable to the people and communities with whom you work, and it is contributing to building knowledge and skill with other organizations on this journey. Be sure to share things like the messiness of your change process, when you hit the wall, when there was tension, as well as the learnings and progress.

<sup>62</sup> Duncan, Aja Couchois, and Elissa Sloan Perry, "People Stitching Earth: Oppression, Healing, Liberation, and Navigating the Terrain in Between," [Change Elemental](#), 2022.

To inform you as you think through the scaffolding of the change process with colleagues, it is usually helpful to reflect on your organization's last major change effort, the depth of internal commitment needed, the challenges you faced (e.g., Staffing, finances, external support) and strengths of your organization, as well as its bandwidth (and how to adjust bandwidth to make the needed investment). Each is a key consideration in guiding the scaffolding of your racial justice change process.

## Collective Learning: Developing Shared Language & Analysis

One of the critical components of a change process is for Staff and Board to participate in ongoing engagements to learn basic definitions (e.g., racial equity, racial justice, white privilege, power, white dominant culture, anti-Blackness, Black liberation, oppression, colonization, indigenous sovereignty, system of white supremacy, decolonization), to understand structural racism and the history of racism, and to be introduced to and practice using a racial equity analysis. Organizations sometimes bring in a consultant team to guide and facilitate ongoing learning engagements. Other organizations participate in public training or work with an established curriculum internally over the course of several months or years. Again, in each of the case studies listed below (see p. 58), organizations share their approach to building Staff and Board knowledge and skills. Budget, time, scheduling, and culture are variables you'll need to consider deciding on the best path for you to develop shared language and analysis. Selecting an education process because you heard good things about it or deciding on a process based solely on convenience are not the best criteria for making these decisions.

**External consultants will do an intake and work with you to learn more about the group's depth of knowledge,** identify organizational issues, build relationships, and *ensure* post-workshop steps are incorporated into the work. If yours is a **smaller organization**, consider gathering a couple of organizations in your sector and request small group discussions by an organizational team (staff, leadership, and board) within an educational session. As a change process unfolds, internal teams can play a key role in guiding the process and keep an eye on what is needed by their constituent group. (See p. 19) Though you are building a shared language and analysis, you don't only do this once. It takes sustained work to collectively build knowledge, skills, and analysis.

After going through an initial set of educational sessions, be sure to create a similar process for new Staff and Board members. This educational on-boarding process should be connected to current Staff and Board members and weave current members' learnings and applications with the different perspectives and knowledge of new members. For many organizations, this educational on-boarding process informs how they recruit new Staff and Board, so be sure to plan time for these discussions and changes.

It is important for your organization to have "common" language and analysis, especially prior to reviewing the results of assessments. However, "common" does not mean everyone is going to be in 'lock step' with definitions and concepts. Each individual's life experiences, identity, and accumulated advantages and disadvantages will influence and interact as Staff and Board build their collective conceptual knowledge. Every organization will have a spectrum - sometimes a wide spectrum - of people's knowledge of the concepts and commitment to working to transform the organization. It is important to build a culture of learning and support - along with accountability practices and expectations that Staff and Board members will contribute to the change process. If a Staff person or Board member is actively challenging the work or the commitment to racial equity and justice, I recommend that you have a discussion with them about whether this organization with its commitment to racial equity and justice is the best place to share their skills.



Some organizations plan their educational processes knowing people will challenge the concepts and “resist,” though framing it as resistance can create an us and them dynamic. Instead, it is important to consider that people will be constantly learning, and some will react differently based on how the concepts challenge their worldview. Current politics and challenges to the history of racism and what is being defined by some as critical race theory may well make discussions more volatile. There may be strong pushback. Obviously, it is critical, when recruiting new staff and board members, that your organization is clearly communicating your commitment to racial justice and your expectation that all staff and board members participate in the change process.

When planning the education process (as always in applying a racial equity/racial justice analysis), center the people who have been most impacted by racial inequities, and possibly harmed by actions of your organization. Be brave and courageous to embrace conflict and be accountable to those most impacted! The dynamics people most impacted describe need to be held and guided by the three teams (see p.19) while you address the ever-present tension of different expectations for the pace of change.

**It is important to note that the educational process will be disruptive institutionally and interpersonally.** As the space opens up to have more conversations about racism, white dominant culture, privilege, anti-Blackness and Black liberation, intersectionality, and power, people begin sharing their truths and Staff are often unsettled by learning about a system and the impact of racial inequities. It will be a chaotic, unnerving, and uncertain time. Reflect on that reality for a moment. Most often the infrastructure is not yet in place to be fully responsive and process the issues that may arise. For many organizations this is a time when the change process stops or slows down. And yet, this can be a breakthrough moment for your organization to hold space and work collectively on how to be responsive in the moment and build practices for the long term.

Finally, be prepared for what Staff members might need following educational sessions. Some may want space to process what may be new concepts or need time to digest and hold colleagues’ stories about the impact of organizational racial inequities or want to discuss concerns about how future change may impact their job, and/or understand the risks and rewards in working toward operationalizing racial justice. Staff of Color will have different needs than white Staff. Staff of Color may need space to share more about the impact of policies, practices, and interpersonal experiences, and may not want to have to share or explain their experience in a multiracial space. (See info on caucuses, on p. 51)

## Conducting a Racial Equity<sup>63</sup> Organizational Assessment

Some of the early questions I hear are, “what does a racial justice or racially just organization actually look like” or “what are the steps to move forward and make progress? Or “how will we know when we get there?” The answer to the last question actually is that there is no arrival - there is only progress. Structural racism and the system of white supremacy are fluid; they are tricksters always making sure the tenets of the system are in place - dehumanizing People of Color through policies, practices, and narratives, and reinforcing systems of entitlement, privilege, and hierarchy. Work will always continue - that is why we need to build our knowledge, skills, courage, strength,

<sup>63</sup> This is a good example of the difference between racial equity and racial justice. Racial equity is focused on the “process of change to identify and interrogate the practices and culture which is creating and/or reinforcing racial inequities and white dominant behaviors.” It doesn’t mean there won’t be questions in an assessment focused on racial justice, but the assessment process falls under the definition of racial equity.

relationships, and tenacity so we can daily address how the system is operating in our organizations, communities, and life. There is never an off switch.<sup>64</sup>

A lot more organizations are now working to operationalize racial justice. Some are deeply taking on the work, some are performative, and some are only dipping in their toes. They are all a work in progress. They are experimenting, failing, succeeding, and learning. There is much uncertainty about the change process. Key to moving toward racial justice is building your individual and collective will to take risks and act boldly.

A racial equity assessment process has different purposes, though one core purpose is engaging the Staff to share their truths and hopes for your organization and begin to lay the foundation for each person to support and work toward racial justice. It provides information from different perspectives to help you learn about the impact of your organization's policies, practices, and culture. A racial equity assessment process will be different based on your organization's size, budget, and what, specifically, you want to learn. Some organizations focus on learning from Staff about the impact of policies, their individual and collective knowledge and skills, and/or ideas on making progress toward racial justice. Some conduct a parallel process with their Board. Still other organizations want to learn from their stakeholders, including partner organizations, clients, alumni of programs, constituents, funders, and/or community stakeholders. There is a list of racial equity organizational change assessment tools on page 65.

## Discussion Questions

Here are some questions you might want to learn more about through an organizational racial equity assessment process:<sup>65</sup>

- **How explicitly does our organization use** the terms race, racism, power, and white privilege in organizational documents, in conversations and internal and external communication?
- **What are the assumptions** and experiences about how change happens within our organization?
- **What are Staff and Board members' experiences**, perspectives, and knowledge about race, racism, white privilege, and white dominant culture? (This provides baseline data on Staff and trustees' knowledge and skills, which can help inform the education sessions and be a benchmark for the organization.)
- **How do the policies, practices, and culture** align with the value of racial justice, specifically looking at manifestations of white dominant culture in organizational policies and practices?
- **What are Staff and Board's experiences** with any racial inequities and/or harm that occurred in the workplace and what has been the impact and the organizational response?
- **What are the organizational strengths** that will help support the racial justice change process?
- **What ideas do Staff and Board members** have about how to operationalize racial justice?

<sup>64</sup> [Practicing Self-care for Sustainability and Impact](#), Developed by Norma Wong for Move to End Violence.

<sup>65</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. [Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool \(TOCA\)](#). MP Associates (2021).

A third party typically does a racial equity assessment process to ensure confidentiality and to share data back in a way that honors voices from different identity groups. This is especially important if some identity groups are relatively small within an organization, so anonymity can be ensured, and individual truths can be shared through disaggregated data and themes.

