

RMI Webinar 4 – Get Your House in Order: Strategies to Advance Racial Equity Inside Your Organization

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What is your desired outcome?

- Equity-focused results: the inability to predict advantage or disadvantage by race
- BOTH improve outcomes overall AND closing racial gaps in outcomes

Equity focused approaches can be applied to external programming and its internal operations.

- It is generally easier to start with the external work before the internal, but the internal work is critically important to carry out that external work. Where to start is with what's within your sphere of influence.
- Don't get caught up in the idea that this work needs to be big and perfect. It's important that organizations do internal work. Don't let perfectionism (which is an ear-mark of white work culture) stop you from doing work.
- Because organizations are made up of people, it's also important to think about how people are doing and faring when it comes to advancing racial equity.
- It's important to start where you have power, because the work you do might be further along than the organization. That might be frustrating, but that's still meaningful.

The Equity Continuum – A Touchstone for Organizational Understanding (for foundations)

Organizational Assessment

- Colorblind work – universal strategies, doesn't take race into account, equality-based work
- Diversity-only – most foundations are in this place; focuses on differences in people and bringing more people of diverse perspectives, backgrounds, identity in. Often leads to turnover.
- Race-tentative – race is talked about in some places but not others. Often is focused on in one program area but is not consistent. Talking about race equity in programming but not in internal work.
- Equity-focused – Lift up race internally and externally. Appropriate policies to support diversity and inclusion.

Critical factors to advance equity inside foundations

- Leadership
 - Some challenges of implementing equity work are technical (toolkits, guides, policies). Sometimes these are the easy part of the work. Most parts of this RMI series have been technical.
 - There is a meaningful part of this work that is about courage to tackle adaptive challenges. Leadership, both personal and organizational, is vital for the courageous part of this work.
 - Leaders don't always need to be people of color. We all have a role to play.

- **Shared language**
 - Need to be able to communicate clearly about the role of race equity in the work, why now, and what changes are necessary to bring about more equitable outcomes.
 - It can be awkward to call out what's inequitable. Being able to speak clearly about why it's inequitable takes away some of that awkwardness and moves people beyond it.
- **Clear point of view (shared)**
 - Why is this work important, if it's work that hasn't been central to the mission of the foundation? Why now?
 - Make sure this point of view is shared by everyone else in the organization. It takes work to ensure everyone shares the point of view. We should expect resistance. Often this is rooted in loss – we have to figure out what they are afraid of and how we can help them work through it.
- **Broadly embraced message**
 - We communicate it consistently because we are all behind it and we all understand it.
 - Process of getting folks on board with a message is equally important to the message itself.
- **Open to reflection**
 - This work is constantly evolving, and we're constantly learning. **We must be open to learning new information and analysis that might cause us to reflect what we are doing.**
- **Space for learning (shared and individual)**
 - Need to create spaces that don't cause harm.
 - There is not a way to take this lens in our organization without doing individual work. This ensures we show up in our work in ways that don't cause harm.
 - Create space in the work we do daily to critically think about what we're doing and to try new things.
- **Data collection, analysis and change mechanisms**
 - We often collect data but don't use it to make substantive changes. We need to ensure we're bringing about change through analysis of that data.

Questions & Comments About Factors to Advance Equity

- When sharing the "why" -- do you have examples of weaving in the technical why with a personal story/viewpoint/experience? I ask because DEI/Racial Equity work/discussion has been presented to our staff (post workshops on DEI) and it is shared with ALL the other work of our Foundation, so it may get a little watered down.
 - Power of story – I don't think facts move people at all. If people were moved by facts, we'd live in a very different world. Also don't think historical stories move people either.
 - Story often moves people, but it must be used effectively. Use your stories to the extent that you've already processed your history and after you've given it a lot of thought and insight.

