PRACTICE GUIDE SERIES

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity

Debunk Myths

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Contents

To our readers

From our earliest days, our founder W.K. Kellogg articulated a formula for change that relies on the leadership and authentic engagement of local community members. As he wrote, "...it is only through cooperative planning, intelligent study, and group action – activities on the part of the entire community – that lasting result can be achieved." This formula paired with a resolute commitment to eliminate racism's enduring effect on the lives of children, families and communities, guides how we support and work alongside grantees.

Although this commitment to racial equity began decades ago, it was not until 2007 that the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) board of trustees committed us to becoming an anti-racist organization. That explicit directive accelerated efforts to examine every aspect of operations and grantmaking from that perspective. In that effort under the leadership of WKKF President and CEO, La June Montgomery Tabron, we identified and named racial equity and racial healing, leadership development and community engagement as our "DNA"–approaches so essential that they are embedded in every aspect of the Kellogg Foundation's work.

In evaluation, the seeds for that were planted decades ago. For example, the Kellogg Foundation funded the American Evaluation Association's Building Diversity Initiative in 1999, explicitly focusing on diversifying the evaluator pipeline and promoting culturally competent evaluation practices. Today, the foundation again finds ourselves leading the field in moving beyond culturally competent evaluations to equitable evaluation (i.e., using evaluation as a tool to shine light on racial inequity and social injustice, and to improve solutions that create a world in which every child thrives).

Practicing equitable evaluation is not, cannot and should not be only for evaluators of color. As a group of professionals, we all bear the responsibility and obligation to do so. In May 2020, the world witnessed George Floyd's appalling murder. Together, people worldwide joined throngs of demonstrators marching in solidarity for a common humanity and calling for leadership and justice on behalf of one man and many others senselessly taken by police violence. As an evaluator, I believe evaluation can be a tool to promote democracy and advance equity. Equitable evaluation can render power to the powerless, offer voice to the silenced and give presence to those treated as invisible. The tools we employ–authentic data collection, analysis, reporting, learning and reflection–can debunk false narratives, challenge biases, expose disparities, raise awareness, level the playing field and reveal truths for measurable positive progress in our society.

As evaluators of color, we have been grappling with how to go beyond the rhetoric of why evaluation currently is not helping to advance racial equity to actual practice. We struggle with questions such as: "Should evaluation be value-free and agenda-free?" "Do our own lived experiences, values and cultures have a place in our evaluation practice?" "How do we bring our whole selves to our work – our intellect, our passion and our histories?" Moreover, we wonder how evaluation can authentically facilitate the advancement of racial equity–so the stories of communities of color are fully told and understood, so the solutions emerge as truly their own.

Every day, we find ourselves asking more questions, pivoting our thinking, wrestling to demystify technical jargon and quite honestly, sometimes wishing we were doing something else, especially on days when we must defend our stance, expertise and identities. "How to" is emerging as something we need to develop so the community of evaluation professionals and evaluation consumers will review, peruse, use, critique, refine, revise and enhance the content of practice guides, all in service of achieving racial equity. With such context and background, this series is produced.

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity consists of 3 practical guides for evaluation professionals who want to do this important work and/or who want to better understand it. Rather than debating the value of evaluation in service of racial equity, we are offering a way forward. We do not pretend to have all the answers. However, we hope this series takes some of the mystery out of evaluation practice and shows how to authentically use evaluation to advance racial equity. There is no single tool, framework or checklist that will transform someone into a practitioner of this type of evaluation. It requires lifelong commitment to self-reflection and learning, as well as racially equitable solutions to change deep-rooted racist systems. This guide aims to show **how** to incorporate this core value and alignment into the evaluation practice.

There are three guides in this series, and this is **Guide #1:**

Guide #1:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

Guide #2:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Guide #3:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

We are grateful for Kien Lee, Principal Associate of Community Science, for her leadership in developing and writing this series of practice guides, with support from other Community Science staff. We would like to thank the following individuals for their insightful reviews and feedback in revising the content: Holly Avey, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Nicole Bowman, Bowman Performance Consulting; Elvis Fraser, Sankofa Consulting; Melvin Hall, Northern Arizona University; Cynthia Silva Parker, Interactions Institute for Social Change; Daniela Pineda, Informed Insight; and Courtney Ricci, The Colorado Trust.

We would also like to thank WKKF colleagues on the evaluation, communications and racial equity teams for their roles in fine-tuning and finalizing the guides.

We welcome you, our readers, to share your comments and suggestions in making the guides the most useful for evaluation practitioners in our collective pursuit of **Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity.**

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Evaluation and racial equity: How did we get here?

What was happening in our country and in the world when we began writing this series?

When we started writing this series of guides about evaluation in service of racial equity, the world was experiencing a major public health crisis and much of the United States was facing civil unrest in response to police brutality. These events highlighted the existing cracks in our communities and in our country along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, making them visible to many White Americans who had previously ignored, dismissed, minimized or denied their existence. The unrest, coupled with the disproportional impact of COVID-19 on Native Americans, Blacks and Latinos made it more difficult for people to remain ignorant or tolerant of racism. It became clear that certain groups of people, because of their skin color, limited education, immigration status or other traits, are still subject to a kind of oppression that denies them fair and just access to opportunities and resources that enable them to thrive. In certain cases, the opportunity to simply survive is not even available.

Suddenly, organizations and corporations were in search of strategies for increasing their own diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Age-old symbols of white supremacy (e.g., Confederate flags, public statues of Confederate generals and sports team mascots that promote harmful stereotypes of Native people) were being eliminated. Terms such as “white fragility,” “white privilege,” “anti-Blackness,” “unconscious bias,” “allies” and even “systemic racism,” exploded into mainstream news. We recognize these issues have existed for generations. However, many people were recognizing them for the first time as they were no longer able to remain ignorant of their presence.

This context is relevant to evaluation. Evaluation at its best should generate knowledge, and knowledge—when made accessible to people who have been oppressed—contributes to their ability to make change. Evaluation also is used to:

- Judge the merit of an intervention.
- Determine whether the intervention deserves continued funding and support.
- Affirm or dispute the assumptions on which the intervention is based.
- Hold leaders and organizations accountable to the communities they serve.

All these functions make evaluation an instrument of power, especially because organizations turn to evaluators to help them determine if and how their services, programs and practices truly contribute to racial equity and how they can be improved. Evaluators—as well as funders, program managers, advocates and community leaders—have started considering the role of evaluation in creating a more equitable and just world, contesting the canons of science and positioning evaluation as part of a larger movement for racial equity and social justice. Evaluation, a field that has already revised approaches to ensure *responsive* evaluation, *democratic* evaluation and *transformative* evaluation, is now undertaking efforts to ensure *culturally responsive* evaluation and *equitable* evaluation.

