CHARTING THE JOURNEY:
Strategies to Guide Racial Equity Organizational Change

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Acknowledgments

We are deeply appreciative of the contributions of Sasanka Jinadasa, CURE’s Director, Equity Strategy and Training, whose leadership of our Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) client partnerships is reflected in the learnings and recommendations outlined in this guide. We gratefully acknowledge the collective labor, partnership, and insights provided by the CURE team, including Chriss Sneed, Aaron Brink-Johnson, Fred Clavel and Chantelle Wilkinson. CURE is grateful to our former and current client partners for trusting us to serve as guides and co-travelers on their racial equity journeys. Additionally, we acknowledge that much of what is detailed in this guide stems from the lived experiences shared by the thousands of nonprofit and government agency staff that we’ve interacted with through surveys, focus groups, interviews, trainings and meetings over the years. We thank Borealis Philanthropy’s REACH Fund for generous support of our organizational change work and this publication.

CURE expresses our appreciation to the following reviewers for sharing their expertise, time and detailed review and feedback to strengthen this guide:

**Gita Gulati-Partee**
*Founder and Principal*
OpenSource Leadership Strategies

**Janerick Holmes**
*Racial Justice Institute Associate Director*
Shriver Center on Poverty Law

**Truc Anh Kieu**
*Senior Program Associate, Racial Equity Initiatives*
Borealis Philanthropy

**Christina Szczepanski**
*Managing Director, Lending and Investments*
Reinvestment Fund

**Dwayne Wharton**
*Founder and Senior Advisor*
Just Strategies

Editorial services were provided by Sara Kamali and design services led by Christin ‘Loocie’ Glover of Talooka Studio.
The Center for Urban and Racial Equity partners with people and organizations to advance equity and justice through policy, systems, institutional, community and societal change. We envision just neighborhoods, cities, systems and workplaces where outcomes are no longer predicted by race and where governments, institutions, organizations and communities work together to ensure the conditions for health, economic security and political power are present for all people.

We ground our work in the following values:

**RACIAL JUSTICE**
We lead with race, name and challenge anti-Blackness, and lift up intersectional racial equity as a value and practice necessary for creating the just future we all deserve.

**COLLABORATION**
We believe in equitable partnerships and strong relationships built on mutual care and respect, proactive and honest communication, responsiveness, creativity and flexibility.

**COMMUNITY CARE**
We value respect, intentionality, spaciousness, rest, and self- and community care as integral to the work of advancing racial equity and justice.

**SELF-DETERMINATION**
We believe in people and community power and honor the strengths, wisdom and agency of systemically marginalized communities.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**
We acknowledge our mistakes as well as opportunities to learn from them, honor shared timelines and goals, and support partners and communities in developing structures for promoting transparency, tracking progress and accountability.

**ONGOING LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING**
Practicing racial equity and working for justice and liberation is a lifelong practice. We are committed to ongoing learning and knowledge sharing that builds the capacity to bring forth equity and justice among our team members, partners and the many communities we serve.
The 2020 uprisings against racist police killings and stark health inequities faced by communities of color during the COVID-19 pandemic brought new awareness to racial injustices in the U.S. For the first time, many organizations issued statements of support explicitly naming anti-Black racism as a persistent cause of health, housing, educational, employment, carceral and other systemic inequities. Pledges were also made to hire more Black staff and staff of color and provide educational grants and scholarships to Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and Asian American and Pacific Islander people.

In response to these pledges, Black and brown employees demanded that institutional leaders move beyond superficial commitments to reckon with the myriad ways racism manifested within their own organizations. In sum, Black staff and staff of color were asking for accountability and meaningful shifts in their everyday, material realities. These demands included calls to:

- Disrupt processes that continue to lead to overwhelmingly white leadership teams and governing bodies
- Equitable opportunities for promotions and career advancement and
- Changes to how organizations view, interact with and serve Black communities and communities of color.

This guide is a response to the search for guidance by nonprofit leaders and those tasked with operationalizing racial equity commitments, including employees in newly-formed equity officer roles. The sector operates on public trust, has a mission to serve and holds tremendous power to shift resources, systems and policies to produce equitable outcomes for communities impacted by structural racism. Consequently, nonprofits have a responsibility to intentionally examine and redress the effects of racism, privilege and inequitable power dynamics internally and in the communities which they serve.

The Center for Urban and Racial Equity (CURE) has been guiding organizational leaders on how to mobilize resources and be accountable for racial equity since 2018. During this period, CURE has worked with dozens of organizations to conduct over 150 trainings, facilitated meetings and focus groups, 130 stakeholder interviews, and 16 complete organizational assessment surveys based on CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) framework detailed below. With an average size of around 300 staff, these organizations cumulatively represent more than 6,500 employees. The REOC has proven to be a flexible and adaptable model for different types of organizations and has been applied in organizations of varying sizes as well as in government agencies and school settings.

1 CURE uses “Black and brown” throughout this guide to refer to people who experience the negative impacts of structural racism including Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and Asian American and Pacific Islander people. See glossary for further explanation.
To move towards meaningful racial equity, CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) framework helps organizations focus their efforts in four key domains:

1. Organizational Culture & Commitment to Racial Equity
2. Shared Language & Analysis
3. Empowered People
4. Equitable Policies & Practices

Implementation and change across the four domains is supported by a Racial Equity Working Group actively involved in CURE’s three-phase process that includes Assessment, Learning and Action Planning.

These four domains strengthen individual and institutional capacity to lead, plan and act in ways that align with an organization’s values and commitment to racial equity:

**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & COMMITMENT**
Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations demonstrate an ongoing commitment to address historical and current inequities experienced by people of color and other marginalized communities. This commitment is reflected in organizational values, vision statements and plans, among the leadership team and board, structures (e.g., racial equity working groups or teams) and budgets established to support sustained focus on racial equity, and active efforts to challenge whiteness as the cultural norm and basis for exclusionary and oppressive workplaces practices.

**SHARED LANGUAGE & ANALYSIS**
To create and fully embody a race equity culture, organizations must develop shared language and analysis on topics of race, power, privilege and justice. All staff should be able to articulate what racial equity is, why it is important to the organization and how their specific role in the organization furthers that commitment.

**EMPOWERED PEOPLE**
Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations ensure that trusted mechanisms are in place to appropriately address racism and marginalizing incidents, that staff and organizational constituents of color are structurally situated to access power in order to practice inclusive leadership, and all staff have the individual skills to actively work toward racial equity in the workplace and the communities whom they serve.

**EQUITABLE POLICIES & PRACTICES**
Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations intentionally embed racial equity across hiring, retention and advancement, communications, programs, services and policy advocacy, community partnerships, contracting and grantmaking, and governance and operations. These efforts include creating and implementing new strategies that explicitly focus on eliminating systemic biases and inequities and the regular review and evaluation of policies and practices to ensure they are achieving their intended equitable outcomes.
This guide shares CURE’s transformation methodology, outcomes, and lessons learned from Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) processes. These lessons and recommendations were garnered through thousands of hours that CURE has devoted to facilitating workshops; analyzing surveys, focus group and interview data; and co-developing equity-centered racial equity plans with client partners. Through this guidebook, we hope to offer a roadmap for anyone seeking to dismantle institutional racism and operationalize anti-racist practices across organizational culture, policies, programs, services and operations. There is no formula for achieving racial equity transformation, so we offer this guide simply as one roadmap, with many pathways, that builds off the work that many others have pursued over the years.

Through sustained focus on the four domains of Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC), CURE believes nonprofits can become anti-racist and justice-driven organizations that actively work to dismantle oppressive systems by ensuring:

- Their mission, vision and values reflect priorities from communities served
- Leadership and staff can articulate the importance of racial equity to their work and continually cultivate skills and capacity to practice racial equity
- The workplace is one where Black, Indigenous, Latina/o/e and Asian and Pacific Islander staff are hired, supported, retained and have equitable opportunities to advance
- All staff, especially staff with marginalized identities and staff with less positional authority, have a voice and trust they have power and accountability for racial equity
- Restorative justice and trauma-informed processes are used to respond to racialized incidents and other forms of harm
- Collaborative relationships with Black, Indigenous, Latina/o/e and Asian and Pacific Islander communities are sustained and facilitate the co-design of programs, services, systems and policy solutions that dismantle structural racism and improve outcomes in communities of color
- Contracting and grantmaking practices support racial and economic justice

Offered in this guide are a range of insights, strategies, recommendations and tools that can be applied to actualize this vision. Whether your organization is just getting started or looking for ways to deepen your racial equity journey, the tools and guidance provided in this guide can help plan for the challenges, tensions, joy, growth and opportunities that building just and equitable organizations present.
How This Guidebook Is Organized

This guide begins with an Introduction followed by an overview, entitled, *What Is Racial Equity Organizational Change*, that outlines CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) framework and process. After introducing the framework and key elements of the change process (e.g., Racial Equity Working Group, Team Learning, Assessment and Action Planning), the sections that follow under *Building Racially Equitable and Justice-Driven Organizations*, are organized by the four domains in the REOC framework: Organizational Culture & Commitment, Shared Language & Analysis, Empowered People and Equitable Policies & Practices. The discussion of each domain includes:

- An explanation of key concepts and practices associated with the domain
- How organizations are struggling to practice racial equity
- Target outcomes within each domain to assess progress in moving toward racial equity
- Specific recommendations on how to make meaningful progress and change that moves organizations closer to achieving the target outcomes for the domain

This guide covers a lot of ground, touching on many aspects of organizational operations including culture, programs and services, hiring and retention strategies, community partnerships and contracting and grantmaking. We encourage you to move through the guide at your own pace and with your change team, taking time to carefully consider the applicability of the information and where there are opportunities to build and sustain racial equity across each of the domains.
How do we reckon with our organization’s legacy? Is our organization an equitable place to work? In what ways are we actually redressing racism? Are we doing harm to the communities we seek to serve?

For organizations that had not prioritized racial equity prior to the 2020 uprisings, it quickly became clear that statements denouncing white supremacy and pledges of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement were important yet inadequate responses to the demands for deep and transformative change. It has taken death and wide-spread community trauma and pain to awaken institutional leaders to the reality that no organization is immune from racism and the impacts of race, power and privilege. Because of the sacrifices of racial justice activists who have amplified the need for structural change by placing their bodies and lives on the line, a dramatic opening has been created for institutional and organizational transformations that can align with broader movements for racial justice.

For many organizations, the journey to aligning with a vision for racial equity and justice starts with critical interrogation of their complicity in creating and maintaining cultures, policies and practices that have not valued the lives, wisdoms, talents and contributions of Black people and people of color.

