**Homework for Video 5**

**Building Racial Equity Teams**

**Objectives**

Participants will:

1. Gain an increased understanding of how change happens in organizations and the key considerations for building organizational capacity to advance racial equity across functions and hierarchy;
2. Be prepared to address barriers and potential opposition to developing a team;
3. Explore different team structures and connections with community; and
4. Develop first steps and resources for building organizational capacity to advance racial equity.

\*\*\*USDN members have the option to receive feedback on their homework. To do so submit the worksheet to dwr@desireewilliamsrajee.com \*\*\*

**Name** **Jurisdiction**

**E-mail       Phone**

**Membership** [ ]  Core [ ]  Associate [ ]  Staff [ ]  Unknown [ ]  Not a member

1. Watch Video 5

[ ]  I watched the video [ ]  Even better, I watched the video with colleagues

1. Come up with a list of people who are key to the success of your project (these are not necessarily your team members; they are people whose support you will need, e.g., your boss, an elected official, a community leader, etc). For each person, assess whether they are likely to be resistors, apathetics, incubators or advocates when it comes to explicitly integrating racial equity.
2. What are the skills and expertise you need for your racial equity project, both inside government and with the community? Identify people for your team who have the needed skills and expertise. Do you have any skill or expertise gaps?
3. Come up with a list of any potential opposition to your project. Why do you suspect they might be opposed? Using the Tool at the end of the homework to develop an “Affirm, Counter, Transform” message to engage one of your detractors.
4. Develop a team description for your project. Include the team members and their roles. Identify education that will need to take place with your team to make sure there is a shared understanding of racial equity.
5. What are the opportunities to use your team’s work to systemically build your organization’s on-going commitment to advancing racial equity? (ex. bring along other departments)

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**Tool: Responding to Challenging Questions**

**When Working on Racial Equity**

Conversations about race and equity can sometimes be challenging. As a facilitator or leader, it is important that you be prepared for difficult or confrontational questions. Being able to address challenging questions in a compassionate and thoughtful manner will help to increase your effectiveness as a leader, enhance the engagement and commitment of your colleagues, and advance racial equity. Ignoring or being dismissive or antagonistic towards questions can cause the person asking the question to check out, become mad or upset or become hostile. Your responsibility is to build as much understanding, commitment and support as possible.

This tool uses a communications model from the Center for Social Inclusion[[1]](#footnote-1),

**“ACT” – *Affirm, Counter, Transform*.**

Follow the steps in order.

***Step 1 – Affirmation***

Offer understanding. You don’t have to agree with what the person has said, but responses should be empathic, acknowledge the underlying feelings, and build rapport while working toward a common purpose. Try to connect emotionally and look for shared understanding.

***Step 2 – Counter***

Help develop a more complex understanding by providing supplemental information that “counters” the question. Remember that growth occurs when participants leave their comfort zones. Explain the root cause of the problem and name race.

***Step 3 – Transform***

Offer concrete ideas for actions based on the new information. Support application of new knowledge and awareness. Reframe benefits and burdens and provide solutions.

The remainder of this hand out offers some frequently asked questions, along with sample responses. You should customize responses to make them relevant to your own organization and situation, especially when it comes to transforming. Ideally, you should strive to transform questions that might be considered challenging when first posed into positive commitment and actions.

***Q-1: Isn’t this just about class, why are we talking about race?***

***A:*** Race and income are closely connected in the United Sates, and income inequities are large. We definitely need to be working on reducing income inequality. What we know, however, is that racial inequities aren’t just about income. When we hold income constant, there are still large inequities based on race across multiple indicators for success, including education, jobs, incarceration and housing. And at the same time, race continues to be the “elephant in the room.” For us to advance racial equity, it is vital that we are able to talk about race. We have to both normalize conversations about race, and operationalize new behaviors, including at the individual and institutional level.  To do so, we need the active engagement of people who have more commonly focused on class, such as yourself.