Debates inside and outside the profession are often reduced to whether evaluation should be value-free and impartial, or whether evaluation should intentionally promote racial equity through its methodologies, as if they are mutually exclusive.

This debate creates a false dichotomy, wasting precious time that we can use to hone the practice of evaluation that is in service of racial equity and scientifically rigorous. We can also use the time to educate people who direct nonprofits, advocate for social justice and lead community change—who are not immersed in the study and practice of evaluation—about what they can expect from such evaluations, and not be confused about rhetoric, philosophies and the like. Simply put, they need to know how to do evaluation that supports their racial equity agenda. It is time for us to shift our focus to how we practice in a way that facilitates racial equity, learn from our experiences and keep pushing the practice forward.

Evaluation in service of racial equity is a practice, not an aside, a checklist, a course or something you do only if the funder wants it. We must engage in a real dialogue about the myths of evaluation that stand in our way, our own biases, our understanding about systems that perpetuate racial inequity and poor community engagement and our actions as evaluators to help create healthy, just and equitable communities.

How do we get there?

As a field, evaluation practitioners need to focus on intentionally breaking down and changing several evaluation-related practices that are especially relevant to racial equity goals. In essence, evaluators have to:

- Go beyond technical tasks and have the knowledge and skills to challenge strategies intended to end disparities in education, health, housing and other areas.
- Engage early in the development and improvement of a strategy so they can raise questions and concerns about *who* is driving the strategy, *with* whom and *for* whom. Funders and organizations typically do not engage evaluators until after their strategies have been developed or are ready for implementation.
- Compel funders and organizations to take the time to define and understand the "community" and be clear about who in that community is supposed to benefit from their strategies.
- Meaningfully and authentically engage the community most impacted by the initiative to learn about their lived experiences and community knowledge, which can guide the practice and use of evaluation.
- Learn about the history of the country, as well as the communities in which they are working to understand—with humility and a systems lens—how past and current institutional structures and policies contribute to power differences and the racial oppression and disparities experienced by people and communities of color today.
- Self-reflect and transform their own thinking and practices. They should also bring in partners with complementary competencies to help respond to the issues and needs that will inevitably arise during the process. This can help them become more connected to relevant fields (e.g., racial justice, organizational development, group facilitation, conflict resolution) to be able to tap into those resources.
- Create an evaluation process to confront and deal with power issues, including differences in power between funders and grantees, between leaders and staff in organizations, between large established and small grassroots organizations and last but not least, among the evaluator, participants and the sponsor or client.

- Design evaluation to use multiple methodologies and studies to assess different types of changes—individual, organization, system and community. Different methods must be used to understand and map complex relationships and connections, identify emerging developments that could facilitate or hinder change and call out intended and unintended outcomes and consequences. This rigorous approach is necessary to assess systems change that can move us toward racial equity. It has to become a *primary* practice in evaluations in service of racial equity. This also means there must be sufficient time, resources and thoughtfulness to coordinate, integrate and make sense of the findings across studies, and use them effectively to improve and move the needle toward racial equity. Too often, funders and organizations don't do this and the knowledge generated by the studies becomes fragmented, diminishing the true value.

- Maximize the use of evaluation by incorporating evaluation into other capacity-building activities. Funders to social justice organizations have to continuously test, improve and learn from strategies to achieve racial equity. Evaluation is often viewed as a threat or something "off to the side." Evaluators alone cannot advocate for use of evaluation findings. Evaluation has to be part of technical assistance, trainings and other capacity-building activities to help communities *and* funders transform findings into usable knowledge. Too often, funders don't invest sufficient resources for the evaluator and other partners to coordinate their efforts or simply leave it to them to "work it out among themselves." This oversight undermines the potential of the evaluation.

None of the above can occur in a vacuum. Evaluations and evaluators are part of an ecosystem of philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, scientist establishments, public agencies, professional associations and the consulting industry—all of which have to do business differently if the practice of evaluation can aid in progress toward racial equity.

How can this series of guides help you as evaluators?

This series of guides, ***Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity,*** is designed to help you exercise your own agency to better use your expertise to achieve racial equity and improve the services you provide your clients and the communities they support. It integrates and further expands on the work of many evaluators who have pushed the envelope through developing new concepts such as multicultural validity, culturally responsive evaluation and equitable evaluation. It also incorporates ideas from systems thinking, organizational development and other fields to help you put evaluation that is in service of racial equity into practice. The series is split into three guides and while they are all connected, they do not need to be read in order, or in full, to be valuable.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

The beliefs and ideas funders, advocates, community leaders, evaluators and others carry that can make everyone anxious and apprehensive about practicing evaluations for this purpose.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Implicit biases that influence evaluation practice and evaluators' understanding of systems and the use of a systems lens in evaluations.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

Responsible, responsive and genuine engagement of communities in the evaluation process and as an outcome in evaluation.

For some the background may seem obvious or rudimentary, especially if you understand structural racism and/or you have experienced racial discrimination. For others, there might be new information and suggestions that can lead to different insights, especially if you have limited understanding about structural racism and/or have never experienced racial discrimination.

This series as a whole:

- Presupposes that evaluation can be used to advance racial equity without diminishing scientific merit.
    - If you don't believe you have a responsibility to use evaluation to promote racial equity and social justice, you could undermine and even harm communities.
- Represents work in progress while reflecting the current state of the field.
    - Evaluation continues to evolve in response to the U.S. political and social climate.
    - Evaluators continue to exercise their agency, work to embed evaluation into strategy and be honest with themselves, their peers and their clients about how everyone can change the way they go about the business of evaluation.
- Uses the term people and communities of color for consistency to refer to the collective of people who identify as African Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Indigenous, Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.
    - This term, along with others such as BIPOC (Blacks, Indigenous and Other People of Color) and Latinx have their own meaning in specific contexts, and it is not the task of this guide to determine which term is correct in which instance.
- Is written by real people who bring their expertise, passion and lived experiences to their work.
    - You'll find technical information as well as expressions of the writers' convictions about evaluation along with personal accounts of their experiences. .

The time to act is now, while individuals and organizations are eager to learn and open to making positive changes toward racial equity, and while our country works toward healing and recovering from the pandemic and civil unrest.

Practice Guide
Doing evaluation in service of racial equity: Debunk myths

Why focus on myths?

Myths are popular beliefs or traditions that are not true, but because these beliefs or traditions are passed along unchallenged, people start to believe they are true. Myths about key concepts in evaluation such as rigor and objectivity are shaped by our mental models—frames of how something works that guide our perceptions, behaviors and how we approach and relate to both other people and our surroundings. These mental models tint and narrow our view of the world we encounter. They can weigh into how we answer questions like:

- What do we think is right or wrong?
- What do we think other people are capable of?
- Can people of color be racist?
- If a program achieves its goals, does this mean the evaluation must be positive?