### Before the Assessment

More organizations than I want to count want to start their change process with a racial equity organizational assessment. Sometimes they want data which they believe will be their guide moving forward. Data can be helpful. But there is work to do before, during, and after the assessment. You need to create a “container,”<sup>66</sup> form internal teams, build their capacity, work with senior leadership, create a common language and analysis, continue to normalize conversations about racism, build internal will, and learn to engage conflict. To be clear, all of those steps may look different based on what is going on in your organization. I highly recommend you take those steps *before* embarking on a racial equity assessment process.

**What should you do if you work in a small organization or have no budget?** I would suggest working on the relationships and normalizing conversations about racism (Items you can use for these discussions are listed on p 63.) You can also focus on centering relationships (see p. 30). Senior Leaders and Board members need to be explicit about their commitment and expectations. Talk about some of the key concepts mentioned above in the questions, and support people building their analysis. Then have discussions about the questions above (or other questions from the assessments listed on p. 65). You may want to put some in an online survey and ask a volunteer or a partner to assist in sharing back the responses. Another option is that you could partner with other organizations, and each provide support to the other in managing the process and analysis.

Here are some reflection questions to inform your organization on when to launch a racial equity organizational assessment. Check the column that best reflects where your organization is on the items listed in the first column. The scale of 1 to 5:

1. We have not started.
2. We have begun to explore the idea.
3. We have been investing time and focus.
4. We have been integrating this into how we do our work.
5. We are developing a level of consistency in the work and awareness of what we don’t know.

	1	2	3	4	5
Form internal teams established to guide change process.					
Talk about racism, power, privilege, and white dominant culture as a group.					
Center relationships in how we do our work.					
Give and receive feedback to each other – outside of annual review meetings.					
Lean into generative conflict.					
Positional leaders communicate commitment to racial equity and justice internally and externally.					
Most staff communicate commitment to racial equity and justice internally and externally.					

<sup>66</sup> The definition for “container” is listed on p. 30.

What did you learn about your organization? How does this inform what you might need to focus on prior to beginning a formal organizational assessment process that will help you seek truths and understand the impacts of current institutional structures and dynamics? I am not suggesting that your organization needs to have a high rating on all of these practices to go forward with an assessment. Instead, I am recommending that you are aware that these practices are part of the change process, and that you will only get traction on data gathered if the organization and the teams are working in these various areas (meaning you have at least “2” rating, and preferably at least a “2” or “3”). Otherwise, it is not worth doing the assessment because all you will have is some recounting of themes, facts, and figures. Organizations must operate from a place of integrity; you are asking folks to share their truths without a container<sup>67</sup> in place to support processing them - and that will potentially cause harm.

### **During the Assessment**

The assessment process is not just an exercise to see if your vendor policy is robust or your recruitment and hiring process is inclusive. Your organization has a responsibility to address the harm and inequities Staff members raise. Too many times after information is shared, organizations stop, slow down, or heavily control the process (see story on p. 25). Sometimes organizations are afraid of potential legal/human resource implications but mostly people are afraid of the needed level of change. There will be those in organizations who repeatedly talk about equity but gatekeep by working hard to limit or stop change processes from succeeding.

During the assessment, the internal staff and Senior Leadership teams must work together to hold and guide the process and to make sure they are creating a “container”<sup>68</sup> to discuss the truths, and, more importantly, to act on them. Your teams need to encourage Staff members to share the truths while at the same time, supporting the senior leadership team to be present and open and to not be defensive when the results of the assessment are shared. They also need to continue to have conversations about racism, power, and privilege and to discuss the change process overall. One of the tensions that comes up frequently is that different people have different expectations of the pace of change. It is critical to have regular frank discussions about the process and for everyone to have a realistic sense of what is doable to move the work forward.

**Everyone is needed to be fully involved in the change process** – not just the internal teams – so it is extremely helpful during this time to talk about bandwidth. You may need to have some hard discussions about how Staff may need to reallocate their time so they can work on integrating racial justice practices and discussions into their work. If you are in the nonprofit sector, be sure to share the process with the foundations and donors who support your work, both so they understand what is involved and how it may impact on the grant deliverables in your agreement and hopefully to inspire them to start or deepen their own change process and also financially support your change process.

### **After the Assessment**

The data collected in the assessment can inform your organization so that you can understand and be aware of different points of view, and the impact of policies, practices, and culture on different kinds of stakeholders and on members of different identity groups. The internal team and senior leaders will then work with the consultant team (if there is one supporting the process) to make meaning of the data and design a process that usually runs counter to how Staff is typically engaged

<sup>67</sup> See definition on p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> See definition on p. 30.

- being very intentional to make meaning, understand all the different perspectives and begin discussing how to move forward.

What does counter to the operating culture mean in this next step of creating an action plan? Think about all the other times you have created an action plan in your organization - and then flip it upside down and turn it sideways - explore, dream, contemplate, disagree, and think about how you can center relationships, joy, and your vision of racial justice organization.<sup>69</sup> Too many times, I have seen folks rush into creating a three-column list of actions, who's responsible and determining a deadline that zaps all the energy out of the process. Use this as an opportunity to experiment with a new process. Be innovative and ensure that this isn't a top-down decision-making process. Make sure you are centering the leadership and voices of those in the organization who are consistently underrepresented or marginalized. (More information about creating an action plan, p. 45)

After the group has had a chance to digest the data and the stories in the assessment, you will need to continue to build the internal will and infrastructure to co-create an action plan. For some organizations, the next steps chosen are transactional tasks (e.g., changing the hiring process, providing training, updating HR policies). These tasks are important though insufficient to create a racially just organization. Transactional adjustments can also be seen as not being accountable to the Staff and constituents in general and especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Multiracial identified people in living the value of racial justice. I say this not to minimize the importance of doing each of those tasks; but to avoid seeing them as only steps in the direction of justice. Operationalizing racial justice means identifying and interrogating all of your policies, practices, and culture to uncover racial inequities and practices reinforcing white dominant culture, and causing racial inequities. It means enacting the vision of what a racially just organization looks like. It means taking risks and not just focusing on the low hanging fruit as sufficient outcomes. As [Gita Gulati-Partee at OpenSource Leadership Strategies](#) shares in its definition of racial equity, it *“requires seeing differently, thinking differently, and doing the work differently.”*<sup>70</sup>

“What we don't see, we assume can't be. What a destructive assumption.”

- Octavia Butler, Science Fiction Author



<sup>69</sup> Some organizations ran out of steam here. They planned to do this but scaled back or didn't move forward with it as they dealt with the reality of what they learned from the assessment and/or organizational pressures and demands.

<sup>70</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. *Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool (TOCA)*. MP Associates (2021).

## 6. DEVELOPING AN ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION PLAN

- Improving Organizational Muscle to Give and Receive Feedback •
- Developing a Community of Practice and Action •
- Developing a Racially Just Decision-Making Process • Creating Racially Just Policies •
- Developing Racially Just Programs, Grantmaking Initiatives, and Strategies •
- Implementing Racial Identity-Based Caucuses •
- Ensuring that the Evaluation Process Reflects Racial Justice Practices

This section will provide some ideas for action and reflections to create a scaffold for your work. After individuals share their truths in the organizational assessment process, it is imperative to be responsive and accountable for what was learned. Many times, organizations develop action plans at this point. Please be sure to read the previous page about this process being counterculture to how your organization usually creates an action plan. Also, remember that your organization is not an island; it needs to be working in community with your organizational peers, the people you work with (partners, constituents, etc.), and the communities where your work lives. An organization's racial justice work needs to go beyond the internal organizational work - programmatic, policy, grantmaking strategy, and how you work with members or constituents. An organization's racial justice work needs to not only be embedded in everything it does but also how your organization contributes to the racial justice movement.

Therefore, working on racial equity and justice as an organization is not a technical process; it is about being adaptive, and building relationships and trust. It is about developing muscles to share feedback with each other and sit in conflict with each other while always centering relationships. The very nature of using a racial equity analysis is that you examine, and ultimately shift and build power. Building, repairing, and deepening relationships is action-oriented; it is central to work on racial justice. When your organization begins to develop workplans, ensure they center relationships, understand and address the pacing of the work to support relationship and trust building, and experiment using different racially equitable and just practices. Sometimes those with the loudest voice and/or in positions of power get their agenda and their comfort prioritized. There is some low-hanging fruit that will help create movement and address a couple of issues while muscles are being developed and conversation is being normalized. But take time, set clear intentions, and try different practices that focus on realizing the vision of developing a racially just and liberatory culture.