- Sometimes sharing stories can make the story-teller feel exploited. There's also shame about background and in feeling like people are being overly personal.
- Without understanding history, the conversation tends to devolve to individuals. The history is important for people to understand as a backdrop to having conversation and sharing personal stories.
 - Policy Biography tool – series of questions to help you think through your story in structural ways
- My organization is going through our own DEI work internally. We've had a couple of facilitated sessions and as a person of color those sessions can be very taxing. Especially given that a lot of these sessions are "beginners" and as much as I know that's ok because ppl are at different levels, it is still very hard to sit through. I've been reflecting on just how much these DEI sessions are meant for white folks and processing their feelings.
 - We have established affinity groups (based on race/ethnicity identification) in part to address this issue. I can only speak for the white affinity group, but it has been really helpful, and hopefully has saved some of the painfulness but also allowed white folks to explore some wonderings that maybe they wouldn't elsewhere

Walking the Walk

- What is your philanthropy doing to advance equity?
- Are you (in your work) taking the steps needed to create equitable outcomes?
- What kinds of work are you doing (personally) to advance equity?

Discussion

- Hiring for diversity and inclusion, but unfortunately only at the junior level, so not achieving equity objectives. Also have started a DEI subcommittee and media series so we can hold space to explore content together.
- In our staff meeting last week, we agreed to participate in a healing circle internally with staff and trustees before asking grantees to do the same. (See resource on healing circles)
- Last year, we had three, three day sessions for ALL members of staff to get an intro to DEI. For the most part, staff receptive. And this year, we will be doing our audit/assessment. We continue to integrate new employees into the conversation. It definitely is a process and takes time so as much as I want to jump into grantmaking with a racial equity lens (those are just conversational for now) we are really trying to bring the staff along in the whole picture. But good because several of our departments are chomping at the bit for action - such as our Grants Management team - in their own conferences the beat of racial equity is out there.

Has your foundation...

- Made an expressed commitment to racial equity?
- Addressed equity in its organizational policy?
- Implemented equitable practices in its operations?
- In grantmaking or other programmatic areas?
- Use accountability mechanisms to monitor and course correct?

Areas for Deeper Focus

- **HR Policy**
 - **Job descriptions, recruiting strategies**
 - Race often falls off the table when recruiters are looking for candidates
 - **Onboarding process**
 - What's in place to let new employees know that race equity is a priority and that there's shared language and a way we talk about the work?
 - **Pay equity**
 - Race and gender on top of hierarchy and seniority
 - What mechanisms in place in the organization to answer questions around pay equity?
 - **Benefits structure**
 - What mechanisms are in place to review benefits policies?
 - **Retention efforts**
 - **Pathways to promotions**
 - How do people move from one position to another, both laterally and vertically? What structures are in place to help people? If there aren't any, then be clear and upfront about that and support them in that place.
 - **Grievance policy**
 - What is the process for managing microaggressions, racism, etc. and moving toward restoration?
 - The process can't be "this person didn't mean to be racist, so we need to forgive and move on."
- **Board and staff diversity**
 - Recruiting strategies (board)
 - Participation protocols
- **Planning processes**
 - Strategic planning, outreach strategies
 - Department planning, development
- **Professional development**
 - REI training and other learning opportunities – sets the context for building staff capacity.
 - Performance measures in performance review. It helps signal that this work is important, but if we want people to have these competencies, we also need to provide resources for people to build those competencies.
- **Communications**
 - Clear strategies, protocols
- **Vendor purchasing**
 - Analyze how and from whom your organization buys its goods and services – vendors and consultants

Questions/comments

- The grievance policy is something I have been thinking about. Any tools you can offer for this? Especially given that our HR person is white and some folks might have trouble going to them.
 - Joanna has been looking for a racially equitable grievance policy but hasn't found one yet. Would love to have a conversation to look at any grievance policy through a race equity lens.
- Consistent use of the Racial Equity Impact Analysis
 - Use your personal power to ask questions: Who is at the table? Who is missing from the table and why? Are we the right conveners for this?

Language matters: How does your organization communicate about race?

- A style guide can create a shared understanding for how to talk about race
- Review graphics, photos, quotes that represent your organization
- Are data disaggregated consistently?
- What narrative does your organization use to describe disparities data? (backmaps are helpful here)
- Are the words you use to describe different racial groups consistent across platforms?

Other Resources

- Book – [Uprooting Racism](#). Help move around racist relatives using story.
- Article – [Why People of Color Need Spaces without White People](#)