These mental models can be so deeply ingrained that we may not even recognize them if they are pointed out. Nevertheless, we depend on them to help make sense of everything around us. For context, mental models may be incomplete, evolving, not necessarily accurate or based on facts, and are often simplified versions of complex situations (Gentner & Stevens, 1983; Holland et al., 1986; Johnson-Laird, 1983; Newcomb, 2008). This means our mental models can contribute to perpetuating myths—consciously and unconsciously.

As evaluators, our mental models about evaluation and the world guide our practice, decision-making and problem-solving. They shape how we relate to other people involved in the evaluation—from the funder who commissioned the work to the people from whom we collect data. These mental models all come from somewhere: from the way we are trained, from our professional and personal experiences and histories and from our current contexts. Mental models about what makes a good or bad evaluation and everything in between influence how we think about, design and implement evaluations—even those that could contribute to racial equity.

Evaluators, funders, advocates, program managers, community leaders and others who use evaluation must become aware of their own mental models and the myths they might perpetuate. Only then can they identify how they need to shift to support evaluations that contribute to racial equity. These shifts can help change personal behaviors and professional practices.

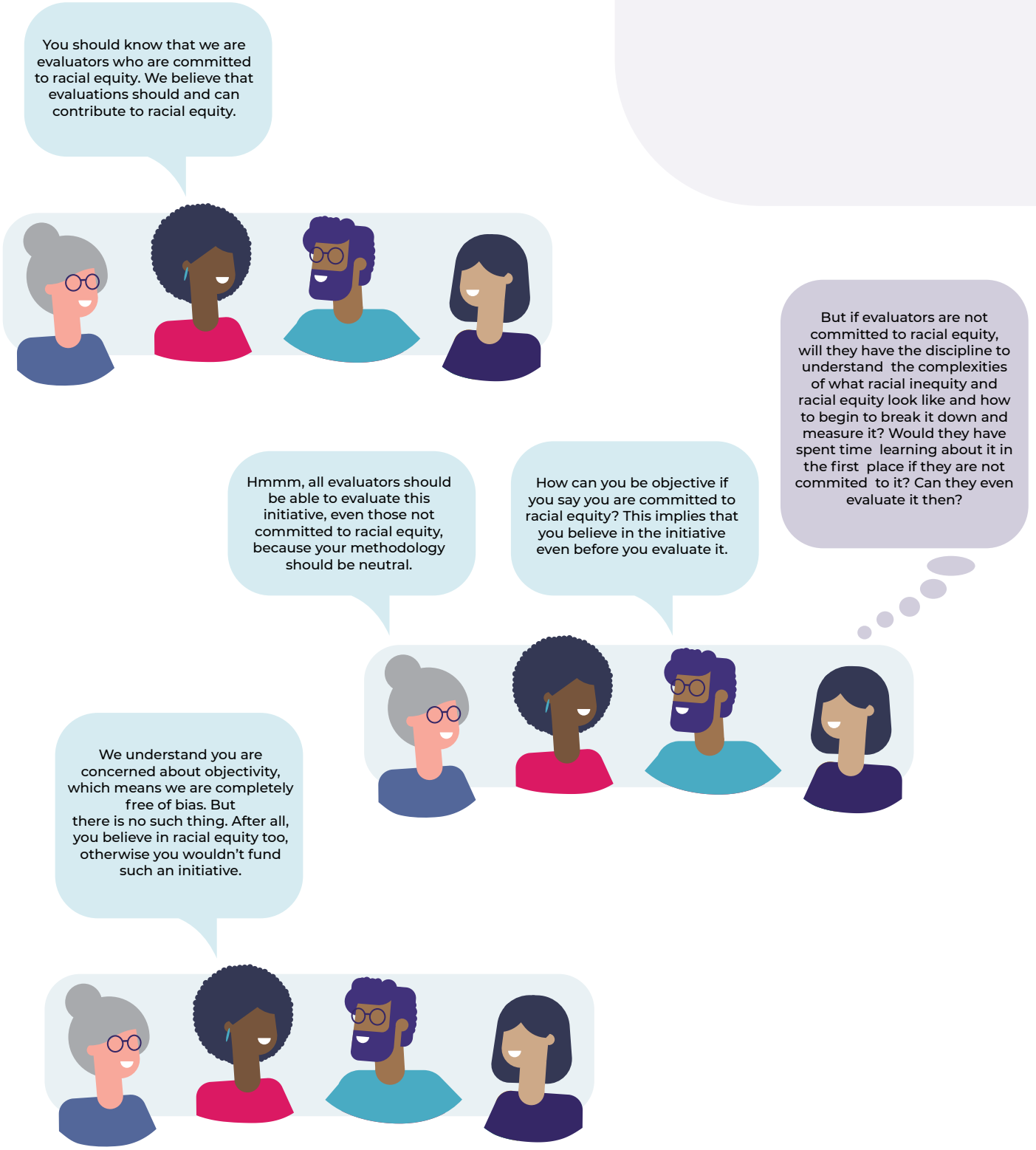
In this practice guide, we explore some common, but unhelpful, myths about evaluation and racial equity. We hope this provides prompts to rethink your own mental models or tips to shift people's thinking so we can all be better aligned with the mission to achieve racial equity.

Common myths about evaluation that challenge its use in service of racial equity

Myths, and the mental models that allow them to persist, affect our perceptions, behaviors and how we approach and relate to both other people and our surroundings. They affect how we think about our work and our colleagues. Some myths support misconceptions and oversimplify the issues underlying the connection between evaluation and racial inequity. Here, we explore some prevalent myths that need to be re-examined to improve the use of evaluation in service of racial equity.

Myth 1:

Rigorous science is objective and value-free. Evaluators who are committed to racial equity are no longer objective and value-free.



Evaluators of racial equity strategies are often committed to social change. They want the strategy to succeed so there can be progress. However, this wishful outlook can lead funders and strategy designers to perceive evaluators as biased, not objective and incapable of conducting a scientifically rigorous study. Some funders and designers prefer (or think they prefer) value-free evaluators.

Consider the decisions made in the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study, the use of Henrietta Lack's cells and the Cincinnati Radiation Experiments, as well as state-run eugenics programs in North Carolina and Puerto Rico and among Native American communities (Nittle, 2020). Those decisions were all made by scientists who perceived people in their experiments to be inferior because of their race and lack of money and power to make their own choices. The experiments were based on racist mental models and without acknowledgement or interrogation of these mental models. Rather, they were viewed as good science by the scientific community which was dominated by White men, and the experiments executed racist outcomes and perpetuated racism. They reflected prevailing societal values at the time and also the pattern of devaluing Black and Brown people and their bodies (Deb Roy, 2018). Their history underscores questions raised earlier: *Who gets to define the research question and scientific rigor and who gets their research funded?* Buying into the notion that science should be value-free and objective influences which scientists and practices we consider "effective" at the cost of racial equity.