We are now at the crossroads of transformation where momentum for racial equity can yield more just and equitable outcomes for organizations, communities of color and our nation as a whole.
The current landscape across the nonprofit sector highlights the need for racial equity change, including:

- Leadership including boards and senior staff often do not reflect the communities served, are overwhelming white, and are ill-equipped to lead racial equity change

- Black staff and staff of color consistently rate organizational culture, communications, as well as hiring, retention and advancement practices as inequitable

- Black women are most likely to feel their race has had a negative impact on their career advancement and that “nonprofit organizations are defined by a pervasive and systemic white advantage”

- Women nonprofit leaders are paid less than male nonprofit leaders

- Funders and nonprofits are making insufficient investments in practices that support workforce equity (e.g., competitive salaries and benefits)

- Nonprofit employees of color report exclusionary organizational cultures as a major roadblock to their advancement

- Programs, services and policy advocacy are often shaped by white saviorism and do not honor the agency and self-determination of Black and brown communities

Nonprofit organizations wield enormous power and potential to shift power, resources, systems and policies to produce equitable outcomes for Black communities and communities of color, including stakeholders from employees to constituents. In the journey toward more liberatory and people-centered systems, it matters whether Black staff and staff of color have fair opportunities for promotion and advancement. It matters whether the wisdom, experiences and priorities of those impacted by racial inequities and injustices are honored. It matters that programs and services are designed with racial equity at the forefront of planning. And on the path to healthy, whole, just and powerful communities, it matters that organizations think and act in ways profoundly different than they currently do.

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2 Data from Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) surveys conducted by CURE to be published in a forthcoming report.


6 Fund the People, “Talent Justice Initiative”
With this vision in mind, the Center for Urban and Racial Equity (CURE) developed the Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) framework in 2018. CURE's approach takes both internal (e.g., organizational culture, decision-making, training, hiring, retention and advancement) and external (e.g., programs and services, community engagement, contracting, grantmaking) racial equity into account, because both are necessary to build anti-racist organizations. Grounded in the study of organizational change and the ways that racism and whiteness are embedded in systems, REOC is a carefully sequenced systems-change approach to racial equity organizational transformation.

A systems change approach includes a set of tools and processes to reveal underlying patterns and identify opportunities to leverage and transform a system holistically. Systems change is dynamic, engages interconnected parts of an organization and occurs at the individual, interpersonal, organizational and societal levels. When systems change approaches are not based on racial equity principles, the interventions proposed to address systemic problems can lead to more racialized harm and negative outcomes. In the words of Sheryl Petty and Mark Leach, “Systems Change pursued without Deep Equity...leaves some of the critical elements of systems unchanged. And “equity” pursued without “Systems Change” is not “deep” nor comprehensive at the level of effectiveness currently needed.”

For the past five years CURE has used the REOC framework to build capacity within nonprofit and public organizations across the country to challenge institutional and structural racism and operationalize racial equity in everyday practice. CURE’s evaluation process has been both quantitative ─ tracking client interactions, offering pre- and post- working group questionnaires, and training evaluation surveys ─ as well as qualitative: engagement in quarterly team retreats to study our process and to reflect on where change is needed, post-engagement calls with client partners, and analysis of case studies to examine specific change strategies that were most impactful.

In the spirit of ongoing learning and resource sharing, this guide shares these outcomes, learnings and recommendations with organizational leaders and anyone engaged in or seeking to launch racial equity transformation processes. Racial equity transformation processes are challenging, require sustained commitment despite the discomfort that may arise and openness to listen deeply and learn along the way. Our hope is that by sharing our framework, including the thought process, methodologies and lessons learned, more organizations will begin and deepen their journey towards racial equity and justice better positioned and prepared for the work required.

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See Appendix 1 for a glossary of the key terms and definitions used in this report.
What is Racial Equity Organizational Change?

“Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

– James Baldwin

How do organizations uproot institutional racism and make racial equity real? Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian American people and communities want intentional, authentic and transformative shifts in their every day, material realities inherent in the promise of racial equity. Undoing generations of structural racism and redressing its impact across institutions including among nonprofit organizations is a long-term process. Racial equity transformation processes must recognize how racial inequities are created by and/or reinforced across an organization’s culture, policies, programs, services and practices. Racial equity organizational change must also be grounded in a deep commitment to working through the constant change that necessarily accompanies the urgency of building justice-driven and equitable organizations, systems and communities.

Traditional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) approaches will not challenge the status quo or interrupt the racist beliefs and practices. This is because the DEI approach, which centers on diversity, (increasing representation of Black people and people of color) and inclusion (improving how marginalized people and communities experience and participate in existing structures) is not sufficient to transform the systems of power that have created and reproduced today’s inequities.

Racial equity demands a world where race no longer predicts outcomes nor determines how Black and brown people are treated and impacted by systems and institutions. Racial equity also requires that harmful and unjust policies are eliminated and calls for building new practices that center and honor the humanity of everyone including Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian and Pacific Islander people.

Racial equity is a proactive process of creating and enforcing practices, policies, values, and actions that produce fair and equitable access, opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for all regardless of race. We practice racial equity to achieve racial justice.

Because racial equity is as much a practice as it is a goal, value and vision, organizational change work in the service of racial equity cannot be about checking off items on a to-do list. Instead, this process is non-linear and very much about relationship-building and learning to move at the speed of trust. Racial equity organizational change stirs emotions, excites, and sometimes leads to frustrations and disappointments when organizations are not willing to go far enough. Because of these realities, racial equity organizational change has to be carefully sequenced and facilitated to support truth-telling, transparency, accountability and care to avoid imposing additional harms and burdens on non-leadership staff and communities of color.
We have found it helpful for organizations, early in their organizational change process, to build shared understanding of the work that they are collectively embarking upon by developing racial equity vision statements and identifying guideposts that take into account the investments in time, resources and emotional labor that these change processes require. For this, we lean on our Guiding Principles for Racial Equity (Appendix 1) which include:

- Naming and confronting racism
- Systemic analysis to understand and eliminate root causes of racial inequities and injustices
- Shifting power to prioritize leadership and solutions from directly impacted people
- Targeted, intersectional approaches that consider how racism interacts with sexism, ableism, heterosexism, cissexism, classism, and other forms of oppression to profoundly impact outcomes and experiences.
- Moving policies and organizational strategy in solidarity with movements for racial justice; and
- Sustained investment in resources, including time, money and people, to realize racial equity at the individual, organizational, community and societal levels

While CURE applies these principles across organizational change, policy analysis and other areas of our work, we also recognize that organizations have to define for themselves how they will practice racial equity and connect this work to a broader vision for racial justice. Grace Lee Boggs so eloquently stated that “You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it, and responsible for changing it.” Racial equity organizational change (REOC) is an invitation to take responsibility for changing society by transforming our institutions and organizations.
CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) Framework and Process

There are many pathways to building racial equity. CURE’s REOC framework and process was developed in conversation with decades of preceding work, activism and interdisciplinary scholarship by thinkers and equity advocates across disciplines and theoretical perspectives incorporating Critical Race Theory, sociology, and systems and organizational change principles.

Four key drivers of racial equity transformation serve as the basis of CURE’s REOC framework (Figure 1) and process: (1) Organizational Culture & Commitment to Racial Equity, (2) Shared Language & Analysis, (3) Empowered People and (4) Equitable Policies & Practices.

**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & COMMITMENT**

Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations demonstrate an ongoing commitment to address historical and current inequities experienced by people of color and other marginalized communities. This commitment is reflected in organizational values, vision statements and plans, among the leadership team and board, structures (e.g., racial equity working groups or teams) and budgets established to support sustained focus on racial equity, and active efforts to challenge whiteness as the cultural norm and basis for exclusionary and oppressive workplaces practices.

**SHARED LANGUAGE & ANALYSIS**

To create and fully embody a race equity culture, organizations must develop shared language and analysis on topics of race, power, privilege and justice. All staff should be able to articulate what racial equity is, why it is important to the organization and how their specific role in the organization furthers that commitment.

**EMPOWERED PEOPLE**

Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations ensure that trusted mechanisms are in place to appropriately address racism and marginalizing incidents, that staff and organizational constituents of color are structurally situated to access power in order to practice inclusive leadership, and all staff have the individual skills to actively work toward racial equity in the workplace and the communities whom they serve.

**EQUITABLE POLICIES & PRACTICES**

Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations intentionally embed racial equity across hiring, retention and advancement, communications, programs, services and policy advocacy, community partnerships, contracting and grantmaking, and governance and operations. These efforts include creating and implementing new strategies that explicitly focus on eliminating systemic biases and inequities and the regular review and evaluation of policies and practices to ensure they are achieving their intended equitable outcomes.
Within each of these domains, are subdomains that reflect how racial equity is operationalized and experienced by employees, organizational partners and communities of color.

**Figure 1. CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) Framework**

The REOC process includes a comprehensive assessment, working group workshops, all-staff trainings, and action planning sessions designed to strengthen and embed racial equity across the four areas of the REOC framework. Throughout REOC processes with client partners, CURE actively centers the voices and experiences of Black and brown employees and communities served by the organizations.

While Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) is a journey that must include measures of accountability and indicators to track progress, as shown in the REOC Framework graphic (Figure 1), we believe momentum and progress are sustained through: (1) transformative practices that challenge the status quo, (2) systemic analysis to address the root cause of differential experiences and outcomes by race and other inequities, (3) a culture of ongoing individual and organizational learning and (4) sustained commitment.

Key to the REOC process is an internal Racial Equity Working Group (REWG) composed of organizational staff from across departments or work units. Working in collaboration with the REWG, CURE team members facilitate the organization through a six to nine months-long multi-phase process that includes a comprehensive assessment, a series of visioning and training workshops, and iterative results-based action planning. For an overview of the entire process, please refer to Figure 2.

A separate toolkit and training for facilitators, consultants and organizational leaders who would like to apply our tools and methodology are available on our website.
By the end of the REOC process, an organization’s REWG members and staff will have:

- Shared language and analysis around the history, ideology, and structures of race and racism
- An introduction to the skills necessary to support people of color in the workplace and to apply a racial equity lens to all facets of organizational decision-making and communications
- An assessment of the organization’s culture, policies, programs and practices as they relate to racial equity, along with preliminary recommendations for addressing areas for improvement
- A racial equity vision statement to guide the organization’s work and how it engages staff, partners and communities served by the organization
- A co-created Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) with specific outcomes and actions for the organization to address

**Figure 2. CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) Process**

CURE’s REOC process (Figure 2) consists of simultaneous learning and assessment activities, followed by action planning informed by the results of the assessment and shared language and analysis developed among members of the Racial Equity Working Group.
Racial Equity Assessments

Racial equity assessments and the resulting report serve as key organizing tools for racial equity transformation. Assessments provide organizations with data for action and a roadmap for informed dialogue, goal-setting and meaningful change to take place.

By building consensus and understanding around existing challenges and identifying potential strategies for addressing racism, power and inequity across an organization, assessments are a critical part of the truth-telling process that is necessary for racial equity transformation. Assessments offer opportunities for counternarratives about an organization to surface that are often hidden or unbeknownst to leaders. Organizational leaders may be unaware that a seemingly race-neutral decision or action had racial equity implications until they were highlighted by staff or CURE. Assessments also reveal reasons why Black staff and staff of color may question the sincerity of current efforts to prioritize racial equity because past attempts at creating change were met with resistance by leadership.

Through racial equity assessments, everyone across an organization is brought into the process of naming and acknowledging past and current experiences, policies, practices and cultural norms within an organization that have implicit or explicit racist underpinnings and/or have resulted in disparate outcomes and treatment of staff and stakeholders of color. These issues, while felt most by Black and brown staff, have implications for all staff and when addressed, benefits the entire organization.

CURE uses a comprehensive racial equity assessment survey to collect the insights of as many staff members as possible, from front-line staff to the Executive Director/CEO. Following the completion of a document review to understand the organizational structure and existing policies and practices at the organization, all staff are asked to rate their organization against the REOC domains and subdomains that CURE defines as key to racial equity. The survey also collects demographic data about respondents, including department, position level, length of time at an organization, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability status, and economic background.