***Q-2: “Shouldn’t we be using a “colorblind” approach? I don’t see race / I don’t see color.”***

***A:*** Race is indeed a social construct, meaning it has no actual basis in biology. However, we do live in a highly racialized society where across all indicators for success, there are deep and pervasive differences based on race. And, if we don’t see color, we are not seeing important characteristics about people, and we are limiting are own ability to develop strategies to get to different outcomes. While explicitly discriminating against people of color is now illegal, systems, policies and procedures still work to favor white people. Because of this, it’s important that we do talk about race, even though it can sometimes feel challenging. We have to both normalize conversations about race and operationalize new behaviors at the individual and institutional level in order to advance racial equity. To do so, we need active engagement of people like you in working on new policies and practices.

***Q-3: “Why do we need this if we have a diverse staff (or elected officials) already?”***

***A:*** We do have a diverse staff (or elected officials), and we can be proud of that progress. It is a great step for this organization. However, simply having a diverse staff (or elected officials) isn’t enough to ensure racial equity. We still have deep and pervasive racial inequities in the community. It’s important to look at how all our systems, policies and procedures can work to advance racial equity, not just in our workforce (or elected officials). At the end of this presentation we’ll all have a chance to envision how we as individuals and our organization as a whole can work toward racial equity. We recognize that there are staff here from many different departments who will have ideas, and we want to work with all of you on additional policies and practices that will advance racial equity in our organization and in the community.

***Q-4: “Management doesn’t care about these issues and I don’t see them doing anything about this problem, even when it is brought to their attention.”***

***A:*** It can certainly feel frustrating when it seems like nothing is moving or it’s all talk and no action. I agree that we do need to feel a greater sense of urgency to make change move more quickly. Some of the things we have done so far in this area are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We are currently working on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ . In the future, we plan to work on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We need the concerns, ideas and support of people like you who can work with us on additional policies and practices that can advance racial equity in our organization. And we all need to be able to integrate racial equity into our own specific jobs. I’m wondering whether you and your work team might be willing to be a pilot for the use of a racial equity toolkit.

***Q-6: “What is the role of white people in doing work for racial equity?”***

***A:*** This is a complex and important question that I appreciate you asking. There isn’t a one-size-fits all answer to this. Sometimes it means being quiet so people of color have room to speak. Sometimes it means speaking up if you notice individual or institutional racism. Sometimes it means educating other white people about racism. For white people in the room, it can be helpful and important to think deeply about ways you have benefited from systems, policies and procedures.

***Q-7: “What about gender and sexual orientation, aren’t there institutional problems around those issues as well?”***

***A:*** There are definitely problems and inequities around gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of marginalization, and it’s important that we are working on them too. There are some similarities between racism, heterosexism and sexism in that they have all been built into institutions. At the same time, focus and specificity are necessary. Strategies to achieve racial equity differ from those to achieve equity in other areas. “One-size-fits all” strategies are rarely successful. For example, the movement around marriage equality laws is a unique strategy used to work specifically for LGBTQ equity. There are different barriers and strategies needed to address each area of marginalization.

Focusing on racial equity provides the opportunity to introduce a framework, tools and resources that can also be applied to other areas of marginalization. This is important because a racial equity framework that is clear about the differences between individual, institutional and structural racism, as well as the history and current reality of inequities, has applications for other marginalized groups. In addition, race can be an issue that keeps communities from effectively coming together. An approach that recognizes the inter-connected ways in which marginalization takes place will help to achieve greater unity across communities.

I’m hoping that you will work with me to look at the intersections across areas of marginalization and build bridges to achieve equity for all our communities.

***Q-8: “Don’t ALL lives matter? Why do people say that only black lives matter?”***

***A:*** Thanks for the question. To put it in context, a movement has been building after the deaths of African-American men Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York at the hands of white policemen. The unifying message of the movement has been “Black Lives Matter,” and some have responded to this message by changing the phrase to “All Lives Matter.” Yes, all lives matter, but not all lives have been affected by police and the criminal justice system, both historically and presently, in the way the African American community has. The Black Lives Matter statement calls out the particular struggle the African American community faces in regards to biased policing and inequities in the larger criminal justice system. When people of color call out ways their communities are particularly affected by issues, it’s important not to co-opt or change the message.

1. Check out the complete “Talking About Race Right” Toolkit from the Center for Social Inclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)