When creating an action plan, consider the scaffolding based on the dynamics of your organization, spectrum of knowledge, skill, and commitment of Staff and Board, and the openness and will to take risks and invest in the racial justice change process. The focus shouldn't be about checking off tactical deliverables, it is about:

- building the internal will for transformational change to happen - including dreaming, visioning, and creating collective expectations of how each person is contributing,
- normalizing the conversation about racial inequities, white dominant culture, anti-Blackness, intersectionality, and power - including developing communication and feedback loops that reflect a commitment to generative conflict,
- creating an equitable and just culture that is willing to interrogate practices, seek to understand and respond to failures, encourage innovation, be responsive to the impact of policies and practice especially for those individuals or groups who are marginalized, and enact accountability practices,

- increase knowledge, skills, and practices that reflect and support a racially equitable and just culture,
- support leadership to take risks and sustain the work for justice, and be effective messengers in the fight for justice,
- ensure the organization is strongly contributing to the movement for racial justice and supporting peers in the field through sharing information and lessons and calling in, as needed.

Throughout this process, Senior Leadership will need to continue to make the case for why it is committed to racial justice and see it as integral to fulfilling the organization’s mission. Staff and Board need to be supported so they also can make the case for why racial equity and justice is a commitment and top priority for the organization. Some organizations find developing a “racial equity and justice theory of change” or similar framework for the organization is helpful.

Questions come up as organizations learn more about white dominant behaviors, interrogate their own culture and consider what is involved in building a racially just culture. It is important to first understand the impact on your organization when these behaviors are not consistently addressed. Impacts can include:<sup>71</sup>

## Impacts

- Staff feeling that they have limited freedom to offer different ideas in problem-solving, decision-making etc. resulting in individuals within the organization holding back perspectives and insights so as to not cause conflict.
- Individual mistakes being identified and emphasized rather than systemic challenges.
- Decision-making processes without transparency or accountability and likely with power hoarding.
- Discussions about outcomes that prioritize numbers rather than including anecdotal or observational data.
- Tokenizing and burdening in general and especially in regard to resolving issues within your organization about racism.
- A pattern of Staff and Trustees of Color leaving your organization, without an examination of the messages and practices within the organizational culture that could be the catalyst for these departures, and then not acting to address them.
- Transactional relationships with partner organizations that don’t have accountability practices in place.
- Communications reflecting how power is distributed within the organization, e.g., with minimal or no engagement, transparency, or conversation with the people most impacted and with people who are not in formal leadership positions.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

*“We all live in supremacy culture. We are participants in systems of privilege and oppression. Given this reality, one of the most important things to remember when transitioning from supremacy culture to regenerative and liberatory culture is to take it slow. The qualities of regenerative and liberatory culture themselves point the way for how we should do this work. We need to do this work in the community. Maintain a learning culture and create room for mistakes since we know we won’t get it right the first time. Focus on a few things at a time and give each thing the attention it needs since we also know that we can’t do it all in one try. Conflict will happen, lean into it. Lean into the messy and uncertain nature of this journey. Take care of yourself, your community, and the land while you are doing this work.”*

*- Daniel Lim, [Qualities of Regenerative and Liberatory Culture](#), Medium.com*

**Finally, every person in your organization will have different expectations and opinions** about the pacing of this change process. Being in the middle of a change process is hard for many people because much is uncertain. In many organizations, a critical mass (or even a key few) become frustrated with the pace, which results in the process slowing down while energy is focused on addressing their frustration. This is especially true when organizations have not built the muscle for addressing conflict and instead work to calm or respond to frustration. All of this takes energy away from the change process. Invite different ways for individuals to contribute to the change process. Stay open and present and listen to individual critiques and angst. Know that this is just part of the change process.

Be transparent about the process, and let people know about the challenges and any gatekeeping behavior you observe. Different people may have their own expectations of how change happens, but it is the change teams’ responsibility to create a collective organizational pacing through overly communicating and being accountable for following through on the action plan. Be mindful of how your own expectations can lead to practicing disappointment, rather than welcoming emergence.

*“Changing everything might sound daunting, but it also means there are many places to start, infinite opportunities to collaborate, and endless imaginative interventions and experiments to create.”*

*- Mariame Kaba, Organizer, Author, and Educator*

## **Improving Organizational Muscle to Give and Receive Feedback**

Many organizations do not have a developed muscle for giving and receiving feedback. There are some important things your organization can do. Spend the time to invest in building skills and create a set of racial justice norms<sup>72</sup> that can ground and guide Staff and Trustees in their

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



individual and collective work on racial justice. Leadership can model using feedback well. Healthy feedback practices thrive in an organizational culture in which there is transparency, open communication, power-building practices, and a focus on being learning-centered. Giving and receiving feedback is an individual skill that can be learned. It is also important to create an organizational culture that welcomes and sets expectations for a strong feedback loop, provides support and space for the discomfort that often happens during hard conversations, acknowledges when emotional tumult may result, addresses power imbalances, and prioritizes learning and reflection for the individual and the organization.

The practice of feedback can also reinforce white dominant behaviors, especially in performance reviews. Clayton Robbins discusses in their article, *Interrupting Feedback Practices of Dominance*,<sup>73</sup> the ways in which feedback practices can undermine the very goal of racial justice by being tools of dominance. It is important to assess your organizational culture to determine what overt or covert messages your organization gives about the ‘appropriate’ ways to receive feedback. Reflect on the impact of those messages. For example, Robbins shares that an organization can view individuals as engaged, collaborative, and humble learners when they listen to feedback calmly and do not critique, while others who are curious about the feedback and ask lots of questions (and decide not to modify their behavior) are viewed as defensive, proud, or inflexible. After looking at these organizational messages, unpack whether there are differential consequences for the way people receive feedback based on their positional role and especially their racial identity. In examining white dominant behaviors and racially inequitable practices, it is always imperative to unpack what are considered ‘acceptable’ behaviors, who defines what is acceptable, who the behaviors benefit, and how well the definitions of what’s acceptable are shared within the organization so that staff don’t find out about what’s acceptable only after the fact.

## Developing a Community of Practice and Action

Be thoughtful so that you create a community of practice and action with a learning arc that reflects the spectrum of knowledge, skill, and will that exist in your organization. There may be some targeted learning opportunities for individuals based on different needs. If so, it is always important to bring that learning to the full group, share information and be accountable for the information learned and how a person is contributing to the change process. Some areas that may be helpful in developing a community of practice and action include:

- Ensuring conceptual understanding of structural racism, power, privilege, anti-Blackness and white dominant culture by all Staff and Board members.
- Providing support and accountability for productive engagement in conflict.
- Providing support for individuals to build their confidence to speak up about racial justice and act.
- Interrogating Staff and Board members’ own practices for interrupting bias and racial inequitable practices.
- Developing a willingness and supports for Staff and Trustees to take risks and to prioritize their vision of racial justice over fears of backlash, conflict, and/or ‘not getting right.’
- Interrupting assumptions about who is a “good” leader.

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<sup>73</sup> Robbins, Clayton. "Interrupting Feedback Practices of Dominance." (2017).

**Through your change process, make space for the different ways people may respond emotionally** to situations and provide thoughtful support. Learning sessions should not be a one-time affair. Think about how you are preparing individuals to engage, what the structure is, and what practices are in place to continue processing. Also think about what expectations are being set about using the knowledge or skills learned and how people can be accountable to change their behavior. Provide each other with regular feedback and make sure that everyone understands that sharing mistakes is an important part of the learning process.

## Developing a Racially Just Decision-Making Process

Identify and reflect on the unspoken and spoken rules and norms that guide behaviors and practices in your organization and learn how power operates within the organization. One of the ways to do this is to track decisions - track different types of decisions so you can begin to understand how power dynamics work.

- Who introduces the issue?
- What is the process for people to engage in discussing the issue? Are there any patterns on whose voices are being prioritized or privileged?
- Is it clear to people what is on or off the table?
- Who is involved in making the decision? Is it communicated who is making the decision and how input will be used?
- Are there opportunities for feedback - for everyone, or just particular people or those with certain positional status?
- Who can challenge the decision? What messages are there in the culture about challenging a decision? Are there any patterns of who can challenge?

Mapping how power operates within your organization can support you in making individual and cultural changes. Continually holding up a mirror is important because it is easy to say, “this is the way we always do things.” As you reflect on the decision-making process, consider how your organization is centering all People of Color’s leadership and voice. As Erin Okuno describes: “*centering People of Color is about shifting power, control, and wellbeing/comfort to People of Color.*”<sup>74</sup>

Incorporating a decision-making tool that has an explicit racial equity analysis is critical to deepen your racial justice change process. Explore the history, practices, policies, and narratives that are present which will enable your organization to analyze issues and decisions to determine root causes and work toward shifting culture and institutionalizing racially equitable and just practices. Doing this analysis deepens the capacity of Staff, leadership, and Board members by building knowledge and skill to assess issues and fully integrate a racial equity analysis in any future decision-making processes. Creating a racially equitable and just decision-making process will reduce racial inequities, improve racially just outcomes, and ensure that accountability practices are in place.<sup>75</sup> (In the resource section, you can explore a few resources that are available p. 66).