Because intersectionality is a core principle of our work, CURE examines these demographics to contextualize the differing experiences of staff across multiple marginalized identities at an organization. Data should always be analyzed through an intersectional lens to understand where inequities exist among staff members. For example, there are many variances between the experiences of Black women and white men in the workplace. Data analysis should take into account multiple marginalities at the intersection of race and gender or sexual identity, transgender status, disability status, immigration status, or economic background.

Following the collection of this quantitative data, CURE carries out focus groups, interviews, community meetings and other qualitative data collection methods to gather descriptive data on the experiences of diverse staff and stakeholders within an organization.

Without trust to provide insights confidentially and efforts to prevent retaliation, participants might be more likely to omit facts, experiences, or perspectives that reveal complex and nuanced experiences and perspectives on the state of racial equity within an organization. Together, these data, stories and conversations provide a comprehensive picture of challenges, strengths and opportunities for action. These findings are presented to an organization in a comprehensive report while assuring the confidentiality of all assessment participants.
In CURE’s experience, organizations that transparently share the full findings to their staff and stakeholders are often the ones who are most effective in taking action as their racial equity journey continues. Frequently, however, organizational leadership find themselves unhappy with the uncomfortable truths documented in assessment reports and often slow or prevent the sharing of these reports with staff. This further reinforces the often already existing cycle of distrust between staff and leadership and hinders organizational progress on addressing racial inequities. Consequently, CURE built into this process an organization-wide briefing where staff members can openly discuss the results of the assessment and provide feedback to the REWG and organization’s leaders as they move into the action planning phase. Because racial equity assessments often describe experiences of racism and marginalization, it is critical that these briefing sessions be facilitated carefully to honor the emotional nature of these discussions and to reinforce the values of transparency and accountability that staff expect to see modeled and practiced throughout the transformation process. By committing at the beginning of the assessment process to a transparent sharing of the report findings, organizations build a culture of trust and honest, proactive communication in their racial equity work.

Learning

Creating deep shifts in organizational culture and practices requires ongoing learning. Leaders and staff must collectively and individually build knowledge, skills and capacity to challenge systemic racism and practice racial equity in organizational and community-based environments. To support these efforts, a significant amount of training and learning is embedded in the REOC process, with a particular focus on developing an organizational Racial Equity Working Group (REWG) to lead the change process. REWG members serve as planners in the REOC process. They meet with the CURE team monthly and devote time to personal learning. They also convene with other REWG members in between meetings. The REOC workshops build REWG members’ racial equity analytical skills through a series of foundational half-day, full-day and multi-day trainings that results in an action plan. Inevitably, one of the outcomes of the action planning process is prioritization of trainings for the entire staff.

Over the past five years, CURE has led 16 Racial Equity Working Groups through the REOC training. Each group averaged 13 members in size, which represents a total of 208 REWG members. During this time, CURE has facilitated over 2700 hours of racial equity conversations. Emerging learnings and internal reflections are continuously integrated into our practice, leading to updates to our curriculum and adjustments in how we facilitate.
Action Planning

CURE’s action planning process is centered around an organizational vision for racial equity. This vision then drives the resulting action plan, including defining a guiding principle, current state, and racial equity goal and outcomes for each REOC domain or focus area.

REWG members are tasked with developing an organizational vision during the first meeting of the REOC process. Following the completion of the racial equity organizational assessment and visioning and training workshops with the Racial Equity Working Group, CURE leads the REWG through an action planning process on behalf of their organization. CURE coaches REWG members to ensure that all actions in the plan are aligned with the vision statement, include both quantitative and qualitative goals, and to ensure they are specific about how they will impact people of color.

This structure was developed using existing best practices in strategic planning, including the Results Based Accountability framework. While many organizations prefer that CURE develop their action plans for them, an important way to build internal racial equity capacity is for REWG members to collaborate and work through challenging discussions and considerations with other staff who are also part of co-creating an Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP).

To learn more about how to conduct a REOC process, visit our website for details about our REOC trainings and how to access CURE’s comprehensive toolkit.

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See Appendix 4 for a list of performance indicators for racial equity.
CASE STUDY
Community Development Corporation

In October 2019, CURE began a full REOC engagement with a large community development corporation based in one of America’s largest cities. With a staff of over 1,100, the organization demonstrated meaningful demographic diversity, but tensions and racialized experiences were still found throughout the organization. Black employees expressed discomfort with their treatment among the majority Latino/a/x staff and both Black and Latino/a/x staff highlighted leadership positions were held primarily by white staff. Black and brown staff did not feel supported in racial equity conversations in the workplace and reported not being offered fair opportunities for mentorship or career advancement.

In the early months of the engagement, CURE worked with the client partner to build a REWG of diverse representatives from across the organization. Vice presidents from divisions throughout the organization were expected to participate alongside line staff and managers. REWG members received training on core racial equity concepts and helped co-design the comprehensive organizational assessment in partnership with the CURE team.

With a greater understanding of the challenges facing the organization, the REWG then moved into the important work of planning for change using CURE’s Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) template. REWG members drafted a racial equity vision statement, which they took to the organization’s board of directors for approval. The primarily white-led board was initially uncomfortable with acknowledging the history of white supremacy, but ultimately approved the statement in its entirety after participating in a tailored training on institutional and structural racism with CURE facilitators.

The final Racial Equity Action Plan was developed in late 2020 and featured a number of goals that have been met a year since the plan was completed. A new racial equity manager role was created and filled to focus on racial equity full-time. The REWG provided significant input into the job description, interview process, selection and onboarding of this new team member. Today, REWG members serve as partners to the manager and representative leaders accountable for implementing action items in their organizational divisions. REWG members were also retroactively provided with additional compensation for their work on the REWG after several members spoke out about the challenges of shouldering committee responsibilities atop their usual work load, especially in the context of the pandemic and racial uprisings in 2020.

“How do we view this as an ongoing process and not just a set of deliverables? How do we see it as something much longer and bigger and more complicated?”
- REWG Member
Staff throughout the organization are also being provided with facilitated dual-language trainings on topics such as anti-Blackness. Affinity groups have been established based on race, gender and sexuality. The organization is also beginning to engage more proactively in larger societal conversations about race. For most staff, the conversation has moved past diversity and towards more complex questions grappling with institutional and structural inequities. One member of the REWG noted that some changes still felt performative, such as the creation of Juneteenth as a floating holiday. Yet at the same time, teams are grappling with larger questions about if or how they should work with banks with a history of racist practices.

There is a greater openness to learning at the administrative level. The Executive Director/CEO, a white man, writes more often to the staff about political and social moments and their relevance to the organization’s mission. In the summer of 2020, the organization hosted an all-staff town hall to discuss the uprisings. The organizational Instagram feed is increasingly political.

In the HR department, there is a conscious effort to recruit people of color, particularly Black staff, and work is underway to create pathways for staff of color to ascend within the organization. Such initiatives include job descriptions that are circulated internally before being posted externally and the offering of an interview to any staff who apply for a new role. Mentorships between staff and leadership are also being developed for people in social work roles across the organization.

The Racial Equity Action Plan is still being integrated into the organizational strategic plan. Like other organizations that have completed this process, the organization continues to grapple with questions of how to avoid treating the Racial Equity Action Plan as a checklist.
Building Racially Equitable Organizations

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

— Lilla Watson

The work of becoming an anti-racist organization is never complete. CURE frequently works with organizations at many different places in their racial equity journey. Many have moved past basic understandings of diversity and toward a focus on equity. However, because of organization size, history, political orientation, complexity, and staff and leadership demographics, people within organizations are frequently at varied stages in developing their racial equity analysis and practice. Assessments, trainings and action planning begin the process of aligning leadership and staff to actively work to dismantle oppressive policies, cultures, and practices that impact organizational stakeholders internally and externally.

The following action items detail how to employ the four domains in the REOC framework to move towards meaningful racial equity. Again, these domains are (1) Organizational Culture & Commitment to Racial Equity, (2) Shared Language & Analysis, (3) Empowered People and (4) Equitable Policies & Practices.
Organizational Culture and Commitment to Racial Equity

Values guide actions. The commitment to racial equity is foundational and must be reflected in vision and mission statements and strategic plans. This commitment must also go beyond words and be brought to life through leadership that practices racial equity. Specifically, it is the responsibility of leadership to build a culture that values all employees and creates a shared sense of belonging where staff feel they are integral to the organization’s mission. Out of the four REOC domains, it is in this domain that exclusionary and oppressive workplaces for Black staff and staff of color are created by an organization’s day-to-day practices and norms, which are often themselves shaped by white dominant culture.
Limited commitment to racial equity in organizational culture is most commonly expressed in the following ways:

- **Mission, vision and strategic plans mention race in one area or section, but fail to fully integrate racial equity throughout the plans and/or programs.** Thus, racial equity is not the intentional focus of decision-making in all aspects of the organization, including planning, implementing and evaluating policies and programs.

- **Diversity decreases towards the top of the organization and leadership is overwhelmingly white.** People of color are more significantly represented in line staff, administrative and HR roles.

- **Oversight boards do not prioritize racial equity.** Boards have not engaged in discussions or trainings on how to center racial equity, and are unaware or apathetic to the racial equity change work happening in the organization (*i.e.*, they don’t think it is relevant to their role as a board).

- **Demands for change stem from Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and Asian American and Pacific Islander employees who hold less power and resources to take meaningful, systemic action alone.** These employees are rarely compensated for the work they are doing to address racial inequities.

- **White dominant culture is normalized throughout the organization.** Expectations of perfectionism for Black and brown staff, a bias towards urgency, defensiveness over whiteness, valuing quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, a focus on either/or thinking, and power hoarding, among others are indicators of the normalization of white supremacy in an organization.⁹

### Organizational Culture & Commitment Outcomes to Aim For:

- Mission and vision reflects collaborative racial equity priorities from community served
- Leadership (including board) reflects communities served
- Accountability mechanisms including performance measures are established to sustain focus on racial equity
- Leadership and staff understand and actively work to address white supremacy and white-dominant cultural norms
- Organizations situate themselves within networks and ecosystems committed to advancing racial equity
- Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) employees experience increased sense of belonging and feel they are integral to organization’s mission, work and culture

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The following strategies will move nonprofit organizations toward the above outcomes:

- **Publicly and demonstrably affirm the organization’s commitment to racial equity.** Organizations should develop and adopt a racial equity vision statement, with buy-in and approval from across the organization, including the board, leadership, and all levels of staff. This commitment should be visible and infused across the organization’s culture, policies, and practices.

- **Establish a Racial Equity Working Group (REWG) to serve as a key resource for organizational change.** CURE recommends that REWGs always include both representation from top leadership, who can ensure that the group receives appropriate resources and support for change initiatives, as well as from a diverse group of staff across levels of the organization. This latter group provides insights into the ways that racialized and/or other differences impact their work. Staff often also identify where change is needed across the organization. Organizations should be prepared to shift the work expectations for people of color who are not at the leadership level, yet who more often than not participate in change efforts. Organizations should also compensate these staff members fairly for their time and emotional labor. Compensation can take many forms, from additional pay to extra time off for self-care.