Debunk the myth: the false pursuit of completely objective research

Separating us as evaluators from our values and experiences is not possible or desirable, just as it is not possible for funders to separate their own values and worldviews from their grantmaking strategies and decisions. As evaluators, we make decisions all the time, including:

- Who we engage and listen to.
- Which questions to ask.
- What data to collect, how and from whom.
- How to analyze the data.
- How to communicate the findings and to whom.

Each of these decisions is influenced by our expertise and informed opinions about what is best in a given context. This is all shaped by our professional training, life experiences and worldviews. Plus the funder and other stakeholders approach these decisions through their own lens.

The pursuit of "completely objective" research is bound to lead to incorrect conclusions, and is broadly harmful because it promotes the myth of an absolute truth to be uncovered by a (nonexistent) perfectly rigorous science. Instead of objectivity, we can practice and demand *honesty, transparency* and *integrity* in the evaluation process. We can state clearly that while we are committed to the intent of the strategy, we are not partial to the strategy itself. This statement helps highlight the power dynamics at play in an evaluation and among stakeholders. **As evaluators, we have to be mindful, honest with ourselves and transparent with the people involved about the logic and chain of evidence that led to our conclusions and recommendations.** This allows others to be informed consumers of information and builds confidence in our findings.

When considering a new evaluation project and negotiating the terms and conditions, we should ask ourselves these questions and be honest about our values, beliefs, biases and perceptions.

- Do I think the strategy will work and for who? Why do I think this? Am I open to being wrong?
- How do I perceive the people funding the strategy, managing and implementing it, providing technical assistance and other support and receiving the funds and doing the work? Why do I perceive them this way (e.g., is it their race and ethnicity, gender, privilege, etc.)? Am I open to changing my perceptions?
- Do I have the lived experiences and the competencies to be an effective partner for the strategy? How much good or harm can I do? Am I okay with that?
- What am I willing to risk if I have to confront, question or disagree with the people involved in order to push for and advance racial equity as the impact of my evaluation effort?

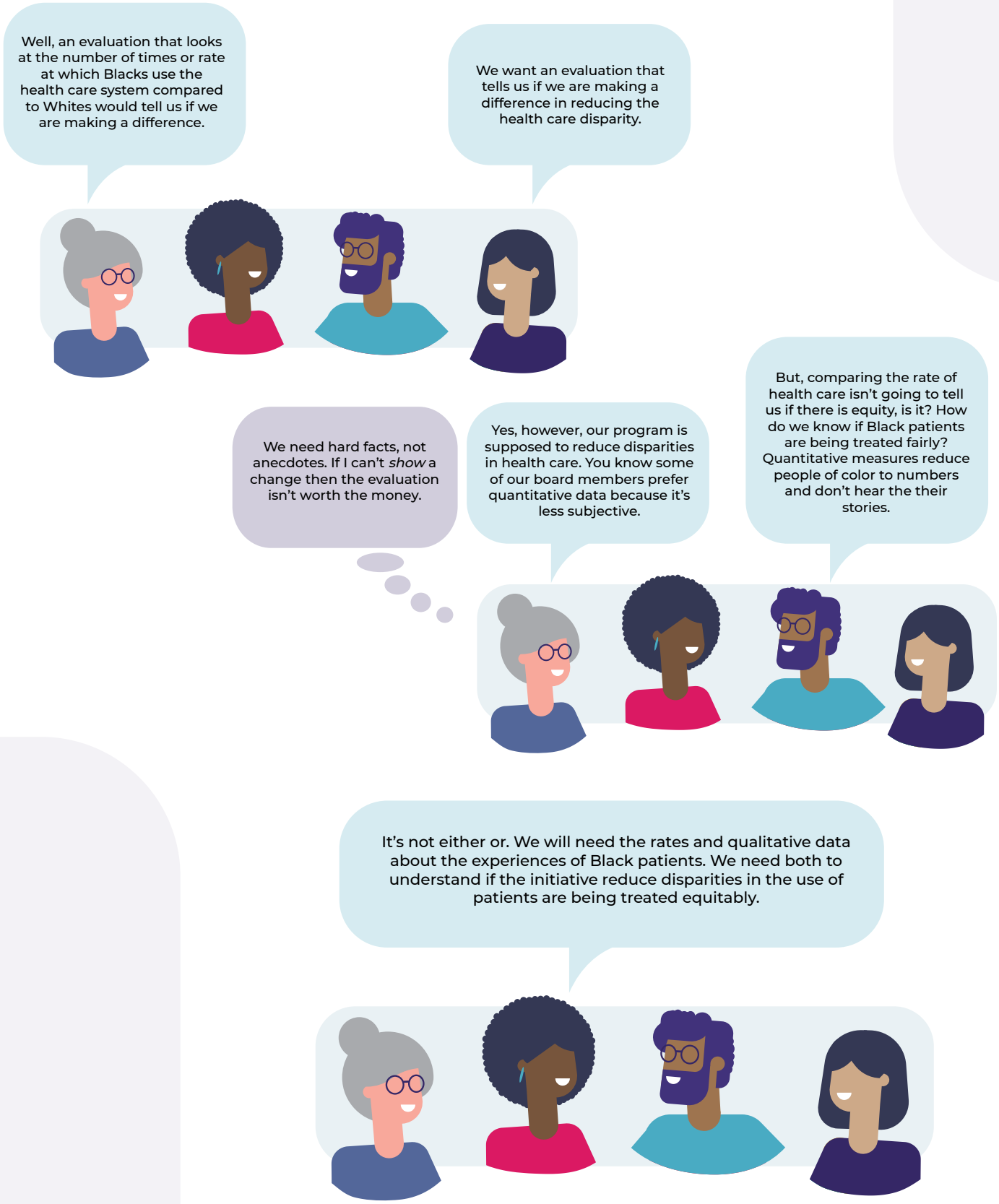
Where is the line?

As evaluators committed to racial equity, we have to ask ourselves where the boundary lies between our desire to see a racial equity strategy succeed and our discomfort with what happens should the strategy not succeed and therefore risk being defunded? Sometimes our blinders prevent us from seeing how we are about to cross the line between our personal and professional commitments. It can be helpful to build a community of trusted peers who can support us in our challenges to assert our agency while being scientifically rigorous, and alert us when we are about to cross the line.

The reverse is also possible. Where is the boundary between our own skepticism that the strategy can advance racial equity and our focus on the strategy's actual potential? How do we avoid letting our skepticism get in the way? Will we challenge our client who is paying for our services—and what happens if we do?

Myth 2:

Some methods are better than others for evaluating racial equity strategies because they promote authenticity or are more scientifically rigorous.