<sup>74</sup> Okuno, Erin, "Five Ways to Center People of Color," Fakequity, April 20, 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Based on Potapchuk, Maggie. *Racial Equity Decision-Making Tool (REDT)*, MP Associates (2022) with additions from Raquel Gutierrez, Blue Agave Partners.

## Creating Racially Just Policies

For many organizations, reviewing policies is the first step. If you know current policies have inequitable impact or you realize an inadequacy talking with colleagues in other organizations, reviewing policies can be an important step. Be very cautious about getting mesmerized by a “shiny new tool” and adopting another organization’s policy. Do the work. It is important to be grounded in values of racial justice and center those who are most impacted in the decision-making process. The process of reviewing policies should be done by applying a racial equity analysis or using some of the racial justice impact questions mentioned in the previous section.

There are times that some policies cannot be adjusted because of budget, or external rules or laws. Those issues should be communicated and clear as soon as they are known, and preferably before the discussion begins. Have creative and strategic discussions about your budget to learn whether there are other ways to supplement it to support the racial equitable needs being expressed.

A few other items to think about:

- Provide support to Staff to implement policies - what will they need to message and discuss the changes in the policy to reflect the commitment to racial justice?
- Create accountability practices and reflection processes to ensure that policies are being implemented with your organization’s racial justice intent and regularly check to determine how policies are working and their impact. This is constant work and is never finished.
- Review recruiting, hiring, and retention practices to address inequities and racial bias. Some questions to explore while thinking about recruitment practices are:
  - *Who is involved in the decision-making process?*
  - *Whose decision is privileged?*
  - *What characteristics are being prioritized for those candidates being defined as a “good” candidate?*

*“... we’ve been wrestling with this question of policies, procedures, but really what’s come out of it is what we need is philosophy and practices. And I say that because I think there’s a lot of technical fix orientation to what are in fact deep questions of governance. We’re not talking about what are the correct policies to make sure people follow the code of conduct or get the exact amount of rest ... What’s lacking is actually a way of life vision of what it means to be a fulfilled human being. And how we want to practice that regularly as ritual. ...we don’t lead with documents, right? What’s actually going to change and transform our culture is what our practices are every day.”*

*~ Sendolo Diaminah, Facing Race Plenary, Race Forward Conference, November 2022*

## Developing Racially Just Programs, Grantmaking Initiatives, and Strategies

Just as you did with your policies, use a racial equity analysis to also review your programs and strategies. Review all programs, even those that provide the organization with a strong income stream and/or have received countless accolades and/or are heavily supported. Reviewing them

doesn't mean they will be eliminated or changed; though it might. When looking back at the racial equity and racial justice definitions earlier in the document, [OpenSource Leadership Strategies](#) shared that racial equity will *"require seeing differently, thinking differently, and doing the work differently."*<sup>76</sup> And operationalizing racial justice includes, "...working in right relationship and with accountability in an ecosystem (an issue, sector or community ecosystem) for collective change, implementing interventions that center dismantling structural racism, use an intersectional analysis,<sup>77</sup> impact multiple systems, and centering Blackness and building community, cultural, economic and political power of all People of Color." So, a simple question is, does your program, grantmaking initiative and/or strategy do that??

The first way to find out what your organization is doing well to operationalize racial justice in these areas is to create a strong feedback loop with your stakeholders, especially People of Color, to learn about the impact, effectiveness, and direction of your program, strategy, and/or grantmaking. Is the program/strategy/grantmaking being shaped based on the intel and wisdom of the people involved? I share a few resources and tools about how to be in relationship, engage the community (p. 68), and be accountable to the community (p. 62). Some of the questions to reflect on and be accountable about include:

- Who is deciding the outcome or result of the program being designed? Who is deciding or assuming how people will respond to a particular program?
- How are we and who is defining participants' needs?
- What is the level of involvement of past participants in the design process? How are past participants chosen to be involved with shaping the design? How are they involved?
- Whose voices are being privileged?
- Are all People of Color's voices and leadership being centered?

As you enter into discussions with community members and those most engaged and impacted by your programs/strategies/grantmaking, your organization can enter with more credibility by owning any past actions that may have led to inequitable outcomes and practices. Take a look at the worldviews and assumptions (spoken and unspoken) that undergird your programs, strategies, and/or grantmaking. What are the narratives that are embedded? Internal discussions and your discussions with the community members will inform how racial inequities, white privilege and dominant behaviors may be manifesting. They will also begin to give you information to do a power analysis.

## Implementing Racial Identity-Based Caucuses

Many organizations deepen their work and build skills by using the methodology of racial identity caucuses. *"The value of caucusing is so both white people and People of Color have intentional space and time to focus on their respective work to dismantle racism and advance racial equity. Caucusing does not happen instead of integrated groups; rather, caucusing can lead to more authentic and powerful integrated groups."*<sup>78</sup> Caucusing has a purpose in working collectively on a racial justice vision, as well as being accountable and in right relationship.

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<sup>76</sup> This definition was developed by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc. All work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial. No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

<sup>77</sup> Sen, Rinku, "How to Do Intersectionality," Narrative Initiative, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Gulati-Partee, Gita, and Maggie Potapchuk. "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity." *The Foundation Review* 6, no. 1 (2014): 25-38.

How this happens in organizations takes different forms depending on the organizational change work that has happened.<sup>79</sup> Though there's not a single formula for successfully implementing caucuses, it is important to reflect on the strength of the container present within the organization and the purpose for bringing together caucuses, and to understand the organization's responsibility for supporting caucus work. *This is not just another methodology* to adopt as part of the change process. Here are some thoughts:

- What happens in a white caucus is different from what happens in a People of Color caucus. People of Color generally use their caucus as a space to counter the overwhelming presence of white dominant culture and as a space where people are not expected or placed in the position of responding to white people's emotions or teaching them about racial justice. It is an opportunity to explore internalized manifestations of racism; to build solidarity, support, and accountability to each other; and to strategize to take action.<sup>80</sup>
- The white caucus is generally a space to unpack feelings and understand how internalized superiority manifests in our attitudes and interactions. It is important for white caucus members to deepen knowledge; develop a power and racial equity analysis; build skills to intervene; increase confidence in having conversations about racism, power, and privilege; and use their voice. It is a space to give and receive feedback, support, and strengthen responsiveness to take action and be accountable to each other, and to the People of Color Caucus.
- Having a basic understanding of structural racism, power, and privilege for all caucus participants is helpful before starting, though it is not a requirement. If people don't have this understanding, they may need additional support to navigate that particular learning process as members will be in very different places in the learning journey.
- Consider the power dynamics and the demographics of each group - if the senior management team is predominately white, consider the impact of white Staff having access to and being in a different relationship with senior leadership than Staff of Color within their caucus. Consider whether senior management should participate in caucuses with the rest of staff and how it might impact Staff sharing their truths. Some organizations implement separate caucuses for senior leaders, or senior leaders do not participate in caucuses and instead receive coaching, or they participate at certain agreed-upon times, or participate in caucuses outside of the organization.
- Think about how and if the caucuses will interact and how those relationships and accountability practices are formed and sustained. Some organizations have regular meetings between the caucuses to work on relationships and trust in a heightened racialized space and for the white caucus to share the work they are doing. This can be an important ritual for coming together.
- The white caucus has a responsibility to report out and be accountable to their colleagues of Color. People of Color caucuses may choose to report out and/or may want to share their expectations of their white colleagues about accountability. They may have a request about how to move forward on the collective racial justice vision and they may just want to listen. It is the decision of the People of Color caucus.

<sup>79</sup> Petty, Sheryl. *A Change Management & Deep Equity Primer: The What, Why, How & Nuance*. Movement Tapestries and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2023). P. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Gulati-Partee, Gita, and Maggie Potapchuk. "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity." *The Foundation Review* 6, no. 1 (2014): 25-38.

There is different emotional labor involved AND “just” listening or choosing to share or comment is an intentional way to counter white dominant behaviors and build power.

In the resource list below, you will find some resources about racial identity caucusing on page 68.