- **Appoint a leadership-level staff member to work in partnership with the Racial Equity Working Group (REWG).** The work of developing an anti-racist organization is time-consuming. Staff are frequently asked to manage this work alongside other full-time job responsibilities. CURE recommends that organizations hire a new member of the leadership team with the active support of the REWG to focus solely on racial equity. The new hire would be responsible for coordinating the REWG and for providing senior-level oversight of implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) thereby building staff trust and confidence in the organization’s commitment to racial equity. While racial equity is the responsibility of all team members, this role is of a dedicated staff person with the positional authority and budget to support implementation activities.

- **Integrate racial equity into organizational values and implementation documents.** Developing protocols to ensure that all organizational planning processes consider how new and existing programs and initiatives will unravel racist structures should be prioritized in racial equity action plans. Ultimately, this process should become part of the standard planning and operating practices of the organization.

- **Embed commitment to racial equity within mission and vision statements.** Organizations can integrate racial equity into these foundational statements to reorient their existing work in a way that considers historical inequities and envisions more just futures. Since mission and vision statements ground the entire work of the organization, specificity and transparency about racial equity in mission and vision statements demonstrate the organization’s core values and priorities that all employees must align around.

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• **Undo white supremacy culture embedded in the organization.** Leaders throughout the organization should clearly articulate the white supremacy norms that exist in the institutional culture, such as perfectionism, undue urgency on all staff and power hoarding. Values prioritizing racial equity should also be clearly stated, including a culture of appreciation, realistic timelines for work, and power sharing. This cultural shift from white supremacy culture to proactively socialized racial equity throughout the organization is fostered through ongoing training opportunities, coaching, and a supportive culture that rewards the embrace of these new cultural norms by recognizing and promoting those who demonstrate equitable leadership at all organizational levels.

• **Prioritize thoughtfulness over speed.** When revising or expanding operations, departments, services or programs to center racial equity, staff bandwidth must be taken into account. Despite the urgency of the work, a process that does not value time and space for reflection and internal growth will hamper racial equity in the long run. Questions to ask during this process include:
  
  • What is the tension between racial equity and growth?
  • How have we traditionally managed it?
  • To what degree is our organization’s history of growth tied to a lack of equitable practice?
  • How will future tensions between racial equity and growth be resolved?

  Within organizational leadership, there is often a strong impulse to find the “correct” solution to social injustices and to deliver on that solution immediately, which itself leads to employee burnout. Organizations should recognize that addressing systemic issues requires iterative processes and that these problems are unlikely to be solved in one year or even two. Small scale pilot or trial programs may be useful to test innovative programming employing information directly gathered from the communities served.

• **Reform organizational structure to develop shared power and shared responsibilities.** An overly hierarchical structure leads to inequities when leaders make decisions and other employees are expected to carry out this work without opportunities for input or consideration that the work may be exploitative or inequitable. Building team networks, and/or rotating term limits for leadership roles dissipates power hoarding because these strategies flatten the organizational hierarchy. For example, nonprofits self-directed by workers are structured so that “all workers have the power to influence the realms and programs in which they work, the conditions of their workplace, their own career paths, and the direction of the organization as a whole.”\(^{11}\) Unions are also a powerful mechanism for supporting worker power with the caveat that racial equity be addressed within representational matters. If not, unions sublimate the experience of individuals across identities like race, gender, or sexual orientation.\(^ {12}\)

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• **Build governance bodies equipped with racial equity analysis tools, commitment, and power to support the anti-racism work of the organization.** Beyond creating more racially diverse boards that include community members, organizations should seek to ensure that boards of directors and similar governing bodies are provided with racial equity training and coaching as the organization evolves. Board policy documents should be reviewed with a racial equity lens and amended when required. For example, term limits can be enacted or shortened to provide more opportunities for power sharing. When well-equipped with racial equity analysis tools, the board is a helpful resource to organizational leadership because it holds the organization accountable for executing the changes outlined in a Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP). Some organizations might seek to move beyond traditional board structures by creating a minimally viable board of directors to handle legally required roles while sharing oversight power with integrity boards and/or steering committees that are better equipped to lead racial equity transformation.

• **Transition white leadership with leadership of color who have experience applying an anti-racist lens to internal and external work.** Organizations should actively seek to diversify executive teams, especially top leadership roles such as executive director, CEO, or president. Organizations can shift the status quo of predominantly white leadership by intentionally placing people in leadership roles with lived experiences with racism and an analysis of how interpersonal, institutional and structural racism impact the organization and its mission. Often, however, new executives of color are brought in without adequate support and are expected to navigate pre-existing white leadership teams that remain after the departure of the CEO or Executive Director. Additionally, people of color are more likely to be promoted into positions of power at times when the organization is experiencing challenges that create a high risk of leadership failure.

Fund the People and CURE’s Talent Justice survey conducted in 2019 with a sample size of over 1400 respondents found that new leaders of color were more likely to experience poor support (42%), to be under pressure not to make mistakes (36%), not have strong relationships with funders (28%), were met with a “wait-and-see” approach by funders (21%), and experienced bias and discrimination in hiring and/or performance evaluations (19%).

Organizations seeking to diversify their leadership teams should thoughtfully prepare for these transitions by working to undo white supremacy cultural norms, enabling risk-taking and equitably compensating new Black and brown leaders executives commensurate with previous white leadership.

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15 Fund the People, “Talent Justice Initiative”

16 Fund the People, “Talent Justice Initiative”
Shared Language and Analysis

Equity-focused organizations analyze the impact of structural and institutional racism on organizational practices, programs, and policies and build shared understanding of how they will seek to “lead with race” in their work. They also prioritize individual and collaborative learning on equity topics and issues.

CURE recommends that staff develop a working understanding of intersectionality and the way that intersecting identities impact the experience of employees, partners and communities served. Ultimately, all staff should be able to articulate what racial equity is, why it is important to the organization and how their roles and responsibilities help to further that commitment.
The process of building shared language and analysis is conducted over trainings and dialogues, adoption of decision-making tools for policy design, program planning and budgeting, and support for individual growth, self-reflection and practice of racial equity concepts and values. Trainings to develop shared language and analysis are not offered as a panacea to address systemic issues that require intervention in the organization’s culture, practices and accountability mechanisms. They are, however, part of the efforts that must be undertaken for organizational change.

Organizations that have not yet developed, or that struggle to build shared language and analysis of the impact of institutional and structural racism share the following characteristics:

- **Previous trainings and assessment activities are limited in scope or have been ineffective.** When racial equity trainings are offered, Black and brown staff describe them as a disappointment and not fulfilling their articulated purpose. There is also a lack of follow-up by leadership to address issues raised during the training. If leadership is unwilling to incorporate a race, equity and inclusion analysis into their workplace practices, staff of color may feel that the organization has spent money on equity training only for the training to be labeled as “bad” or “ineffective” by those with power to ensure follow-up and integration of learnings.

- **Trainers do not consider the unique experiences and needs of different identities of participants, resulting in the retraumatization of Black and brown staff members.** It is common to see leadership, especially when composed of white women, cry or become upset in relation to the training. Sometimes, leadership will use work time to process the content of training. This leads to Black staff and staff of color feeling exhausted, exasperated, hesitant, and pained about the cyclical nature of the reactions to training rather than substantial steps taken toward sustained racial equity practices.

- **Organizational buy-in to racial equity work is limited.** People throughout the organization hold different interpretations of what it means to operationalize racial equity and the importance of their own work in carrying this out. These differences create inconsistent racial equity programming and operational decisions. For example, Black HR staff might be deeply focused on addressing racial equity internally while white operations directors may be providing inadequate budgets for these efforts.

- **Conversations about race and racism are not common or normalized across the organization.** Staff and partners confuse and conflate the concepts of diversity and equity. For example, there may be a sense that the organization is doing fairly well on “equity” because of significant representation of people of color among staff and the leadership team. Additionally, teams display a lack of ability to talk about marginalized identities outside of race. Discussions of class, gender identity, and sexuality are separate from conversations about race and distinct from one another.
Shared Language & Analysis Outcomes to Aim For:

- All staff regularly receive racial equity training
- Increased knowledge and skills of race, power, privilege and equity topics (e.g., institutional and structural racism, gender bias, LGBTQ inclusion, class-based inequities, ableism and issues affecting people with disabilities)
- Mechanisms are in place for onboarding staff and ongoing professional development about racial equity
- Organizational leaders and staff understand and clearly articulate the importance of racial equity to their work and continually cultivate skills and capacity to practice racial equity
- Staff make use of race equity tools for policy, program, research and budget decisions

The following are strategies to move toward these outcomes in the Shared Language and Analysis domain:

- **Conduct a racial equity assessment to fully understand the state of racial equity in the organization.** Using the guidance described in the assessment section on pg. 17, organizations should seek to conduct a complete racial equity organizational assessment. This assessment will provide the organization with a nuanced understanding of the way that staff and programs are currently experiencing and/or operationalizing racial equity. In most cases, this is best accomplished in partnership with a neutral third party, such as a racial equity consultant.

- **Agree on organizational definitions for key concepts.** Key concepts such as structural racism, racial equity, and anti-racist should be defined. By documenting specific organizational definitions and defining how these operate in practice, staff and organizational partners are provided with the opportunity to truly develop a shared analysis. In many situations, this can be done by adhering to the definitions provided by a training partner or racial equity consultant.

- **Provide racial equity training and coaching to all staff and leadership.** Training, coaching, and affinity spaces should be developed for all team members, with a goal of developing organization-wide shared language and analysis of racial equity concepts. These training opportunities should be carefully tailored to the needs of staff based on learnings that emerge from the initial organizational assessment. For example, white employees may need to spend significant time internalizing basic definitions and concepts around institutional and structural racism, while everyone, including employees of color, might need additional support to consider how anti-Blackness, colorism, and intersecting identities shape organizational culture. Board members and key partners should also be provided with trainings, although consideration should be given to power differentials before inviting these stakeholders to staff-focused trainings. Training opportunities need to be ongoing, repeated and prioritized as new employees join the organization. Staff should be provided with appropriate reductions in their day to day job responsibilities to attend and process these trainings and supported in operationalizing racial equity in their jobs.
• **Sequence the trainings for impact within the overall change process.** Organizations should be wary of offering basic trainings on racial equity to staff outside of the context of a larger change effort. CURE has noted that when trainings are offered with no organizational commitment to change, staff of color frequently report frustration that basic trainings are used as a replacement for seriously addressing issues that they have already raised. At the very least, leadership should make clear that trainings are only one element of organizational change efforts.

• **Develop ongoing mechanisms to measure and assess racial equity.** Beyond the initial assessment, organizations should develop tools and processes to regularly examine the state of racial equity within the organization and its work (e.g., programs, services, policy advocacy). In many organizations, there is a need for staff to develop metrics and tools to support racial equity analysis and evaluation activities. To fill this gap, metrics and data collection tools that provide insights into where inequities might be arising are needed. Data should always be disaggregated by race and other key demographic differences so that racial disparities in outcomes can be better tracked and addressed. These data should be freely visible to staff throughout the organization and should serve as opportunities for conversations around course corrections and new initiatives. For example, some organizations choose to conduct comprehensive racial equity assessments every two years to track how the organization has operationalized racial equity over time.
CASE STUDY
Facilitating Racial Equity Organizational Change (FREOC) Learning Collaborative

Developed and led by CURE in the spring of 2021, the Facilitating Racial Equity Organizational Change (FREOC) cohort program worked with organizations to launch or deepen existing efforts to practice racial equity internally and in their communities.