Qualitative inquiry and methods that promote storytelling are generally preferred by funders, evaluators, advocates and community leaders who are involved in racial equity efforts, as compared with quantitative methods that rely on numerical data. These individuals believe that highlighting the lived experiences of historically silenced groups is important, and qualitative data in the form of stories are more effective at doing this—especially in identifying shifts in power, changes in community conditions, the quality of people's interactions with systems such as law enforcement and other signs of progress toward racial equity. In fact, some anti-racist advocates would assert that quantitative data and statistics are reflective of the dominant culture and therefore should not be used in evaluations of racial equity work.

Debunk the myth: both quantitative and qualitative methods are necessary and each has its unique strengths and limitations

Highlighting lived experiences is important. However, qualitative methods alone are often not sufficient when using evaluation as a tool for racial equity. Both numbers *and* stories are needed to understand the full picture. For instance, indicators of racial inequity include racial disparities in health, education, housing, wealth and other life conditions. Quantitative data are most helpful in illustrating these disparities and bringing attention to the unequal access of people of color to services and resources. For example, we know that there is a health crisis experienced by Black mothers because we can quantitatively track mortality rates from childbirth across race and ethnicity. And we know there is a criminal justice crisis for young Black, Latino and Native American men and women because we can enumerate the proportion of inmates, police-involved shootings and sentencing practices across race and ethnicity. We are also able to quantify positive behaviors and social constructs, like volunteerism and sense of community, among different racial and ethnic groups through the use of surveys. All of these quantitative data—in addition to qualitative data about changes in systems and community conditions—are important to understand and address racial inequity.

Also, some funders, policymakers and evaluators prefer that any strategy be evaluated through quantitative inquiry, such as experimental designs and randomized control trials (RCTs), because they allow for validity and objectivity. These methodologies are perceived as the gold standard for scientific rigor, assumed to ensure an unbiased and objective evaluation. Indeed, their use has historically been advantageous in securing funding and having results "taken seriously," illustrating the use of science as a tool of power. However, their strengths, such as helping to prove causation, are useful only for answering certain evaluation questions, and only if you can select two groups that are identical on the characteristics central to the intervention being evaluated and determine if the intervention caused any differences in outcomes between the two groups. Proof of causation, however, is not enough to fully understand and address racial inequity.

Racial equity strategies are complex undertakings because of the multiple levels of change they need to effect, the compounding root causes and the natural conflicts that can arise. Anyone who has embraced such complexity in a strategy's design and implementation ought to embrace a similar complexity in its evaluation. Yet funders and evaluators tend to want a single answer, based on a single method, under a single framework, and they tend to want a single study to evaluate all this complexity. Evaluation methodologies and quantitative and qualitative methods are merely tools. The key—and the hallmark of scientific rigor—is how we put them together to answer the evaluation questions, implement them in a way that highlights racial inequity and use the answers to scrutinize the assumptions underlying the strategy and to improve the theory behind it and its implementation.

What does it mean to implement evaluations in a way that facilitates racial equity—to ensure that people who have been historically excluded because of their race, ethnicity and other intersecting identities have equitable access to the opportunities and resources offered by evaluators and by the evaluation? Let's consider this for a popular quantitative-focused approach—experimental and quasi-experimental designs—and for qualitative inquiries.

Managing funders' expectations

Funders often don't embrace complexity because it can be too much of a risk (i.e., it will make their board uncomfortable, it will take too many years, it is not how things have been done). They tend to be disappointed if evaluations do not show the results they had hoped to see. When this happens, funders may abruptly stop the strategy or the evaluation.

In the end, the communities of color that might have benefitted from the strategy are negatively impacted. This is why evaluators have to be involved in the strategy's development from the start. By doing so, they can help funders and others manage expectations about what is measurable within the timeframe for the strategy and within the budget available.

In **experimental and quasi-experimental designs,** for instance, we as evaluators can:

- Provide options for improvement (e.g., extra after-school tutoring, financial literacy assistance, substance abuse treatment, etc.) to both the control and treatment groups, or use a wait-list tactic and not withhold those options from the treatment group. Withholding an intervention option (as opposed to wait-listing) is an acceptable practice, but it creates unequal treatment of different groups and it gives the evaluator too much power over the participants.
- Be transparent about the sampling and randomization strategy with the people involved and weigh the pros, cons, risks and benefits for them.
- Be intentional about using accessible language and don't rely on technical jargon (e.g., "randomization," "attrition," "external validity," "intervention fidelity," "p value") to communicate the scientific rigor of the evaluation. Using technical jargon is one way the evaluator maintains power and control and continues to mystify evaluation.
- Draw on and relate participants' real-world knowledge about their lives and communities to the scientific findings produced through the experimental design or RCT conclusions. This practice values the experiences of people in communities—especially people of color—and helps place them in a position to drive change, instead of valuing only the evaluators' perspective and continuing to treat the people most affected by the initiative as subjects. Also, the evaluator should not try to oversell the findings by extrapolating or generalizing them to other "similar" populations and communities. This dismisses, ignores and devalues differences across racial groups and how they have been impacted by structural racism.
- Consider the implications that group differences (regardless of statistical significance) may have for the strategy or program, rather than diminishing the findings' impact because there was no statistical significance. Statistical significance is useful, but it is only one tool to understand the strategy or program's effects, and by emphasizing statistical significance, participants' real-world experiences with the strategy or program are undervalued.
- Have upfront discussions with the funder about what it takes to oversample for racial and ethnic groups that tend to be underrepresented in the variables of interest. Oversampling can be time- and resource-intensive. Yet, having a sufficient sample size is necessary to fully understand the problem and properly inform the solution to benefit the underrepresented groups.

In **qualitative inquiry**:

- Be clear and transparent about the rules of evidence used to derive themes, and not focus on the loudest or most opinionated voice. By giving a primary voice to the loudest person, the evaluator could be perpetuating power differences during data collection and in reporting.
- Pay deliberate attention to—and further explore—responses that suggest a disregard for the needs, histories, cultures, experiences and contexts of particular racial groups by the funder, strategy manager or a relevant third party, such as a technical assistance provider. This is important even if such responses represent only a small percentage of the sample. The evaluator should also ask the respondents' permission to share the information because their confidentiality could be compromised if they represent a small number in the sample.
- Balance thematic analysis and use of quotes. Quotes alone are insufficient and their use is not an indicator of authenticity or lifting up "the community's voices." Neither is the use of thematic analysis and synthesis sufficient. Lack of transparency about the way themes are derived diminishes the authenticity and granularity of community voices. So does an evaluator's lack of understanding about structural racism, lack of attention to the granularity of people's responses and failure to contextualize responses.
- Be attentive to power differences in group interviews or focus groups. Evaluators should not set up groups so that the person, or people, with the most power dominates the discussion or influences the responses of others. Doing so can affect the quality of the data, perpetuate power differences, and cause missed opportunities to address racist attitudes.