## Ensuring that the Evaluation Process Reflects Racial Justice Practices

There are many resources<sup>81</sup> available to help you develop an evaluation plan, determine how you are collecting data, analyzing the data, and sharing findings. Make sure you are using racially equitable and just practices when you begin evaluating. Here are a few questions to consider as you move forward:

- What data informs the evaluation process? Who is creating the questions being asked to determine if progress is being made?
- How will data be collected and by whom?
- Who is reviewing and interpreting the data?
- Are those most impacted by a particular issue sharing their experiences of the impact of the program and determining success?
- How are outcomes and progress being defined?
- Are grant deliverables and reports to foundations being centered in the evaluation process or are those most impacted determining the evaluations process?
- Is the data racially and intersectionally disaggregated?
- Are the participants who shared a critique or lower ratings part of the evaluation discussion?

For training sessions there are also some common questions that are asked:

- Was my knowledge increased?
- How would I rate my overall learning experience?
- Was I satisfied with the content?
- Did I learn any new skills?

Though these questions are helpful for program evaluations, they promote only judging the session rather than acknowledging that educational experiences should be about mutual accountability. Some additional suggested questions to consider include:

- Was my imagination engaged and stirred?
- Did I consider what is possible?
- How was I in relationship with the other people present?
- How did I engage with the content?
- Was I open and present to hear the content?
- How can I use my power and truth to transform what I heard and to act?
- How did I relate to the facilitators as thought partners on my journey, as content delivery people, and as guides?

<sup>81</sup> Please explore the resources in the Evaluation Tab of [racialequitytools.org](https://www.racialequitytools.org) - <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/evaluate>

## Being Accountable for Making Progress

Another part of accountability needs to focus on how you are tracking your progress toward racially just outcomes. It is important to question whether your organization is privileging quantitative evidence over anecdotal information, and written word over storytelling. As [Audrey Jordan](#) shared in the publication, *Measuring Love In The Journey For Justice*, “*To reverse the colonized, white supremacist culture of ‘knowing,’ where only the mind-knowing way is valued and maintains power dynamics that accrue value based on white dominant culture, we must actively value and integrate ways of knowing that are deeply ingrained from our ancestors: prioritize connections and relationships, emergence, belonging, the mystery of things that are not ‘knowable,’ and our own being. We are valuers, not e-valuators. Valuation is integration of all the ways of knowing.*”

### Reflection Questions

As you track progress to operationalize racial justice, reflect on these questions:

- **Who is involved in tracking benchmarks** for progress?
- **Whose voices and perspectives** are being privileged to determine what progress looks like?
- **What is the filter being used** to assess if the process is too slow/fast?
- **How are policy changes, relationship building, and knowledge development** being invested in by the organization?
- **What is considered sufficient change** and who is deciding what is sufficient?
- **Does the progress being tracked address** the root issues or are only quantifiable changes being prioritized?



## 7. CONCLUSION

Starting or continuing your organization's work to align with racial equity and transforming to a racially just organization will be a dynamic, maddening, emergent, intense, and joyful process (sometimes all at the same time). Often in racial justice work, we say, "we need to meet people where they are." As Arundhati Roy shared,<sup>82</sup> we are in a portal between two worlds. *Our focus* needs to support people to imagine a racially just and liberated organization and then to collectively work to operationalize racial justice in our organizations. I encourage you to sit with the uncertainty of how the change process may evolve. Invest in your commitment, your belief in what is possible, and gather and support people to join you. I strongly encourage every organization to tell the story of their racial justice journey publicly and proudly and be sure to include the challenges, tension points, strategies, and culture change that occurred and is occurring. Telling your story is an important part of accountability practice!

Although I am advocating for and sharing ideas, lessons, and resources about how to operationalize racial justice in organizations, it is critical to be clear about the *immediacy* of prioritizing and deepening this work for the long haul. We recently witnessed rulings by the Supreme Court that reversed years of gains, reinforced inequities, stated emphatically whose lives matter, and insisted that access will be based on good intentions while our biases will now be institutionalized and deemed acceptable behavior. At the same time, we are witnessing the growing fascist movement in the U.S. Ejeris Dixon, of Vision Change Win shares, "Under fascism, the majority sees itself as a victimized community that's fighting against marginalized communities for its survival. ... Fascism produces and thrives on a culture of fear and chaos. Chaos can create conditions where it is almost impossible to focus on long-term strategy – yet long-term strategy is exactly what we need to win against fascists." This is not a time to be hesitant or wonder what's next in your change process. Build your base to work in accountable solidarity in your ecosystem. Take strategic risks while increasing your stamina and sustenance. We can and we must, together, build and use our collective power to make our dreams for racial justice and liberation a reality.

*"Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. What we have been forced to leave behind we needed to leave behind. What is getting us through is what we will need to take forward, all the rest is up to us. DREAM. While [you] have so much time. DREAM of the life you want. DREAM of the world you desire to exist in. Look for the places in your new dreams that have parts of the old world and remove them. What is the dream then? From there we can add to the collective weaving of whatever it is that is next. If we are gonna heal, let it be glorious."*

~ Sonya Renee Taylor, Author, Activist and Thought Leader  
on Racial Justice, Body Liberation



<sup>82</sup> Roy, Arundhati. "The Pandemic Is a Portal." Financial Times. (April 3, 2020).



## 8. CURATED RESOURCES ON OPERATIONALIZING RACIAL JUSTICE<sup>83</sup>

Here is a curated list of resources focused on operationalizing racial justice. Explore and review different organizations' publications, tip sheets, tools, and lessons. Before you do, please pause. It is essential throughout the change process for your organization to prioritize the internal expertise and wisdom, especially of Staff and community members of Color, to create, innovate, and share truths and ideas on operationalizing racial justice.

Sometimes people assume that adopting a tool will result in an easy fix and address the challenges in their change process. When challenges arise, we generally need to slow the process down and listen. One of the behaviors that is a manifestation of white dominant behaviors is a sense of urgency. At the same time, racial justice is, in fact, urgent work. That is why it is important to develop a healthy feedback muscle in your organization and to work on accountable relationships with people and communities most impacted by structural racism in order to address the urgency of the work, while simultaneously slowing down to listen. For organizations to advance racial justice, it is important that you use an inclusive and transparent process, center relationships, and invest in building Staff's knowledge, skill, and confidence, while ensuring that those most impacted are informing and leading.

When you are reviewing potential tools and resources, ask yourself what you are hoping to gain from them, such as clarity, knowledge, building consensus, and/or developing action steps. Ensure that any tool or resource being used reflects your racial justice analysis and pays attention to power and privilege. Here are a few questions to ask, including some from the tip sheet *Reviewing Resources*<sup>84</sup> from [www.racialequitytools.org](http://www.racialequitytools.org).

### **Prior to adopting a tool or a framework, review it carefully and ask these questions:**

- What seem to be the assumptions about how change happens?
- Does it include discussion of addressing privilege, racism, oppression, and power?
- Does the way the tool works acknowledge the existence of persistent differences in power, life experience and perspective among various racial/ethnic groups, or does it assume there is a single worldview, or that all people have roughly the same opportunities and challenges?
- Are the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion used interchangeably or are they used more precisely?
- Does it take into account how power is operating in the context of structural racism?
- What does the tool imply about why things are as they are, particularly in terms of different outcomes for people of different identities?
- Does the tool ask you to consider the ways racial inequities are maintained?
- Does the tool help you choose strategies that consider systemic, institutional, intergroup, and individual types of privilege and racism, and how they act to interrupt or reinforce each other?

<sup>83</sup> This section is also available as a separate document on [www.mpassociates.us](http://www.mpassociates.us), and will be updated regularly.

<sup>84</sup> Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and MP Associates. "Reviewing Resources." (2013).

When you review the curated list of resources and tools, please go beyond looking at the individual resources and tools and explore each organization’s website and learn about their analysis, approach, and find out about other resources they created. Making that investment will increase your knowledge of the work happening across the country. It is critical in sustaining your work that you widen your community and deepen your relationships with co-conspirators, leaders, and activists. This is a curated list of resources and tools which you can find in the categories below. Additionally, there is a clearinghouse to search for research, tips, practices, and curricula at [www.racialequitytools.org](http://www.racialequitytools.org), which includes over 4,200 curated resources in [98 different categories](#)<sup>85</sup> and a [Resource Lists](#) page.

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- Communicating about Racial Justice
- Racial Equity Organizational Change Assessments
- Racial Justice Impact and Power Analysis Questions

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- Hiring / Recruitment / Promotion
- Contracting and Finances
- Program Strategies
- Governance Process and Structures
- Racial Identity-Based Caucuses
- Building Relationships and Engaging Community
- Tracking Progress and Evaluation

<sup>85</sup> [www.racialequitytools.org](http://www.racialequitytools.org) – Maggie Potapchuk (MP Associates), Sally Leiderman and Stephanie Halbert Jones (Center for Assessment and Policy Development), and Shakti Butler (World Trust Educational Services).