Through an interactive learning lab for racial equity teams of two to three people from four participating organizations, cohort participants were supported through a structured curriculum, collaborative learning and planning activities, coaching and guidance on strategies and practices to advance equitable outcomes for Black and brown people and communities. Specifically, organizations learned how to expand capacity to apply a racial equity lens, critically assess organizational culture, programs, services and practices, and identify strategies and actions that confront racism and support transformational change. Importantly, they also had the space and opportunity to build relationships with each other.

In the fall of 2021, six months after the conclusion of the FREOC, CURE held conversations with cohort members from two different participating organizations to evaluate the impact of the program. All four interviewees spoke about the impact of the program on their personal racial equity journey and the role that they could play as racial equity advocates. Said one, “It helped me to feel like, yes, this is difficult but it’s something that we can and should be working on in our [organization]. It gave me a little self-efficacy with these concepts that are daunting.” Participants also emerged from the cohort experience with a deeper comprehension of white supremacy culture and how these harms manifest in their organization, including persistent cultures of urgency, a focus on perfectionism for all employees, and overvaluing of academic credentials as the most legitimate expertise. Participants closely tied these characteristics to a lack of focus on the well-being of all staff members and discussed how they had become much more proactive about protecting both their own time as well as that of team members. One leader remembered a quote from a CURE team member to “Put boundaries to your time like white people do.” Another participant spoke about telling her team to intentionally extend the work deadlines that they set for themselves.

CURE’s interactive learning lab was described by participants as providing the boost they needed to start down the path of organizational change. Both organizations interviewed in the fall of 2021 reported that funding and plans were in place for more complete change processes, from assessments to training and action planning.
The first organization secured a large grant and consulting partnership to help them move through the process. The second organization utilized CURE’s document assessment tool and stakeholder interview guidance to conduct an assessment a few months following the FREOC. The findings from this assessment was shared with stakeholders at a one-day Community Engagement and Racial Equity Retreat during the fall, where attendees also participated in training on topics such as institutional and structural racism as well as action planning exercises. Participants reported on the high value of their cohort relationships throughout the program.

There was universal agreement that sharing ideas, collecting feedback and garnering a sense of common challenges alongside other justice-driven organizations was immensely valuable.
Empowered People

While advancing racial equity is everyone’s responsibility, organizational structures and processes play a critical role in creating the conditions in which all staff can practice agency, experience self-determination in their work, and be accountable for racial equity. These ideals are not possible when one is made to feel uncomfortable or out of place at work because of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability and other aspects of their identity.

Through the *Empowered People* domain, CURE focuses on experiences of racism and discrimination including microaggressions and other forms of marginalization that occur at work. In addition to exploring what organizational supports (e.g., trusted human resources and grievance policies) are available for employees that experience racism and other marginalizing incidents, this domain explores how cultural humility, team work, collaboration and shared accountability for racial equity is fostered and distributed.
Power is central to how racial equity takes root in meaningful ways, we help staff consider their power to advance racial equity within their organizational context, in addition to whether teamwork and collaboration is encouraged, if a culture of learning and growth is present, and whether staff have the individual skills to practice inclusive leadership. CURE defines inclusive leadership as that which prioritizes power sharing, deep listening, authentic engagement and participation, and cultural humility.

Cultural humility is an important reflection of steps that staff have taken individually to build their personal racial equity practice. Originally developed by Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia, the three dimensions of cultural humility include lifelong learning and critical self reflection, recognizing and challenging power, and institutional accountability. According to Tervalon, cultural humility is not just a concept, but a “communal reflection to analyze the root causes of suffering and create a broader, more inclusive view of the world.”

Taken together, the components encompassed under the Empowered People domain equip and create the conditions for staff to empower and see themselves as full and active contributors in the organization and racial equity change process.

In organizations where staff with marginalized identities (e.g., Black staff, staff of color, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities) experience marginalization; where inclusive leadership is not consistently practiced; and employees feel disempowered, CURE commonly sees the following practices:

- **Black and brown staff report ongoing experiences with both microaggressions and sometimes outright racist behavior.** These repetitive traumatic experiences leave staff of color feeling exhausted, disempowered and distrustful of the organization and its leadership. Racial trauma has lasting impacts and chips away at health. It also taxes psychological resources and leads to hypervigilance about potentially negative experiences as a way to protect oneself from further harm. Because of this, turnover and disengagement is often higher among people of color.

- **Staff are not provided with trusted mechanisms for raising and addressing grievances.** Pathways for reporting are not made clear, are blocked or hostile to employees seeking support. For example, some staff may have limited options for sharing feedback due to their rank outside of leadership. Others have reported feeling unsafe and have received threats of retaliation from personnel in charge of reporting mechanisms. Oftentimes, staff develop alternative strategies for sharing grievances with organizational leaders and managers - like waiting until their mood is pleasant - or avoiding institutional pathways altogether.

- **Decision-making lacks transparency and accountability.** Staff outside of leadership have limited opportunities to provide input or feedback on operational, policy, or programmatic changes. Clients and communities of color are not included in programmatic decisions on how they will be served.

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Empowered People Outcomes to Aim For:

- Staff at all levels are empowered to challenge racial inequity
- Groundwork is established to shift power and for equitable community partnerships, programs and services that foster racial equity
- Staff trust they have power and ownership in decision-making and accountability for racial equity
- Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities co-design programs, services, systems and policy solutions that dismantle institutional and structural racism
- Measurable changes in social, political, health and/or economic outcomes occur among communities served

The following are strategies to move toward these outcomes in the Empowered People domain:

- Empower all staff to lead in the work of building an anti-racist organization. Using the features of inclusive leadership described above, all staff should be proactively encouraged by leadership to participate in the organizational racial equity journey and programmatic work of the organization. White staff should be expected to be proactive in focusing attention on racial equity across their work and in the workplace (for example, holding white colleagues accountable for racist actions). It may be helpful to set racial equity goals for each employee as a part of existing evaluation processes. At one organization that CURE worked with, racial equity accounted for 20% of an employee’s evaluation at the vice president level — equal in weight and importance to how the VP helped the organization to achieve financial stability. Staff are expected to take part in racial equity transformation by:

  “leading from your seat to participate in creating a caring culture that addresses racial inequities in particular, including being conscious of and countering circumstances that are doing harm to colleagues of color; building internal and external relationships with colleagues, partners, vendors and government that advance racial equity in programs, policy and/or procurement; participating in creating and implementing the racial equity action plan; in addition, for program and policy staff, supporting efforts to create a grounded solutions practice for new program development and committing to raise concerns if existing programs or policies have negative unintended consequences or impacts on the communities we are serving; in addition, for managers, recruiting a racially diverse team and supporting the development of racially diverse staff.”

• **Equip all managers to speak and to lead on racial equity.** All managers across the organization should be provided with training, coaching and resources to operationalize racial equity and practice inclusive leadership. Managers should be comfortable with power sharing and ongoing honest and direct bi-directional feedback. Particular attention should be paid to managers who supervise diverse teams and managers who have been identified as directly contributing to a racist culture. For example, questioning the professionalism and credentials of Black staff or creating power structures that exclude people of color from decision-making opportunities. In some cases, if a manager is unable to embody the new leadership culture of the organization, then the manager should be removed from the leadership role or the organization entirely.

• **Offer affinity groups, coaching and mentorship to people of color to provide spaces for processing racist incidents.** Affinity groups and similar spaces can be valuable sources for self-care and organizing for Black and brown staff. Affinity spaces can be helpful for processing organization-wide racial equity conversations and change efforts and offer support to staff of color who experience trauma at work. As described on page 38, the work of racial equity has often been led by Black and brown staff throughout the organization long before any official organization-wide racial equity change efforts kick off. This work should be acknowledged and staff should be given the opportunity to reflect on and heal from any prior harm caused by those experiences.

• **Encourage and support white ally caucus groups.** Causing among white staff and ally groups provide space for white people to authentically challenge white privilege and white dominant cultural practices and hold each other accountable for change. White ally groups can be powerful spaces for personal and collective learning, allowing white people to examine how they have colluded with racist systems and practices. Moreover, white ally groups can be important spaces for organizing and planning actions in solidarity with Black and brown people.
HONORING THE LABOR of Black and Brown Workers

Organizations that seek to invest in racial equity transformation frequently initiate these processes because of the labor of Black and brown staff who have spent years calling attention to and creatively maneuvering around organizational apathy and lack of resources to address racial inequities. These staff members have experienced microaggressions, resistance, and even significant trauma in the process and have done so without the full power, support, or resources to drive organizational change.

Black women, in particular, report exhaustion and physical and mental health issues resulting from years of this type of struggle. The 2019 Race to Lead survey by Building Movement Project details this exhaustion related to race, equity and inclusion efforts:

“Hundreds of write-in responses and focus group observations indicate an exhaustion experienced by people of color in the nonprofit sector. People of color shared reflections about the constant demands of both job responsibilities and navigating issues related to race, and particularly the intersection of race and gender. Whether their frustrations related to being among the only people of color in a predominantly white organization, or considering whether to challenge racially fraught incidents given the potential for retaliation, or simply being overlooked and unheard, these reflections exemplify the disparity of nonprofit sector experiences among people of color compared to white peers.”

During racial equity change processes, Black and brown people may struggle or express hesitancy to engage in conversations, especially with white leadership who are only now noticing problems that staff of color have tried to highlight for years. REOC can trigger old traumas or create new ones when conversations are not sensitively facilitated. Even with thoughtful trauma-informed guidance, staff of color will feel the brunt of the labor in the work of uncovering and intentionally examining racism within organizations.

“"I take care of myself so that I can take care of others and that is also always at the root of my self care and sustainability.”

— Mia Mingus

Any organization seeking to embark in large scale organizational change should recognize, compensate, and promote the employees who have carried it to that point for their efforts. As the REOC begins, CURE recommends carefully building affinity groups, delineating spaces for self-care, dedicating coaching support, and allocating additional time off for Black and brown staff.

Equitable Policies and Practices

Policies and practices shape culture and are important indicators of how deeply racial equity is embedded across an organization. The Equitable Policies and Practices domain challenges organizations to comprehensively examine its operations to eliminate systemic biases and to foster the conditions for racial equity through the creation of new systems, policies, and practices that can sustain focus and movement toward racial equity.

This domain seeks to institutionalize racial equity across operations and interactions with all stakeholders including employees, community members, grantees and partners specifically through the following five key areas: (1) Human resources, hiring, retention and advancement (2) Communications and decision-making, (2) Community engagement and partnerships, (4) Programs and services and (5) Contracting and grantmaking.
If organizations have not embedded racial equity across their policies and practices, they frequently display these attributes:

- **Hiring policies and job descriptions contain requirements or expectations that limit the diversity of applicant pools.** Educational requirements and networks used to post jobs exclude workers who would bring valuable lived experience to the role and to the communities served.

- **Significant pay disparities exist.** These disparities often show up between the highest-paid and lowest-paid staff members, with white leadership often receiving double, triple or even more multiples of the pay of Black and brown staff in non-leadership roles.

