

CHARTING THE JOURNEY: Strategies for Racial Equity Organizational Change

MEDIA SUMMARY

Two years since widespread anti-racist pledges were made across the nonprofit sector in 2020, the Center for Urban and Racial Equity's latest report outlines concrete opportunities for nonprofits to make measurable improvements in their racial equity transformational efforts. [According to a study of more than 5,000 nonprofit employees conducted by Building Movement Project](#), an overwhelming 74% of respondents reported that their organization has undertaken work on diversity, equity and inclusion. However, organizational promises to Black employees and employees of color have long fallen short. To avoid losing this unprecedented window of opportunity for institutional and systemic change, it is imperative that nonprofit leaders act to maintain a sustained commitment to transformational racial equity.

Over nearly five years, CURE has spent thousands of hours analyzing employee survey data, facilitating trainings and workshops and co-creating racial equity action plans with nonprofit and public sector clients of all sizes. The report publicly shares our Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) framework, process and lessons learned from guiding nonprofit leaders to mobilize resources and be accountable for racial equity in their workplaces and communities. By sharing what was previously only available to clients and partner organizations, CURE hopes to demystify the process of racial equity organizational change and share our methodology, recommendations and organizational trends observed over five years to equip the nonprofit sector at large.



Center for
Urban and Racial
Equity



WHAT IS RACIAL EQUITY ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE?

Developed in 2018, CURE's Racial Equity Organizational Change (REOC) process is a carefully sequenced approach that helps nonprofits focus their efforts on four key domains that deepen and advance racial equity. Used with a range of nonprofit and public sector clients of all sizes, the domains also guide important actions that should be part of any transformation process, including an organizational assessment, formation and training of a racial equity working group, and action planning.



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE & COMMITMENT

Racial equity organizational transformation first requires a commitment from the top, with leadership that is willing to name and confront racism, shift power to prioritize leadership from impacted populations, and embed racial equity across all aspects of an organization. However, nonprofit executives are often ill-equipped to lead racial equity change, and [79% of executive directors and board chairs](#) remain white, despite leading organizations that primarily serve communities of color.

CURE has found that the following strategies help an organization develop a foundational 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.
- Organizations should establish a Racial Equity Working Group composed of leadership as well as staff from across position levels to facilitate change across the organization.
- Organizations should actively seek to diversify executive teams, especially top leadership roles such as executive director, CEO, or president. When new executives of color are brought in, they should be provided with substantial onboarding, adequate support and equitable compensation.



SHARED LANGUAGE & ANALYSIS

Racial equity organizational transformation requires that all staff have shared language and analysis to fully articulate what racial equity is and what it means for their organization. Often, employees across an organization may hold different interpretations of what racial equity is and what it means to operationalize it. For example, Black human resources staff might be deeply focused on addressing racial equity internally, while white operations directors may be providing inadequate budgets for these efforts. Similarly, 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.

CURE has found the following strategies can help address gaps in definition and conversations about racism across the organization:

- Organizations should conduct a racial equity assessment to fully understand the state of racial equity in the organization. In most cases, this is best accomplished in partnership with a neutral third party, such as a racial equity consultant.
- Organizations should agree on shared definitions for key concepts such as: “structural racism,” “racial equity” and “anti-racist.”
- Organizations should provide racial equity training and coaching to all staff and leadership. These training opportunities should be carefully tailored to the needs of staff based on learnings that emerge from the initial organizational assessment.



EMPOWERED PEOPLE

Racial equity organizational transformation requires that trusted processes are in place to respond to racism and other marginalizing incidents and that all staff are empowered to see themselves as full contributors in working towards racial equity in the workplace and the communities they serve. Often, employees of color are called upon to lead racial equity efforts, experiencing microaggressions, resistance and even significant trauma in the process. For example, [Race to Lead's 2019 study of more than 5,000 nonprofit employees](#) found that respondents of color were two times more likely than white employees to report experiencing significant stress from being called upon to lead racial equity efforts. In order for racial equity transformation efforts to be successful, all employees – especially white employees – should be expected to be proactive in focusing attention on racial equity across their work and in the workplace.

CURE has found the following strategies can help ensure that all staff are empowered to lead in the work of building an anti-racist organization:

- Organizations should offer affinity groups, coaching and mentorship to employees of color for self-care and processing racist incidents and other trauma at work.
- All staff should be proactively encouraged by leadership to participate in an organization’s commitment to racial equity. It may even be helpful to set racial equity goals for each employee as 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, which was equal in weight in how they were evaluated on helping the organization achieve financial stability.

- All managers across the organization should be provided with training, coaching and resources to speak and lead on racial equity. Particular attention should be paid to managers who supervise diverse teams or managers that have contributed to racist cultures in the past.



EQUITABLE POLICIES & PRACTICES

Racial equity organizational transformation requires that organizations have equitable policies and practices in the way they operate and interact with all stakeholders including employees, community members, grantees and partners. In Fund the People's 2019 [Talent Justice survey](#) conducted in partnership with CURE, respondents of color more frequently cited limited room for advancement (56%), poor leadership and management (45%), exclusionary organizational practices (44%), an inability to save for retirement or pay student loan debt (40%), limited or no opportunities for mentorships (40%) and limited or no internal cross-training (37%). To meaningfully address racial inequities, organizations must comprehensively examine their operations to eliminate systemic biases and enact tangible changes in organizational policies and practices.

CURE has employed the following strategies to address inequities across all aspects of an organization's operations:

- Organizations should create policies and practices that address workplace inequities in recruitment, pay equity and advancement and promotion opportunities for employees of color. These include developing racially equitable hiring criteria, creating equitable compensation packages and institutionalizing meaningful advancement opportunities for employees at all levels.
- Organizations should develop decision-making structures that allow for inclusive participation, input, feedback and power. 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.
- Organizations can incorporate program design models that prioritize the wisdom, experiences, and priorities of impacted communities, centering the voices of target communities from the earliest stages of the planning processes.

For more strategies, insights and case studies on advancing racial equity organizational change, you can access the full report on CURE's website [HERE](#).

For media inquiries, please contact
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Dr. Judy Lubin, president of the Center for Urban and Racial Equity is also available for interviews to discuss the report findings, takeaways for philanthropic and nonprofit organizations, and trends observed through CURE's years of work with organizations on racial equity transformation.