## Organizational Case Studies

PLEASE NOTE it is important to build our collective community of practice and action.

Part of our accountability practice includes writing your organization's story including the steps, reflections, and lessons of your organization's racial equity change process. Share truths — describe moments when you hit the wall, discuss the tensions that came up and how your organization responded and refocused. Share your story so we can all learn from each other. When you finish, send to [mpotapchuk@mpassociates.us](mailto:mpotapchuk@mpassociates.us) – **Thanks!**

[A Case Study in Anti-Racist Organizing: Closing Healthcare Disparities in Greensboro by Focusing on Structural Racism](#)

Prepared by The Bridgespan Group for the Greensboro Healthcare Disparities Collaborative

[A Case Study of the Equity Initiative of Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services with Technical Assistance from Common Health Action and Funding from Consumer Health Foundation](#)

Gita Gulati-Partee, OpenSource Leadership Strategies

[Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries: Case Studies from the Field](#)

Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity

[An Overview of the Wallace Center's Journey Toward Becoming an Anti-Racist and Multicultural Organization](#)

Wallace Center

[BALLE \[Business Alliance for Local Living Economies\] — Racial Equity Change from the Outside In](#)

Cyndi Suarez, Nonprofit Quarterly

[Becoming an Anti-Racist / Racially Just Organization: The Environmental Support Center's Story](#)

Danyelle O'Hara, The Environmental Support Center

[Beyond Diversity and Multiculturalism: Towards the Development of Anti-Racist Institutions and Leaders](#)

Mary Pender Greene, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

[Boston Builds Capacity to Address Racism and Achieve Health Equity](#)

Health Equity Guide

[Confronting Structural Racism in Research and Policy Analysis: Charting a Course for Policy Research Institutions](#)

Steven Brown, Kilolo Kijakazi, Charmaine Runes, and Margery Austin Turner, Urban Institute

[Demos' Racial Equity Transformation: Key Components, Process & Lessons](#)

Heather C. McGhee, Lucy Mayo, and Angela Park, Dēmos

[From Implicit to Explicit Lessons for Supporting Funders in Advancing Racial Equity In Philanthropy](#)

Iowa Council of Foundations

[Grounding Our Work In Community Wisdom](#)

Kenneth Rainin Foundation

[How Growing Gardens Went from a Nonprofit That Ignored Racism to One That is Actively Practicing Anti-Racism](#)

Alice Skipton

[King County's Journey in Institutionalizing Equity and Social Justice](#)

Matías Valenzuela, Public Administration Review, King County

[Moving Forward Together: CSSP's Journey to Center Equity, Inclusion, and Justice](#)

Juanita Gallion and Kristen Weber, Center for the Study of Social Policy

[Putting Equity at the Heart of Our Mission: A Snapshot of PPGNY's Journey](#)

Fiona Kanagasingam, Planned Parenthood of Greater New York

[Putting Racial Justice at the Heart: How Did CompassPoint Get Here?](#)

Lupe Poblano, CompassPoint

[San Francisco Opportunities for Advancing Racial Equity, Phase I: November - April 2021](#)

National Innovation Service

[Video Case Studies: Equipping Organizations for Change](#)

Equity in the Center, includes videos about Year Up, Leadership for Educational Equity, SAGE, and Demos

Vulnerability and Our Journey to Become an Anti-Racist Organization CT3
What Does it Take to Embed a Racial Equity and Inclusion Lens? Ratna Gill, Hafiz Omar, and Nadia Owusu, Living Cities
<b>Analysis, Frameworks and Toolkits</b>
A Change Management & Deep Equity Primer: The What, Why, How & Nuance Sheryl Petty, Movement Tapestries
Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action Julie Nelson, Lauren Spokane, Lauren Ross, and Nan Deng, Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity
Analysis Tools Dismantling Racism Works Book
Anti-Racist Organizational Change: Resources & Tools for Nonprofits CommunityWise Resource Centre
Are You Guilty of Equity Offset? Vu Le, Nonprofit AF
Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture Equity in the Center
Building a Multi-Ethnic, Inclusive & Antiracist Organization Tools for Liberation Packet Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence
Building Resilient Organizations: Toward Joy and Durable Power in a Time of Crisis Maurice Mitchell, Convergence
Continuum on Becoming a Transformative Anti-Oppression Organization AORTA
Creating Cultures & Practices for Racial Equity: A Toolbox for Advancing Racial Equity for Arts and Culture Organizations Nayantara Sen & Terry Keleher, Race Forward
DEI Strategy Is Limited and Potentially Harmful: So Now What? Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates
Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens Rinku Sen and Lori Villarosa with contributions from Maggie Potapchuk, Lisa McGill, and Makani Themba, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity
How to Manage When Things Are Not Okay (And Haven't Been For Centuries) The Management Center
Paving a Better Way: What's Driving Progressive Organizations Apart and How to Win by Coming Together Rebecca Epstein and Mistinguette Smith, Nonprofit Quarterly
People Stitching Earth   Oppression, Healing, Liberation, and Navigating the Terrain In Between Aja Couchois Duncan and Elissa Sloan Perry, Change Elemental
Racial Equity Toolkit: Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Your Organization Monica Joe, Reuben Waddy, Housing Development Consortium
REJI Organizational Race Equity Toolkit JustLead Washington
Seeing and Naming Racism in Nonprofit and Public Organizations Laurin Mayeno Consulting
Six Phases of Racial Equity Practice CORE Food Systems, dR Works

Systems Change & Deep Equity: Pathways Toward Sustainable Impact, Beyond “Eureka!,” Unawareness & Unwitting Harm

Sheryl Petty and Mark Leach, Change Elemental

The Embodying Belonging and Co-Liberation Frame

Sonali Sangeeta Balajee, Our Bodhi Project

To Tackle Racial Justice, Organizing Must Change

Daniel Martinez HoSang , LeeAnn Hall , and Libero Della Piana

What It Looks Like to Build a Pro-Black Organization

Liz Derias and Kad Smith, NonProfit Quarterly

Why did SAGE decide to work with consultants?

Equity in the Center

## GETTING READY

### Centering People of Color and Interrupting white Dominant Culture

20 subtle ways white supremacy manifests in nonprofit and philanthropy

Vu Le, Nonprofit AF

All in This Together: Ending white Supremacy Culture Starts with Us

Hafizah Omar and Alyssa Smaldino, Living Cities

BlackSpace Manifesto

BlackSpace

Building Relational Culture

Our Bodhi Project

Centering Blackness: The Path to Economic Liberation for All

Insight Center for Community Economic Development, Medium.com

Challenging white Dominant Culture: Time to Look in the Mirror

Lupe Poblano, CompassPoint

Decentering whiteness and Creating Inclusive and Equitable Conferences: A Tip Sheet

N. Aruliah, S. Balajee, S. Butler, B. Calhoun, D. Goodman, S. Leiderman, E. Morrison, and M. Potapchuk

Dismantling Anti-Black Bias in Democratic Workplaces: A Toolkit

AORTA

Disrupting white Dominant Culture: Reflection Questions for white People Working for Racial Justice

Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

Five Ways to Center People of Color

Erin Okuno, www.fakeequity.com

Going Pro-Black: What Would a Pro-Black Sector Sound, Look, Taste, And Feel Like?