- **Salaries and promotional pathways are not transparent, which limit the ability of newer or lower-ranked staff to self-advocate or plan for advancement.** With unclear promotional pathways, racial inequities in promotions are more likely to occur because opportunities for advancement become dependent on whom those in leadership and management (who are often white) choose to mentor, sponsor or advocate on behalf of for promotion.

- **Communications and decision-making structures prevent non-leadership level staff from providing input and feedback.** As a result, critical and important perspectives to support racial equity, for example in planning new policies, practices, programs and services, are missed and not considered. Additionally, external communications (e.g., fundraising messages) may rely on stereotypes about communities served. Communications strategies may also fail to meaningfully connect with community members in the places, languages and styles that would be most impactful.

- **Programs and services and community engagement practices are not race explicit and inadequately engage program beneficiaries in program planning.** Evaluations do not consider the extent to which programs are addressing inequities. They also fail to uplift the voices, experiences and priorities of people of color.

- **Contracting and grantmaking practices do not prioritize funding to businesses owned by or organizations led by Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and Asian American and Pacific Islander people.** Without an explicit strategy to move resources to business and organizations owned and led by people of color, institutions and organizations are not measuring up and overlooking significant opportunities to promote economic justice and materially improve conditions for people and communities impacted by structural racism.
The following are strategies to move toward achieving these outcomes. Because the policies and practices within an organization typically span many departments and work areas, CURE has divided the recommendations for this domain into key subdomains, which are (1) Human Resources, Hiring, Retention, and Advancement, (2) Communications and Decision-Making, (3) Community Engagement and Partnerships, (4) Programs and Services and (5) Contracting and Grantmaking.

Human Resources, Hiring, Retention, and Advancement

- **Review and revise employee handbooks and employment policies with a racial equity lens.** Proactively ensure that written employee policies offer equitable benefits to all staff including access to paid time off, family leave (instead of maternity leave) as well as culturally responsive holiday policies. Gendered language can also be removed from the employee handbook and employee forms. For example, using “they” rather than “s/he”.

- **Establish and document a procedure for addressing grievances.** Organizations should develop grievance policies that prioritize the safety of those reporting racist behavior rather than protecting the organization, which is the norm in many human resources departments. The grievance process should include an expectation that management will act on submitted feedback and will provide avenues to escalate the issue if there are questions about the outcome. Independent bodies, appointed board contacts or other external structures can be used to hold the organization accountable to action. Organizations should also identify trends in grievances while protecting the initiators, report these trends out to the full-staff at regular intervals, and take actions that will reduce these trends in the future. For example, if a high number of microaggressions are reported across the institution, then the organization could invest in staff-wide microaggressions training.

Organizations should develop grievance policies that prioritize the safety of those reporting racist behavior rather than protecting the organization.
• **Conduct focused training and assessment for human resources staff and policies.** Because of the unique position that human resources teams play in workplace culture, investing in a review of human resources policies can help ensure that all hiring, retention and advancement decisions are made with a racial equity lens. Hiring managers should receive trainings on implicit bias and equitable hiring practices that specifically considers all levels of racism (individual, institutional, structural).

In addition to individual staff learning and growth within the HR department, human resources staff should develop the skills and experience to lead both institutional policy and practice change. Moreover, structural change analysis to examine how to build capacity so that members of served communities can join the organization will equip HR staff with the skills to consider and address structural barriers to building and retaining a diverse workforce. Such structural barriers include the racial distribution of student loan debt burden by race and the racial disparities of tuition reimbursement opportunities across position levels. Black and brown staff are often predominantly represented in entry-level/front-line positions so understanding racial distribution of student loan debt and tuition reimbursement opportunities could inform strategies to eliminate these inequities and better retain staff of color. This competency can also help organizations equitably weather economic crises by equipping HR staff to collaboratively consider potential racial inequities around layoffs and explore staffing alternatives when making layoff decisions.

• **Develop racially equitable hiring criteria.** Beyond simply seeking to hire a diverse staff, organizations should create hiring protocols that consider historic inequities. This may include practices such as valuing lived experience over educational attainment, ensuring that jobs are publicly posted to allow for diverse applicants rather than hiring through existing networks, and proactively recruiting directly from the communities where an organization provides services. It can be helpful to codify a list of equity competencies for inclusion in job descriptions, interview guides and standards and reviews.
• **Create compensation packages that consider racial equity.** At a minimum, every organization should pay a “thriving wage” to all employees. A thriving wage is defined as a wage that allows employees to live comfortably without the stress of affording their day-to-day needs including shelter and utilities. Furthermore, racial and gender based pay inequities should be eliminated through undergoing a compensation audit disaggregated by position, race, and gender.

Salary ranges should also be accessible for all positions, including in all job postings. Where inequities exist, organizations should seek to increase compensation for underpaid employees.

For organizations seeking ways to substantially restructure their compensation practices, consideration can be given to how historical pay inequities and racial gaps impact their employees and develop compensation strategies responsive to those realities rather than traditional hierarchical pay structures.\(^{20}\)

• **Prioritize the creation of a race equity culture that supports employee retention.** Organizations should be mindful of the myriad ways that organizational cultures can reduce employee retention, especially for people of color, in order to undo these dynamics. For example, a culture of urgency may be leading to burnout. An exit interview, if conducted with appropriate cultural humility, may surface reasons why employees of color are leaving the organization. Staff should be consulted on what steps would most tangibly help to address existing issues.

Organizations should also seek to be adaptable to the needs of employees while also giving consideration of the ways that positionality can impact flexibility. For example, while managerial office work can be accomplished from home on a flexible schedule, custodial work does not allow for the same. Furthermore, home working environments might vary among employees. Some people enjoy large offices and babysitters while others may need to work in spaces with inadequate desks, technology, and intergenerational dependents requiring care. Organizations should be transparent about these inequities and seek input from staff who are provided with fewer benefits to learn what resources or adjustments would best support their needs, happiness, satisfaction and retention.

• **Institutionalize meaningful advancement opportunities for employees of color.** Organizations should take steps to ensure that staff of color are supported and encouraged to apply for leadership positions within the organization. Professional development resources could be used to provide underrepresented staff from intern and line staff through the executive level with training, mentorship, sponsorship and/or sabbatical opportunities to support their career growth and advancement. Leadership development programs and plans should be well-structured to follow up with and track participants’ progress. Clear pathways to advancement should also be designed for staff. If these cannot be accommodated within the organization due to size or budgetary constraints, organizations can support Black and brown employees to advance within the organization’s larger industry. Some organizations may go further and explore management term limits to provide opportunities for more people to serve in leadership roles.

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Communications and Decision-Making

- **Develop decision-making structures that allow for inclusive participation, input, feedback and power.** Most organizations that CURE works with start from a norm of hierarchical decision-making. Oftentimes, people in power at the top pass final pronouncements to the staff below them. Organizations can move toward inclusive decision-making by creating as many opportunities as possible for stakeholders including employees at all levels to voice their thoughts and participate in decision-making. At a minimum, this can be done by ensuring that stakeholders are aware that a major decision is being made and be given a platform to share feedback and/or challenge leadership before a decision is finalized. Another approach is to allow any staff member to attend and actively participate in any meeting on any topic organization-wide. Some organizations can generate an inclusive decision-making culture by rotating participation in boards, committees and teams. Accountability structures are also needed to ensure that leadership is responsive to input from those with less institutional power.

- **Ensure that internal organizational communications are clear, transparent and honest.** When decisions are made and when there is news to share, organizations should create mechanisms to carry this information across teams and internal structures. Staff should be encouraged by leadership to share information to push against a culture of power hoarding. Standard communication should consist of two-way feedback in which employees express their input in decisions and leadership meaningfully responds. Other tools for increasing transparency and strengthening communication include standardizing the publication of meeting notes, creating regular interactions across teams, providing staff with open access to leadership during office hours, and hosting open feedback forums at regular intervals.
• **Apply a racial equity filter when developing external communications.** In addition to practicing transparent and equitable communications internally, organizations should ensure that all external communications do not reproduce dominant narratives and/or stereotypes of communities of color. They are also actively countered through routinely and explicitly addressing racial dynamics in communications.21 Racial Equity Working Group (REWG) members can serve as reviewers of external communications to ensure that no harm is being perpetuated by the content. Also, organizations can consider and employ communication styles and modes (i.e., language, internet access, socio-economic background) that are culturally relevant to the communities that they serve based on feedback from community members.

**Community Engagement and Partnerships**

• **Build mutually beneficial and collaborative relationships with local grassroots groups working on similar issues and the communities being served.** Mission-focused organizations frequently use a white savior model when providing services to Black and brown communities. Racially equitable and justice-driven organizations should seek meaningful partnerships that uplift the assets of, and sit in solidarity with, these communities. These relationships are not transactional, but fill needs and priorities as they are expressly outlined by communities.

Harness Community Advisory Councils (CACs) to thoughtfully integrate community voice. CACs are meaningful mechanisms for hearing and implementing community voice into institutional work. However, organizations must take care not to tokenize CAC members by authentically engaging and integrating their wisdom, knowledge and experience. Effective CACs are empowered to substantively contribute to institutional and programmatic decisions. CACs also serve as a pipeline program for community members to fill seats on boards of directors.

Ensure the appropriate compensation of grassroots partners, council members, and contributing community members. Beyond respect and collaboration, white-led organizations should consider how resources, specifically money, are being distributed to smaller Black and POC-led community organizations that traditionally receive less funding. Community members and organizational partners should always be compensated for their work with well-resourced institutions. For institutions with less available financial and other resources, staff should be thoughtful about how they can best compensate partners for both tangible and intangible contributions to the execution of the institution’s mission. Compensation can include pro-bono work, political capital, and proprietary data that smaller groups would not be able to collect otherwise. Capacity building trainings could also be offered when explicitly requested by community partners. Organizations should avoid a paternalistic decision, such as deciding that a grassroots organization needs media training because their social media usage is less formal than the larger institution.

Programs and Services

Offer support for program staff to develop and manage mission-focused programs with a racial equity lens. Organizations should invest in trainings focused on designing racially equitable programs. These trainings should cover content around equitable program design, implementation and evaluation. These gatherings can also provide opportunities for program staff to express how each member envisions racial equity as expressed by the mission and can help inform the focus of programmatic efforts. Helpful questions to guide this process are, “How does our work fit into a broader segregated society? What can our programs do to build racial equity in the system?”

Use community co-design and liberation models to inform and direct program design to honor the agency, power and self-determination of communities. Organizations should prioritize program design approaches that value and center the voices of target communities, especially in cases where the work is focused on Black and brown neighborhoods and other communities that experience structural discrimination. The communities should be engaged from the earliest steps of the planning process. Innovative models, such as long-term paid fellowships for community members with lived experience, can be used to embed more deeply in target communities. The Community Engagement Continuum illustrates the potential means of developing shared leadership with impacted communities and how the relationships and processes can deepen over time.²²

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As Monique Minkens, formerly of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Services in Madison, Wisconsin, describes this relationship:

"We look at partnership when working with clients, as opposed to helping. In a partnership, advocate and client are on a level plane, each bringing their expertise and strengths as the advocate follows the lead of the client to connect the client to resources that will support the client in attaining liberation. If we do want to use the term help, we want to make certain we are helpful helpers who recognize and support the individual strengths of the clients. Our clients are adults and experts of their own lives who happen to be in need of resources that will allow them to liberate themselves."\(^{23}\)
• Develop program evaluation models that test for progress on racial equity and uplift the voices of people of color. Organizations should build formal and informal models to evaluate the extent to which programs and services are decreasing historical inequities and building power within communities. These evaluation models should consider community members as study partners thereby developing data collection models that are responsive to their communicated needs and priorities. Examples of data collection models include multilingual door-to-door canvassing to collect survey data and stories through photo banks, social media campaigns and community meetings. Program staff should seek to design responsive, honest learning relationships with the clients whom they serve and should be open to feedback and new ideas from these clients. Organizations should also take care to avoid assuming that the experiences of participants with differing identities are comparable or identical. This requires a willingness to adapt frameworks and program plans even if they run counter to previous work or already-established expertise. For example, the Equitable Evaluation Framework recommends that nonprofits, philanthropy and evaluation consultants consider how the change initiative has been shaped by structural inequities and challenge dominant frames (i.e., whiteness) that determine what and whom are valued and what is considered truth.