In the end, neither quantitative inquiry nor qualitative inquiry alone are "gold standards" regardless of the evaluation question being asked. It is more important that the evaluation questions, data collection practices, analysis and conclusion follow a logic that is reasonable and transparent, generate knowledge that serves the needs of the people most affected by the intervention and evaluation and don't perpetuate racial inequity. the use of evaluation in service of racial equity.

Myth 3:

Asking community members their opinions on the evaluation is enough to help equalize the power between them and evaluators and gives them power.

When asked about practicing evaluations that contribute to racial equity, funders, strategy designers and implementers, technical assistance providers and evaluators often emphasize community engagement—involving community members in designing the evaluation and co-interpreting the results, or "lifting up the community's voice." In their minds, being intentional about who needs to be involved in the conversation, and assuming that everyone has something to say regardless of whether or not they are in a position of power, will reduce power differences.

Debunk the myth: community engagement is about shifting power, not just lifting up voices

The power difference between evaluators and community members is important to address. However, the most important power difference lies between the community and the funder and other people who make unilateral decisions that impact the community. Evaluations in service of racial equity must be implemented in a way that helps identify and shift that power difference. To do this, we as evaluators can:

- Create evaluation and learning questions that, when answered, will provide community members with data and opportunities they can use to advocate for change.
- Include the voice and presence of the community in telling the story and not diminish negative feedback from the community about the funder, process and other support received (or not) from the funder and partners.
- Involve community members to make sure the evaluation uses appropriate and reasonable measures of change and explains the outcomes in a way that doesn't harm the community.
- Work with community members to understand the systems maintaining the status quo and identify the levers of change (and who controls them). Then, design an evaluation that will hold the decision-makers accountable and facilitate the community members' use of the findings to advocate for their priorities and drive change.

We must be clear about two things in the evaluation:

1. *Who the "community" is.* Frequently there is not one community but multiple communities, and each one has a different stake in the strategy and the evaluation.

2. *What "engagement" really means.* Informing community members about the evaluation and consulting them about different aspects of the evaluation (which don't facilitate a shift in power to affect racial equity) or partnering with them to build their capacity to make joint decisions about the evaluation and the strategy or initiative (which facilitates a shift in power to affect racial equity).

Evaluators and funders often favor participatory approaches and training, and using community residents to collect, analyze and interpret data. They think these approaches share power and control with community members. While commendable, the resources, time and effort that go into supporting the residents' training, coaching and quality control of the data are usually not sufficient (Gommerman & Monroe, 2012) or focused on putting community residents in the position to lead, drive change and shift power so they can have more control over decisions and processes that impact them. Consequently, community engagement like this turns out to be more tokenistic than meaningful.

The third guide in this series, ***Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement,*** provides guidance about how evaluators can meaningfully involve community members in evaluation, as well as help ensure that community members' knowledge and leadership are prioritized in the initiative.

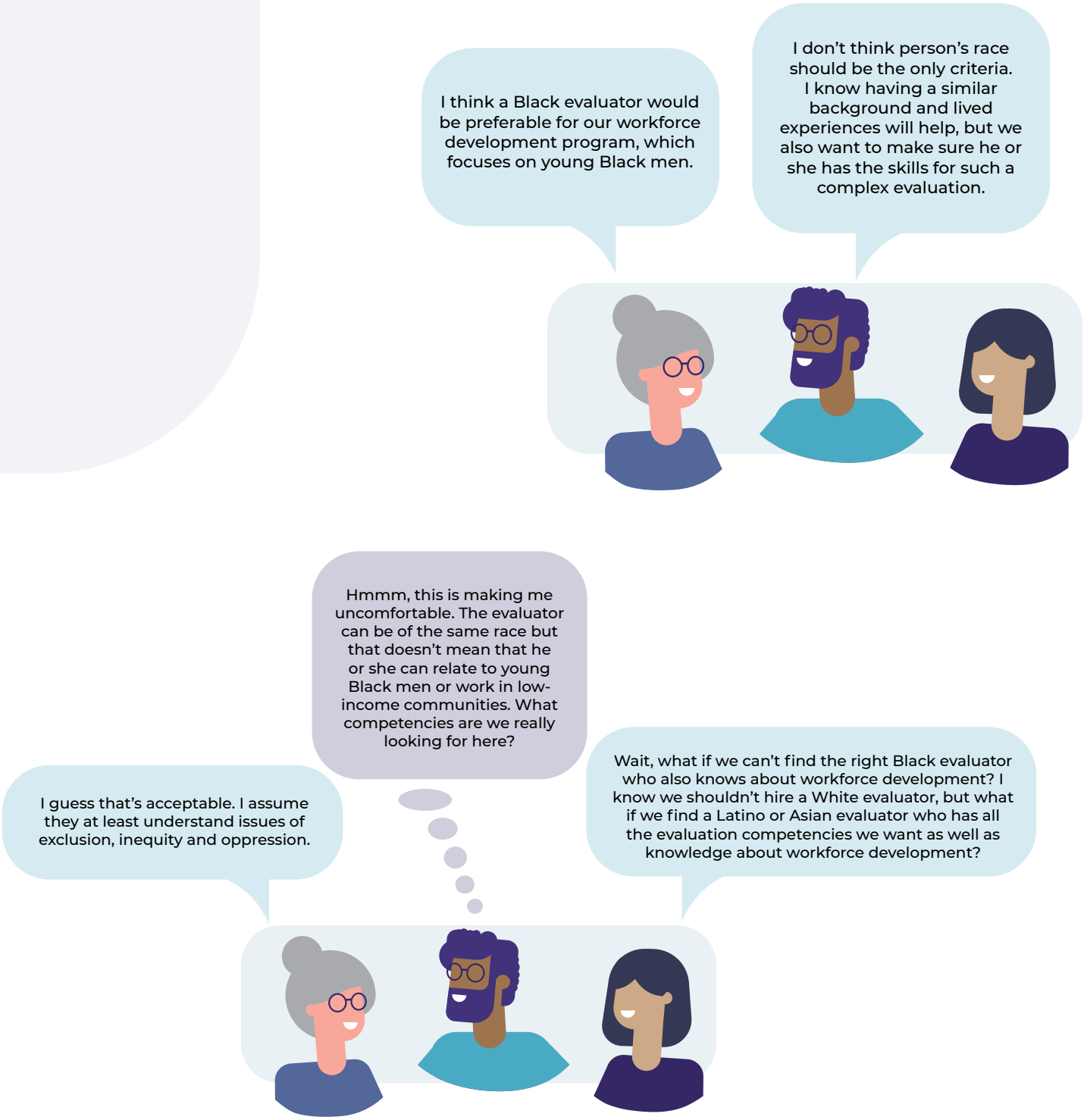
Engaging the community: How?