NonProfit Quarterly

Interrupting white Dominant Culture in Museums

Mike Murawski, Art Museum Teaching

Love is in Need: 5 Things You Can Do to Center Black Freedom

Erin Trent Johnson, Medium.com

Paying Attention to white Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity

Gita Gulati-Partee and Maggie Potapchuk, The Foundation Review

Pushing Back Against Habits of white Supremacy During a Crisis

Kad Smith, CompassPoint

Qualities of Regenerative and Liberatory Culture

Daniel Lim, Medium.com

The Bias of 'Professionalism' Standards  
Aysa Gray, Stanford Social Innovation Review

Transforming Culture — An Examination of Workplace Values Through the Frame of white Dominant Culture  
Merf Ehman, Columbia Legal Services, Management Information Exchange Journal

Uncovering white Supremacy Culture in Museum Work  
Hannah Heller, nikhil trivedi and Joanne Jones-Rizzi, The Inluseum

We Can't Authentically Practice Feedback Without Talking About Power  
Learkana Chong, CompassPoint

White Danger  
Autumn Brown

White Dominant Culture & Something Different: A Worksheet  
Partners for Collaborative Change

White Supremacy Culture: Coming Home to Who We Really Are  
Tema Okun

White Supremacy Culture & Remote Culture Crosswalk  
Remote DEI Collective

White Women Doing white Supremacy in Nonprofit Culture  
Heather Laine Talley

## Leadership for Racial Justice

Black Women Thriving  
Ericka Hines and Mako Fitts Ward, Every Level Leadership

"Doing the Right Thing" Over "Doing Things Right," A Critical Principle for Advancing Equity and Justice  
Vu Le, Nonprofit AF

Exploring Influence Without Authority  
Kad Smith, CompassPoint

Healing Love Into Balance  
Audrey Jordan, Kate Morales, Rosa Gonzalez, and Shiree Teng

How Do You Build Leaderful Organizations?  
Ananda Valenzuela, RVC

Love Notes to Our Social Justice Leaders  
Strategies for Social Change

Racial Equity Core Teams: The Engines of Institutional Change  
Terry Keleher, Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity

The Challenge to Power  
Dax-Devlon Ross, NonProfit Quarterly

The Productivity Paradox is the New Normal  
Move to End Violence

Toward Love, Healing, Resilience & Alignment: The Inner Work of Social Transformation & Justice  
Sheryl Petty, Kristen Zimmerman, and Mark Leach

What does it look like to radically reinvent leadership?  
Vu Le, Nonprofit AF

## FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENTS

### Centering Relationships, Strengthening Internal Communication, and Engaging in Generative Conflict

Embracing Conflict Didn't Tear Our Organization Apart: It Transformed Us (Part 1)  
Bryan Mercer and Hannah Sassaman

<p><a href="#">How to Receive Feedback (Part 2): Power, Difference, and Inequity</a> The Management Center</p>
<p><a href="#">In It Together: A Framework for Conflict Transformation in Movement-Building Groups</a> Interrupting Criminalization &amp; Dragonfly Partners</p>
<p><a href="#">Interrupting Feedback Practices of Dominance</a> Clayton Robbins, Diversity Equity Inclusiveness Consulting</p>
<p><a href="#">Moving Toward Conflict for the Sake of Good Strategy</a> Yotam Marom, Medium.com</p>
<p><a href="#">Nurturing Relationships, Navigating Conflict</a> Kate Shapiro, Auburn Seminary</p>
<p><a href="#">Supervising in a Crisis: Slowing Down and Focusing on Relationships</a> Hana Lee, CompassPoint</p>
<p><a href="#">Turning Towards Each Other: A Conflict Workbook</a> Jovida Ross and Weyam Ghabdian</p>
<p><a href="#">We Can't Work Toward Racial Justice and Equity Without Working on Relationships</a> Kad Smith, CompassPoint</p>
<p><b>Individual and Community Care and Healing for Racial Justice</b></p>
<p><a href="#">21 Day Self-Care Challenge Packet</a> Move to End Violence</p>
<p><a href="#">Healing &amp; Accountability Wheel</a> Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective (BEAM)</p>
<p><a href="#">Healing Justice Practice Spaces: A How-To Guide</a> Autumn Brown and Maryse Mitchell-Brody</p>
<p><a href="#">How We Heal: From the Inside-Out</a> National Equity Project</p>
<p><a href="#">Love with Power: Practicing Transformation for Social Justice</a> Kristen Zimmerman and Julie Quiroz, Movement Strategy Center</p>
<p><a href="#">Murmuration: Returning to the Whole</a> adrienne maree brown, YES Magazine</p>
<p><a href="#">Out of the Spiritual Closet: Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice</a> Kristen Zimmerman, Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado and Taj James, Movement Strategy Center</p>
<p><a href="#">Practicing Self-Care for Sustainability and Impact</a> Move to End Violence</p>
<p><a href="#">Resources for Sustaining Momentum and Doing Everyday Racial Justice Work</a> Beth Goodbee, Heart-Head-Hands.com</p>
<p><a href="#">Rest: A Middle Finger to Oppression, a Road Map to Justice</a> Shawn A. Ginwright, NonProfit Quarterly</p>
<p><a href="#">Self-Care Strategies for Survival: Sustaining Oneself in Social Justice Movements</a> Lauren Lofton, CompassPoint</p>
<p><b>Accountability Practices</b></p>
<p><a href="#">10 Ways Orgs Can Show Up for Black Lives Without Exploiting 'Black Lives Matter'</a> Sunshine Muse, ColorLines</p>
<p><a href="#">Accountability in a Time of Justice</a> Vivette Jefries-Logan, Michelle Johnson, Tema Okun</p>
<p><a href="#">Accountability Principles</a> Puget Sound Cohort and Race Forward</p>

<p><a href="#">Accountability: Who Benefits from Our Work</a> Paul Kivel</p>
<p><a href="#">Building a Culture of Accountability</a> Piper Anderson, Stanford Social Innovation Review</p>
<p><a href="#">Building Accountable Relationships with Communities of Color: Some Lessons Learned</a> Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team</p>
<p><a href="#">Calling In: A Quick Guide on When and How</a> Sian Ferguson, Everyday Feminism</p>
<p><a href="#">Community Accountability within the People of Color Progressive Movement</a> INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence</p>
<p><a href="#">Dreaming Accountability</a> Mia Mingus, Leaving Evidence</p>
<p><a href="#">Healthy Group Accountability: Learning How to Learn</a> Joshua Kahn Russell and Michael Strom</p>
<p><a href="#">Leaders Need to Build Peer Accountability</a> Cathy Dang-Santa Anna, Convergence</p>
<p><a href="#">Organizational Change and Accountability</a> Paul Kivel</p>
<p><a href="#">Protocol and Principles for white People Working to Support the Black Liberation Movement</a> Bay Area Solidarity Action Team</p>
<p><a href="#">The Liberatory World We Want to Create: Loving Accountability and the Limitations of Cancel Culture</a> Aja Couchois Duncan and Kad Smith, NonProfit Quarterly</p>
<p><a href="#">Transparency</a> Kip Holley and Jon Martinez, Organizing Engagement</p>
<p><a href="#">What Does Accountability Look Like Without Punishment?</a> Mariame Kaba, Josie Duffy Rice, and Reina Sultan, YES! Magazine</p>
<p><a href="#">What To Do When We F*ck Up — Because We Will — A Lot</a> Rebekah Giacomantonio, Community-Centric Fundraising</p>

## COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

### Building Racial Justice Knowledge, Skills, and Analysis

<p><a href="#">1619 Podcast</a> Nikole Hannah-Jones, The New York Times</p>
<p><a href="#">6 Month Study and Practice Guide</a> White Awake</p>
<p><a href="#">A Conversation on Race: A series of short films about identity in America</a> The New York Times</p>
<p><a href="#">Anti-Oppressive Facilitation for Democratic Process: Making Meetings Awesome for Everyone</a> AORTA</p>
<p><a href="#">Anti-Racist Facilitator's Guide to Co-Op Development</a> Solidarity Resource</p>
<p><a href="#">Asian American Racial Justice Toolkit</a> J. Ishida and Soya Jung</p>
<p><a href="#">Belonging: A Weekly Practice – Facilitator and Practice Guide</a> Othering and Belonging Institute</p>
<p><a href="#">Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity</a> World Trust Educational Services</p>



Dismantling Racism 2016 Workbook dRworks
Learn & Unlearn: Anti-racism Resource Guide School of Art Institute of Chicago, Multicultural Affairs
Mirrors of Privilege: Making whiteness Visible World Trust Educational Services
Organizing for Power, Organizing for Change: Resources and Trainings Lisa Fithian
Putting Racism on the Table (Videos) Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers
Race: The Power of an Illusion California Newsreel
RaceWorks Toolkit Stanford University, SPARQtools
Racial Equity Learning Modules World Trust Educational Services
seeing white (Podcast) Center for Documentary Studies, Scene on Radio Podcast
The Shape of Trust: Video Facilitation Guide City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative
Structural Racism Explained: Video & Teaching Guide Othering and Belonging Institute
Systems Thinking and Race: Workshop Summary john a. powell, Connie Cagampang Heller and Fayza Bundalli
Targeted Universalism: Animated Video Othering and Belonging Institute
Teaching People's History: Teaching Materials Zinn Education Project
The 1619 Project Curriculum Pulitzer Center
The Disturbing History of the Suburbs Adam Ruins Everything
Transforming white Privilege: A 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Capacity World Trust Educational Services, MP Associates, and The Center for Assessment and Policy Development
We Don't Want to Be Stars: A 21st-Century Intersectional Feminist Organizing Curriculum for These Times Kate Shapiro, Auburn Seminary
Witness History: Black History Podcast BBC News
Witnessing whiteness: The Journey into Racial Awareness and Antiracist Action (Workshop Series) Shelly Tolchuk
<b>Communicating about Racial Justice</b>
7 agreements for productive conversations during difficult times Vu Le, Nonprofit AF
Content creators, here's an Equity Screen to use as you work on your next blog post, book, podcast, or video Vu Le, Nonprofit AF
Courageous Conversations Toolkit Social Transformation Project