**Contracting and Grantmaking**

• Ensure that grantmaking and contracting processes allow for equitable access to funding opportunities. Organizations should codify racial equity in procurement and grantmaking policy statements by setting specific monetary goals outlining how much funding (e.g., percentage goals) will be directed to Black-and brown-owned/operated vendors. Organizations seeking to truly transform their procurement and grantmaking processes could seek to shift toward 100% of funding to organizations led by people of color. Additionally, organizations may consider setting geography-based objectives to invest in historically under-resourced communities, proactively marketing to reach underrepresented groups, announcing funding opportunities in multiple languages, and developing formal equity-based vetting processes and decision-making questions for potential vendors and partners.

• Develop a POC-only vendor list. Proactively research and develop an ongoing list of vendors of color that is available to all staff who hold a role in procurement. The list should not just include vendors deemed “respectable” based on values driven by white supremacy, including perfectionism and paternalism. This list can be far-reaching, ranging from office services and large scale business systems, to local Black- and brown-owned restaurants for catering events.

• Ensure that Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and other funding opportunities are developed with equity in mind and with input from the communities they are intended to impact. The structure and requirements of traditional RFPs inherently advantage traditionally white-owned businesses that are more likely to have the resources and social capital that enable them to leverage relationships and insights about RFP processes to their advantage.

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These resources include staff dedicated to preparing RFPs, longevity, and size. Organizations should consider where RFPs are posted and shared and the listed requirements and assumptions embedded in the decision-making process. They should also seek to combat any sense of urgency or scarcity that leads to making inequitable decisions. One meaningful mechanism for this is to include impacted communities directly in the design of the RFP and selection of vendors. These processes should also be used when hiring equity, diversity and inclusion consultants for organizational change work. The organization Equity In the Center provides a detailed tool to employ when hiring equity consultants.  

- **Make racial equity a core requirement of all grants.** Grant-making organizations should ensure that all RFPs have a racial equity component and/or advance racial equity as a core purpose of the funding. When evaluating grant proposals, the diversity of funding recipients throughout the organization’s history as well as how the grantee proactively works to address racial equity should be considered.

- **Consider the source of funds flowing into the organization.** Organizations should consider the sources of their funding and the extent to which these funding sources perpetuate historical inequities. For example, some organizations may decide to not accept funding or engage in partnerships with large banks that have a history of redlining or a current practice of exploiting Black or brown communities for profit. Similarly, organizations may choose to reject grants from corporations whose practices exacerbate wealth inequality or endanger workers.

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CASE STUDY
Community Health Clinic

In 2021, CURE began a ten-month Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) engagement with a community-based health care organization with a staff of over 200 people in a large metropolitan city in the mid-Atlantic. Leaders noted that they felt as if they were living in twin pandemics, the COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for racial justice. These two challenges have caused multiple, intersecting issues to rise to the surface that were previously cloaked under broad, non-race explicit discussions of equity and inclusion.

CURE’s initial assessment identified several areas in need of improvement, including training, recruitment and pay equity. Staff lacked trust in the agency. A need for regular racial bias, harassment and discrimination training was also noted. Staff desired more deliberate and targeted hiring practices to recruit Black and brown staff, but noted that pay, retention and advancement opportunities did not feel adequate, fair and transparent.

Nearly a year since the REOC process began, a greater sense of alignment among staff has emerged alongside a stronger commitment to embedding racial equity across organizational planning processes. In reflecting on the REOC process, REWG members noted the importance and cascading effects developing a shared vocabulary and understanding around racial equity issues has had across the organization.

There are several concrete ways that CURE’s REOC process has impacted the organization’s practices:

RECRUITMENT
Staff were intentional in framing the job description for a new chief medical officer to address racial equity and to be transparent about the required experience and skills as well as salary and benefits.

EVENT PLANNING
The organization plays several short films during its annual fundraiser. Representations of people of color were often missing because the departments coordinating this portion of the event lack people of color. Employees want to be more intentional when looking at film selection, content and messaging to be more representative of the communities served.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS
Developing a racial equity action plan led to a discussion among organizational leaders to address the inequity in lower-paid staff having to pay the same health insurance premiums as higher, paid team members. People of color are concentrated in these lower-paid positions, thus creating an economic and racial inequity in health care premiums offered at the organization. As a result, the organization’s health insurer has presented three different models for health care premiums that take these inequities into account.
ACCOUNTABILITY
Clients, many of whom are people of color, disengaged from the medication-assistance program. Staff made the decision to be transparent and take accountability for missteps as they prepared the January 2022 newsletter. This included language acknowledging that the organization portrayed itself as a “savior” despite the program’s low-track record of success.

Organizational leaders expressed gratitude for emerging from the REOC process with a tangible action plan. They are now poised to critically question the decision-making process, including the identities of decision-makers and the racial equity implications of their decisions. There is a sense of urgency to do this work, but this urgency is tempered with a need to be methodical to move the organization’s racial equity journey forward.

Future racial equity work within the organization still needs to be further conceptualized and structured for sustainability. Leadership is also concerned about fatigue being experienced by white and Black employees and employees of color. REWG members are considering how to avoid burnout by ensuring that racial equity work is ingrained in the organization’s culture at the cellular level and part of performance evaluations and strategic planning.

Leadership relayed several ways to improve the organizational change process, including increased board engagement and coordinated efforts among the REWG to improve accessibility of language and response rates for the racial equity staff survey. Lastly, following the REOC process, the organization is increasing opportunities to ensure racial equity training for all staff beyond those in supervisory roles.
“We are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s business; we are each other’s magnitude and bond.”

– Gwendolyn Brooks

We are at the crossroads of transformation where momentum for racial equity can yield more just and equitable outcomes for organizations, communities of color and our nation as a whole. As the third largest employment sector in the U.S., nonprofit organizations are crucial agents of social change. Nonprofits are uniquely positioned to model racial equity in their organizational cultures, practices, programs, services and policy advocacy while working to make racial equity and justice real in communities across the country.

Guided by CURE’s Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) framework detailed in this guide, changemakers can build justice-driven organizations through inclusive organizational cultures and sustained commitments to racial equity, shared language and analysis on equity concepts, empowered people, and equitable policies and practices. Additionally, the racial equity journey should be anchored by: (1) transformative practices that challenge the status quo, (2) systemic analysis to address the root causes of inequitable experiences and outcomes by race and other systems of oppression, (3) a culture of ongoing individual and organizational learning, and (4) sustained commitment.

CURE hopes this guide will serve as a meaningful tool to change leaders as they take their next steps. Once this important change is underway, transparent communications about the trajectory of the work, celebrating small wins, and ensuring accountability measures are in place—will be important for sustaining momentum.

Dismantling racism is challenging and long-term work that will be furthered by disrupting norms, accountability and a willingness to be open and share lessons learned along the way. As more changemakers contribute emerging tools and strategies for building racial equity and justice within organizations — our workplaces, communities, and society will move closer to fully leveraging the beauty, value, power and strength that our differences offer.
**APPENDIX 1.**

**Glossary of Terms**

**Anti-Blackness/anti-Black racism** is a pivotal structure around which all racism functions. Conceptually, it describes racism specifically targeting Black people and communities. All systemic racism is related to, and reflects, anti-Black racism, as contemporary systemic racism was founded on an ideology used to justify the trans-Atlantic slave trade and subsequent race-based chattel slavery and other forms of racial oppression, which targeted Black Africans and the African diaspora.

**Black and brown** is used in this report to refer to people who experience the negative impacts of structural racism including Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and Asian American and Pacific Islander people. The term “brown” encompasses people including South Asian, Latino/a/x and biracial people who identify as “brown” and not with the limited racial categories that are often offered to them. As a Black-led organization, CURE centers and amplifies the experiences of Black people and recognizes the shared struggles of oppressed people for equity, justice and liberation.

**Colorism** is directly related to anti-Blackness, in which light-skinned people are socially, legally, politically, and economically privileged at the expense of darker-skinned people. Colorism is present among people and communities from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

**Implicit bias** describes bias that is internalized and not recognized consciously.

**Microaggressions** are verbal and physical expressions of implicit bias.

**Racial equity** is a proactive process of creating and enforcing practices, policies, values, and actions that produce fair and equitable access, opportunities, treatment and outcomes for all regardless of race. Racial equity requires a commitment to naming and confronting racism, shifting power, equitable distribution of resources to address historical and contemporary causes of inequities, accountability and targeted, intersectional approaches designed to materially improve the lives of Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and Asian American and Pacific Islander people. We practice racial equity to achieve racial justice.

**Race** is a social construction that relies on ideas (often related to geography, nation, ethnicity, culture, and phenotype) to classify people into racial groups (e.g. Asian, Black, Indigenous, white) that may change depending on historical context and location. While race can be a unifying force for culture and community, ideas about race have been and are continuously used to determine which groups have access to power and resources.

**Racism** is a system of oppression that was developed based on the ideology that racial groups are discrete and have innate differences in their abilities. Racism as we know it today is primarily grounded in white supremacist ideology (see white supremacy).

**White supremacy** describes an ideology in which the ideas, lives, values, desires and actions of white people are deemed as more valuable, better, normal and good [than non-white people]. In the United States, as well as other nations developed through Western European empires, white supremacy enabled (and enables) white people and communities to wield the vast majority of power over political, legal, economic and social systems across the globe.
APPENDIX 2.
CURE’s Guiding Principles for Racial Equity

The following principles guide our approach to racial equity:

- **Movement Solidarity**: Racial equity work must be connected and guided by racial justice movements including movements for Black Lives.

- **Naming and Confronting Racism**: Deliberate and focused attention on the various manifestations of racism—interpersonal, cultural, institutional and structural—is required to transform the policies, systems and practices that produce unfair and unjust outcomes for Black and brown people.

- **Systemic Analysis**: Racial equity change begins by seeking to understand the ways in which history, the distribution of power and resources, and policies, systems and practices work together to create and reinforce racial inequities and injustices. Racial equity work fundamentally seeks to shift power and resources and transform systems and practices to materially change conditions for people and communities negatively impacted by structural racism.

- **Shift Power**: At its core, the practice of racial equity is the practice of prioritizing the leadership of – and solutions from – the people and communities most closely impacted by the issues and injustices we seek to change.

- **Intersectionality**: Analysis and action shaped by the ways that gender, class, sexuality, and other forms of oppression intersect with race contribute to a fuller understanding of racial inequities and targeted strategies to address these inequities.