Funders like the idea of "centering" community residents of color in their strategies and placing these residents in the "driver's seat," but at the same time not "overburdening" them.

However, rarely do we ask what funders mean by "centering," and we also rarely ask community members if they want to be involved, and how, when, and in which decisions they want to have a say. Authentically engaging community starts with the funder and evaluator being honest about both the power and the limits of community engagement. Are the funder, evaluator or strategy manager truly ready to share power with community residents? What are the parameters of the power they are willing to share or give up?

Myth 4:

We should hire evaluators of the same race as the people of color most affected by the intervention. If this is not possible, it is better to hire any evaluator of color than a White evaluator because they understand what it's like to be excluded and oppressed. Also, evaluators of color are naturally anti-racist because of their lived experiences.



Evaluators who share the same or similar race or ethnicity as the people who are affected by the intervention will do a better job because they are naturally able to relate to the people, which also means that the people will tell them the truth. As such, the quality of the data will be better and the findings will be more accurate. White evaluators are less likely to successfully engage and relate to the people who are affected by the intervention because they don't share a history of oppression; on the contrary, White evaluators are perceived as representing the oppressor.

Debunk the myth: evaluators' understanding of systems and their competencies in mixed methods, in addition to their lived experiences, are what matters

All evaluators, regardless of their race and ethnicity, should be trained and equipped to evaluate racial equity strategies and to conduct evaluations in service of racial equity. This is essential because:

- Evaluating racial equity strategies is a complex undertaking. It can be helpful to use evaluators with life experiences that can help them relate to the people who are supposed to benefit from the strategy (i.e., people of color). However, equally important is having evaluators with a deep understanding about how systems maintain the status quo of racial inequity, the technical skills to use mixed methods to answer the evaluation questions, facilitative skills to support the use of evaluation to advocate for change, a capacity for empathy and the courage to take risks toward the end goal of racial equity.
- No race is monolithic, and someone's race does not make them an expert in someone else's racial experience, even if they can empathize with the person's experience.
- Being a person of color doesn't make someone non-racist or anti-racist. People of color can have power and can use power inappropriately.
- Achieving racial equity requires both people of color and White people to work together and shift power.

The issue is not the evaluator's race—that is individual. The real issue is that we tend to assume and treat each racial group as homogenous and believe that racism is perpetuated through individuals and not systems. We behave as if every person in one racial group will have the same experiences and views as every other person in that group. Racial homogeneity is often substituted for the recognition that people can have multiple identities and belong to more than one community and social group at a time.

It cannot just be about evaluators' personal transformation

Personal transformation is only part of the work to achieve structural and systems-level change. Focusing on the evaluator's race and lived experiences, and requiring evaluators to deal with their own personal transformation to be able to evaluate racial equity strategies, keeps the problem of evaluation in service of racial equity at the individual level rather than the structural and systemic level. It's not an "either or" solution, but we can't put all our attention and energy into transforming individual evaluators at the expense of systemic change in philanthropy, the evaluation profession and in the communities we serve.

Myth 5: Evaluation and data are neutral.

Numbers and other types of data don't lie. In fact, all numbers and non-numerical content are data, all data are information and all information is evidence. Good evaluation is objective and value-free because it is based on data and, as such, it is neutral.

Debunk the myth: data and evaluation can be weapons of oppression or guardians of racial equity; it depends on who is using them and how

Evaluations have historically been used as a weapon of oppression against people of color to "prove" white racial superiority. Data have been used to justify movements like the wars on crime and drugs, as well as negative narratives like the "welfare queen," the "lazy immigrant" and the "super-predator." Foundations, which employ evaluators and fund evaluations, are historically established by wealthy White people and represent the dominant culture. As such, communities of color tend to view evaluation as a punitive tool (and evaluators as implementers of that tool), often on behalf of foundations that wield their power through money similar to how a government wields its power through policies.

It is a myth that all numbers and non-numerical content are data, all data are information and all information is evidence. When *any* data are turned into evidence without meeting the criteria for evidence, the evaluation becomes something harmful. The *harmful use* of data and evaluation is symptomatic of structural racism—patterns of oppression over the course of history perpetuated (primarily) by White men who have accumulated wealth and power, using them to create policies, practices and norms that would guarantee their continued success. Yet, a typical response to the controversy about evaluation reflecting and supporting the dominant white culture is to encourage White evaluators to explore their white privilege and whiteness, while for evaluators of color it is to explore their privilege as educated and middle- to upper-income professionals. This focus on the individual evaluator—while it can be informative— is simply insufficient for dismantling structural racism. It keeps the emphasis at the individual level, not at the systems level. It also continues to privilege the individual evaluator rather than helping the evaluator develop the skills to be an ally and advocate to communities of color in order to disrupt the systems that perpetuate the status quo.

Data and evaluation can indeed be used as weapons of oppression. However, they can also be used as guardians and defenders of racial equity if the data meet the criteria for evidence and if the evaluation is used properly to understand, explicate and challenge symptoms of structural racism—and hold the perpetrators accountable. By removing evaluation from your toolbox, you lose the opportunities to combat the history of harm it has helped create and change the narratives of communities that are overlooked in data or oppressed by the toxic use of data.

In sum, we can train evaluators all we want. We can help White evaluators understand their white privilege and discuss how evaluation reflects the dominant white culture. However, if we don't learn to deliberately use evaluation to highlight unfairness and injustice and to identify the possible levers of systemic change, regardless of our racial and ethnic background and preferred methodologies, then evaluation can indeed act as a weapon of oppression. The ultimate question remains:

As evaluators, what are we willing to do to be anti-racist and dismantle racism, regardless of our race and ethnicity?

Conclusion

This first **Practice Guide – Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths** shared a few common myths that get in the way of practicing evaluation that contributes to racial equity. These are not the only myths to consider, there are many more. The other guides in this series, ***Diagnose Biases and Systems*** and ***Deepen Community Engagement***, focus on operationalizing the practice of evaluation in service of racial equity—the *how* we work to make this happen. It is important to remember that such practices can only be successful if we explore the unspoken myths that tend to go unchallenged, in the hope that a more honest conversation—no matter how difficult—can occur in philanthropy and in the evaluation profession. If you'd like to explore these common myths further, you can complete the exercises at the end of this guide.

Exercises

Find someone you trust to be honest with you, no matter how hard the conversation might get. Ask them to listen and probe your thinking. Then you can switch roles. If you're not sure of what questions to ask to help dig deeper, asking "why" after several answers can help get to that next layer of information.

EXERCISE 1.