Discussion Guide: Common Good Message Box Building Movement Project
GARE Communications Guide Local and Regional Government Alliance for Race and Equity
How to Tell Compelling Stories While Avoiding Exploitation Abesha Shiferaw, Nonprofit Technology Conference
Messaging This Moment: A Handbook for Progressive Communicators Center for Community Change
Race Matters: How to Talk Effectively About Race Dorlee, Social Work Career
Re-railing the Conversation on Race Autumn Brown, AORTA, and Danielle Sered
Talking About Race National Museum of African American History & Culture
Telling a New Story: A Collaborative Checklist for Social Justice Leaders Using Narrative Strategies for Change The Opportunity Agenda
Ten Lessons for Talking About Race, Racism and Racial Justice The Opportunity Agenda
The Stories We Tell: Land Acknowledgements & Indigenous Sovereignty Center for Story-Based Strategy
<b>Racial Equity Organizational Change Assessments</b>
Building Organizational Capacity for Social Justice: Framework, Approach and Tools National Gender and Equity Campaign
Commitment to Operationalize Racial Equity Boston University, Boston Medical Group
Equity and Empowerment Lens Sonali Sangeeta Balajee, Multnomah County, Oregon
Internal Institutional Analysis on Race Worksheet for Predominantly white Congregations Katie Crowe
Race Equity Cycle Pulse Check Equity in the Center
Race Matters: Organizational Self-Assessment Annie E. Casey Foundation
Racial and Social Equity Assessment Tool for Farm to School Programs and Policy National Farm to School Network
Racial Equity Readiness Assessment for Workforce Development Race Forward
Racial Justice Assessment Tool Western States Center
REJI Organizational Equity Plan Worksheet (Tool A) JustLead Washington
Standing Together Coming Out for Racial Justice: An Anti-Racist Organizational Development Toolkit for LGBT Equality Groups and Activists Basic Rights Education Fund. pp.147-163
Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity Coalition of Communities of Color and All Hands Raised

Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool (TOCA)  
Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

## Racial Justice Impact and Power Analysis Questions

Approaches to Power Inequity Within Organizations  
AORTA

Concentric Circles: Unpacking Privilege and Power  
Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

How Can We Choose Strategies for our Action Plan?  
MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development

Racial Equity Decision-Making Tool (REDT)  
Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates with additions from Raquel Gutierrez, Blue Agave Partners

Racial Equity Impact Assessment  
Race Forward

Racial Equity Toolkit to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs and Budget Issues  
Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative

Resource Guide to Power Mapping  
Restorative Justice Project at Impact Justice

Strategic Questioning: An Approach to Creating Personal and Social Change  
Fran Peavey

Tools for Thought: Using Racial Equity Impact Assessments for Effective Policymaking  
Annie E. Casey Foundation

## DEVELOPING AN ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION PLAN

### Internal Policies and Practices

Brave Questions: Recalculating Pay Equity  
Mala Nagarajan and Richael Faithful, Network Weaver

Compensation Policy  
Media Justice

How to Be an Antiracist Supervisor: Start with Changing What You Call Yourself  
Kim-Monique Johnson, NonProfit Quarterly

Investing in Community: Why Radical Human Resources Is Critical for Movement Organizations  
Interview with Mala Nagarajan and Richael Faithful, Borealis Philanthropy

Making Our People Policies More Equitable, Human, & Humane  
Aja Couchois Duncan and Pam Sysiuk, Change Elemental

Power Dynamics: A Systemic Inquiry  
Anna Birney, Network Weaver

Reimagining Compensation Decisions through an Equity Panel  
Jasmine Hall, CompassPoint

Reimagining Compensation: It's Time to Stop Building on Inequities of The Past (Part 1)  
Shannon Ellis, CompassPoint

Restorative Justice for Our Movement  
Face Race Plenary, November 2022, Race Forward, Start at 40:00

When All of Our Tools Are Weapons  
Erica Stallings, Leadership Learning Community

White-Led Organizations: Here Are Three Keys to Incorporating Racial Equity in Strategic Planning  
Renee Rubin Ross, Community-Centric Fundraising

## Hiring / Recruitment / Promotion

10 ways to make executive leadership searches and transitions better and more equitable  
Vu Le, Nonprofit AF

18 Ways We've Improved Our Hiring Process  
Kira Page, COCo

Cultivate Talent with The Same Energy Level You Cultivate Gifts — Especially with Your BIPOC Support Staff  
Priscilla Lopez, Community-Centric Fundraising

Equity in Hiring and Employee Development  
City of Madison Human Resources

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Recruitment, Hiring and Retention  
Urban Sustainability Directors Network

Hiring: Building the Team You Want  
AORTA

Making (or Taking) Space: Initial Themes on Nonprofit Transitions from White to BIPOC Leaders  
Building Movement Project on behalf of the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation

Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap  
Sean Thomas Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther, Building Movement Project

Racial Equity and Social Justice Tool: Process Guide  
City of Madison

The "Problem" Woman of Colour in the Workplace (Toolbox)  
Kira Page, COCo

## Contracting and Finances

Addressing Racially Biased Financial Analysis  
Nonprofit Finance Fund

Contracting for Equity: Best Local Government Practices that Advance Racial Equity in Government  
Contracting and Procurement  
Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity

Guidelines for Promoting Racial Equitable Purchasing  
Annie E. Casey Foundation

FY24 Operating Budget Equity Tool Guidance Manual  
Montgomery County, Maryland

## Program Strategies

Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Our Parks  
Alec Weis, Julie Nelson, Jennifer Ringold, Art Hendricks, and Jules Posades, Parks and Recreation Magazine

Best Practices for white-Led Organizations to Promote Health Equity and Racial Justice in Health Advocacy  
Alberto González and Kasey Wilson, Community Catalyst

Farm to Early Care and Education Racial Equity Framework  
Ready Set Grow

How Can We Choose Strategies for Our Action Plan?  
MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development

Liberatory Design Card Deck  
Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise, National Equity Project

Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper  
Shiree Teng and Sammy Nuñez

Organizing Transformation: Best Practices in the Transformative Organizing Model  
Steve Williams, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

Racial Equity Tools – Strategies Section

Center for Assessment and Policy Development, MP Associates, and World Trust Educational Services

## Governance Process and Structures

[“If You Like It Then You Shoulda Put a Re-Ng on It!” Moving Nonprofit Boards Towards Real Racial Equity \(Re\) Commitments](#)

Sapna Sopori, Sapna Strategies LLC

[7 principles of community-centric boards](#)

Vu Le, Nonprofit AF

[Activating Race Equity Problem-Solving on Nonprofit Boards](#)

Markita Morris-Louis

[Decolonize Your Board](#)

Natalie A. Walrond, Stanford Social Innovation Review

[Guardrails for Relationships Tilted by Power: How to Keep Everyone on the Road](#)

Keecha Harris, NonProfit Quarterly

[The 4 Secrets: The Hidden Factor of Nonprofit Boards & Racial Equity Change](#)

Kelly Bates, Interaction Institute for Social Change

[The default nonprofit board model is archaic and toxic; let’s try some new models](#)

Vu Le, Nonprofit AF

## Racial Identity-Based Caucuses

[Building an Effective white Caucus](#)

Roots of Justice

[Caucuses as a Racial Justice Strategy: What We Have Learned](#)

JustLead Washington

[Disrupting white Supremacy Culture: Reflection Questions for white People Working for Racial Justice](#)

Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

[Going to the Root: How white Caucuses Contribute to Racial Justice](#)

Alex Vlastic, The Arrow

[Being Mindful of Race: Guidelines for Forming Racial Affinity Groups](#)

Ruth King

[Race Caucusing in an Organizational Context: A POC’s Experience](#)

Kad Smith, CompassPoint

[Racial Identity Caucuses](#)

No author listed

[Tips for Creating Effective white Caucus Groups](#)

Craig Elliott

[Why People of Color Need Spaces Without white People](#)

Kelsey Blackwell, The Arrow

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If you have questions and/or feedback about  
**Transforming Organizations by Operationalizing Racial Justice**  
please email Maggie Potapchuk at [mpotapchuk@mpassociates.us](mailto:mpotapchuk@mpassociates.us) • [www.mpassociates.us](http://www.mpassociates.us)