- **Sustained Commitment**: A commitment to long-term, sustained investment in resources, including time, money and people by governments, institutions and organizations to make racial equity real at the individual, organizational, community and societal levels.

We view racial equity as not only a value and desired outcome, but a process of intentional action to:

1. **Target** the distribution of resources and access to opportunity to people and groups that experience structural and institutional discrimination and oppression

2. **Eliminate** harmful and unjust policies, practices and systemic barriers that have and continue to produce historical and contemporary inequities based on race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, geography and other forms of difference

3. **Create** new systems, policies, and practices that institutionalize racial equity and support sustainable, transformational change
By recognizing that racial equity change is a necessary step for your organization, you have already taken the first step to transforming your organization’s workplace culture, policies and practices, and programs and services. The following are specific points for white leadership before they embark on this journey:

1. **Racial inequities exist in everything.** The process of racial equity transformation is about transforming all aspects of an organization. These include workplace culture, policies, decision-making, and more. Nothing is off limits. If it comes up in a conversation about racial equity, including discussion on the intersections of racial equity with gender, sexual orientation, class, and more, there’s likely a reason. CURE will guide you through these conversations and the thought process.

2. **There are no checklists and consultants are not fixers.** You might be hiring the CURE team because there have been complaints about racial inequity, or because you simply do not know how to start the journey to Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC). It is important to remember that racism operates on several interdependent levels throughout the structures of society. CURE cannot and will not attempt to fix racism.

3. **What CURE will accomplish is building capacity of the organization to:**
   - Strengthen organizational commitment and culture in relationship to racial equity.
   - Build shared racial equity language and analysis.
   - Initiate an investment in empowered people in both the communities the organization serves and employees of color.
   - Develop racially equitable policies and practices within the organization.

4. **If we at CURE do our jobs right, people will regularly feel uncomfortable.** Structural racism is a system that privileges and empowers white people at the expense of many different communities of color. This is not a comfortable subject to talk about, listen to, hear, or witness. However, we cannot move the work forward without discussing these uncomfortable realities and committing to changing them. We all contain the capacity for a myriad of responses to difficult conversations, and this work often moves people along several points on the emotional spectrum. People may be harsher at times, because they may be more vulnerable. They may also be sad, discontent, furious, tired and despondent. At the same time, people may also be joyful, hopeful, excited, patient, gracious, kind and enlivened. As the racial equity foundations are built, CURE will work to motivate staff toward a mindset of growth and committed engagement in order to propel the work forward.
5. **The organization must be at a place where it can commit to change.** True racial equity transformation is deep, is responsive to immediate needs, and is intentionally pointed toward a very different world than the one that currently exists. Commitment to a long-term plan is required and this plan may fundamentally change discussions about work, how the work is accomplished, the treatment of staff, and how the organization functions in the community.

6. **Defensiveness is natural and the work is personal.** Make space for feelings, but do not weaponize them. Staff will raise valid concerns about the organization, their managers, and decision-making. In most organizations we work with, leadership carries a vast amount of power, including hiring/firing, salary determination and ultimate decision-making. It is critical to recognize this power. A key part of racial equity work is deconstructing how power usually works in order to create structures that prioritize power-sharing, especially for staff of color and communities of color served by the organization. Do not voice your defensiveness immediately, but listen first. There are a number of alternate pathways for this personal work: reflection practices, executive coaching and developing skills in receiving feedback.

Thank you for your time.
The CURE team looks forward to dreaming, challenging and developing with you.
Racial Equity Performance Indicators

As part of our ongoing work to assess Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) and through a partnership with Charity Navigator to develop diversity, equity and inclusion metrics to rate the extent to which nonprofits listen to staff and constituents and use their feedback to foster equitable workplace cultures and transformative programs and services, CURE has cataloged over 90 performance indicators on race, equity and inclusion from a variety of trusted sources including our own REOC assessment and action planning data as well as Equity in the Center, Race Forward, As You Sow and other organizations.

A sampling of these indicators are offered here for organizational leadership considering how to institute accountability measures for racial equity.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & COMMITMENT

Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan

- Strategic plan features specific goals and objectives around race, anti-racism, equity and inclusion.

Racial Equity Culture

- Racial composition of leadership and staff reflect communities served.
- Staff across identities including race and gender feel that they are an integral part of the organization.
- Conversations about race, racism and racial equity are common and normalized.
- Race, equity and inclusion assessments are conducted at regular intervals.
- Racial equity is a performance measure evaluated as part of employee annual reviews.

Leadership

- The leadership team reflects communities served by the organization and has the necessary lived experience to lead racial equity work.
- The board members reflect communities served by the organization and have the necessary lived experience to lead racial equity work.

Shared Language & Analysis

- Trainings and discussions about what racial equity means to the organization’s mission and work routinely occur across the entire organization.
- Staff make use of racial equity tools for policy, program, research and/or budget decisions.
Empowered People

- Experiences of racism, discrimination and marginalization are tracked by race, gender identity, age, religion, sexual orientation, transgender status, immigration status, economic background and disability status.

- A transparent and trusted process exists to confidentially report grievances and instances of unfair treatment, racism and/or discrimination.

- Staff feel empowered to promote racial equity.

- The work environment encourages equitable teamwork and collaboration.

- Affinity groups are encouraged and financially supported by the organization.

EQUITABLE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Hiring, Retention, Advancement

- Outreach for hiring new employees is broad and includes a variety of strategies to recruit staff members from communities served.

- Salary ranges for all positions are available and accessible to job applicants and staff.

- Performance reviews are based on holistic criteria that minimize personal biases and prejudices.

- Staff of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds are equitably promoted.

Communications & Decision-Making

- When decisions are made that directly affect the work of staff members, all staff are included in the decision-making process and/or review of a proposed decision prior to it being finalized.

- Dominant narratives and/or stereotypes experienced by communities served by the organization are directly interrupted rather than reproduced through communications.

Governance & Operations

- Personnel policies and procedures promote fair treatment and meet the needs of employees across identities (e.g., care for dependents, religious observances, non-traditional families.)

- Physical spaces including facilities, meetings and event spaces comply with ADA standards and are welcoming to historically marginalized groups including people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities.

Programs & Services

- Program data are routinely disaggregated and analyzed data by race, income, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, disability status and other demographic characteristics.

- Feedback on programs and services from communities served are routinely collected and used to improve service delivery.

- There is a long-term commitment to advocate for policy change to eliminate inequities experienced among populations served by the organization.
Community Engagement & Partnerships

- Community partnerships support racial equity by providing compensation (monetary and/or non-monetary) to community members, explicitly consider power dynamics between the organization and communities, and respect and honor the wisdom and self-determination of people of communities impacted by structural racism.

- Partnerships are rooted in long-term, mutually reciprocal and supportive relationships rather than transactional, events-based partnerships.

Contracting & Grantmaking

- Percentage of contracts and/or dollars spent with businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian American and Pacific Islander people are routinely assessed with efforts to improve in this area.

- Percentage of grants or dollars spent with organizations led by Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian American and Pacific Islander people are routinely assessed with efforts to improve in this area.

- Trust-based philanthropic practices that allow grantees space and freedom to determine how best to leverage grant funds to meet organizational needs and priorities are the norm.
APPENDIX 5.

Additional Reading and Resources

Organizational Culture & Commitment, Shared Language & Analysis, Empowered People

- In Focus: Reducing Racial Disparities in Health Care by Confronting Racism, Commonwealth Fund, 2018
- The Diversity and Inclusion Industry has Lost Its Way, Kim Tran, Harper’s Bazaar, 2021
- Towards Braiding, Jimmy, E and V. Andreotti, Musagetes Foundation, 2019
- 21 Signs You or Your Organization May Be the White Moderate Dr. King Warned About, Vu Le, NonprofitAF, 2021
- We Can’t Work Toward Racial Justice and Equity Without Working on Relationships, CompassPoint, 2019
- White Dominant Culture & Something Different: A Worksheet, Adapted from the work of Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones, COCo, n.d.
- Whitesupremacyculture.info, Tema Okun, 2021

Hiring, Retention, Advancement

- Brave Questions: Recalculating Pay Equity - Network Weave, 2020
- Eliminating Bias in Recruitment, Hiring, and Performance Evaluations, Talent Justice Toolkit, Fund the People, 2019
- I help organizations hire people — and watch white candidates get favored again and again, Leniece F. Brissett Vox, 2016
- Not showing the salary range in job postings is archaic and inequitable. So why do we keep doing it?, Vu Le, NonprofitAF, 2020
- Talent Justice Toolkit, Fund the People, 2018

Communications & Decision-Making

- Addressing Racial Equity With an Organizational Change Lens, Yaro Fong-Olivares, 2018
- Creating Culture & Practices for Racial Equity, Nayantara Sen and Terry Keleher, Race Forward, N.D.
- Our default organizational decision-making model is flawed. Here’s an awesome alternative!, Vu Le, NonprofitAF, 2018
- Structuring Leadership: Alternative Models, Building Movement Project, 2011
Governance & Operations

- Addressing and Preventing Workplace Harassment and Discrimination, City of Seattle, 2018
- Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, King County, 2016
- Measures Signed Into Law, Center for Nonprofits, 2020
- Pay Equity, Family and Earned Sick Leave, Minimum Wage, Salary History, Wage Theft
- Unpaid Parenting: An Informal Analysis of Parental Leave Policies in Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice Organizations, ReproJobs, 2020
- Wage Equity Matters, TSNE Mission Works, 2018
- Why Nonprofit Staff Wages Are as Important as CEO Salaries, Kori Konoyama, 2018

Programs & Services

- Confronting Structural Racism in Research and Policy Analysis, Urban Institute, 2019
- Community-Led Participatory Policymaking Toolkit, We Power Policy, 2020
- Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community-Building, Maggie Potapchuk and Sally Leiderman, 2005
- When Baltimore Awakens: An Analysis of the Human and Social Service Sector in Baltimore City, Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle, 2019
- WHY AM I ALWAYS BEING RESEARCHED?, Chicago Beyond, 2019

Community Engagement & Partnerships

- Are you or your org guilty of Trickle-Down Community Engagement?, NonprofitAF, Vu Le, 2015
- From Community Engagement to Ownership Tools for the Field with Case Studies of Four Municipal Community-Driven Environmental & Racial Equity Committees, Urban Sustainability Directors Network Innovation Fund Project
- 20 ways majority-white nonprofits can build authentic partnerships with organizations led by communities of color, NonprofitAF, Vu Le, 2018
- Trickle-Down Community Engagement, part 2: The infantilization of marginalized communities must stop, NonprofitAF, Vu Le, 2016

Contracting & Grantmaking

- Contracting for Equity, Government Alliance on Race & Equity, 2015
- Eliminating Implicit Bias in Grantmaking Practice, SSIR, Nancy Chan, Pamela Fischer, 2016
- Inclusive Procurement and Contracting, PolicyLink, 2018
- Grantmaking with a Racial Equity Lens, GrantCraft, 2018
- Resourcing Networks for Equitable Systems Change, Change Elemental, 2021
APPENDIX 6.

Bibliography


“The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind.”

— MAYA ANGELOU

For more information about CURE’s trainings and workshops, visit www.urbanandracialequity.org
CHARTING THE JOURNEY:
Strategies to Guide Racial Equity Organizational Change

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