Consider a mental model that you have about evaluation. Ask your partner to listen and identify anything that might help facilitate or hurt efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance racial equity.

EXERCISE 2.

Consider a time when you were really excited about the potential of a racial equity strategy. What made you excited about it? What were your assumptions about its potential effectiveness? If you were to evaluate it, what would make you excited and why? Then consider the reverse: Think about a time when you were skeptical about the potential of a racial equity strategy. Why? What were your assumptions about its lack of effectiveness? If you were to evaluate it, what would make you concerned and why?

EXERCISE 3.

Consider a time when you used data and evaluation successfully to affect change as a step toward racial equity. What were the conditions and capacities that had to be in place for that to happen? How could you ensure the same conditions and capacities in another evaluation?

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PRACTICE GUIDE SERIES

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity

Deepen Community Engagement

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Contents

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity : Deepen Community Engagement

To our readers

From our earliest days, our founder W.K. Kellogg articulated a formula for change that relies on the leadership and authentic engagement of local community members. As he wrote, "...it is only through cooperative planning, intelligent study, and group action – activities on the part of the entire community – that lasting result can be achieved." This formula, paired with a resolute commitment to eliminate racism's enduring effect on the lives of children, families and communities, guides how we support and work alongside grantees.

Although this commitment to racial equity began decades ago, it was not until 2007 that the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) board of trustees committed us to becoming an anti-racist organization. That explicit directive accelerated efforts to examine every aspect of operations and grantmaking from that perspective. In that effort under the leadership of WKKF President and CEO, La June Montgomery Tabron, we identified and named racial equity and racial healing, leadership development and community engagement as our "DNA"–approaches so essential that they are embedded in every aspect of the Kellogg Foundation's work.

In evaluation, the seeds for that were planted decades ago. For example, the Kellogg Foundation funded the American Evaluation Association's Building Diversity Initiative in 1999, explicitly focusing on diversifying the evaluator pipeline and promoting culturally competent evaluation practices. Today, the foundation again finds ourselves leading the field in moving beyond culturally competent evaluations to equitable evaluation (i.e., using evaluation as a tool to shine light on racial inequity and social injustice, and to improve solutions that create a world in which every child thrives).

Practicing equitable evaluation is not, cannot and should not be only for evaluators of color. As a group of professionals, we all bear the responsibility and obligation to do so. In May 2020, the world witnessed George Floyd's appalling murder. Together, people worldwide joined throngs of demonstrators marching in solidarity for a common humanity and calling for leadership and justice on behalf of one man and many others senselessly taken by police violence. As an evaluator, I believe evaluation can be a tool to promote democracy and advance equity. Equitable evaluation can render power to the powerless, offer voice to the silenced and give presence to those treated as invisible. The tools we employ–authentic data collection, analysis, reporting, learning and reflection–can debunk false narratives, challenge biases, expose disparities, raise awareness, level the playing field and reveal truths for measurable positive progress in our society.

As evaluators of color, we have been grappling with how to go beyond the rhetoric of why evaluation currently is not helping to advance racial equity to actual practice. We struggle with questions such as: "Should evaluation be value-free and agenda-free?" "Do our own lived experiences, values and cultures have a place in our evaluation practice?" "How do we bring our whole selves to our work – our intellect, our passion and our histories?" Moreover, we wonder how evaluation can authentically facilitate the advancement of racial equity–so the stories of communities of color are fully told and understood, so the solutions emerge as truly their own.

Every day, we find ourselves asking more questions, pivoting our thinking, wrestling to demystify technical jargon and quite honestly, sometimes wishing we were doing something else, especially on days when we must defend our stance, expertise and identities. "How to" is emerging as something we need to develop so the community of evaluation professionals and evaluation consumers will review, peruse, use, critique, refine, revise and enhance the content of practice guides, all in service of achieving racial equity. With such context and background, this series is produced.

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity consists of 3 practical guides for evaluation professionals who want to do this important work and/or who want to better understand it. Rather than debating the value of evaluation in service of racial equity, we are offering a way forward. We do not pretend to have all the answers. However, we hope this series takes some of the mystery out of evaluation practice and shows how to authentically use evaluation to advance racial equity. There is no single tool, framework or checklist that will transform someone into a practitioner of this type of evaluation. It requires lifelong commitment to self-reflection and learning, as well as racially equitable solutions to change deep-rooted racist systems. This guide aims to show **how** to incorporate this core value and alignment into the evaluation practice.

There are three guides in this series, and this is **Guide #3:**

Guide #1:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

Guide #2:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Guide #3:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

We are grateful for Kien Lee, Principal Associate of Community Science, for her leadership in developing and writing this series of practice guides, with support from other Community Science staff. We would like to thank the following individuals for their insightful reviews and feedback in revising the content: Holly Avey, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Nicole Bowman, Bowman Performance Consulting; Elvis Fraser, Sankofa Consulting; Melvin Hall, Northern Arizona University; Cynthia Silva Parker, Interactions Institute for Social Change; Daniela Pineda, Informed Insight; and Courtney Ricci, The Colorado Trust.

We would also like to thank WKKF colleagues on the evaluation, communications and racial equity teams for their roles in fine-tuning and finalizing the guides.

We welcome you, our readers, to share your comments and suggestions in making the guides the most useful for evaluation practitioners in our collective pursuit of **Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity.**

Huilan Krenn, Ph.D.
Director of Learning & Impact
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

November 2021

Evaluation and racial equity: How did we get here?

What was happening in our country and in the world when we began writing this series?

When we started writing this series of guides about evaluation in service of racial equity, the world was experiencing a major public health crisis and much of the United States was facing civil unrest in response to police brutality. These events highlighted the existing cracks in our communities and in our country along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, making them visible to many White Americans who had previously ignored, dismissed, minimized or denied their existence. The unrest, coupled with the disproportional impact of COVID-19 on Native Americans, Blacks and Latinos made it more difficult for people to remain ignorant or tolerant of racism. It became clear that certain groups of people, because of their skin color, limited education, immigration status or other traits, are still subject to a kind of oppression that denies them fair and just access to opportunities and resources that enable them to thrive. In certain cases, the opportunity to simply survive is not even available.

Suddenly, organizations and corporations were in search of strategies for increasing their own diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Age-old symbols of white supremacy (e.g., Confederate flags, public statues of Confederate generals and sports team mascots that promote harmful stereotypes of Native people) were being eliminated. Terms such as "white fragility," "white privilege," "anti-Blackness," "unconscious bias," "allies" and even "systemic racism," exploded into mainstream news. We recognize these issues have existed for generations. However, many people were recognizing them for the first time as they were no longer able to remain ignorant of their presence.

This context is relevant to evaluation. Evaluation at its best should generate knowledge, and knowledge—when made accessible to people who have been oppressed—contributes to their ability to make change. Evaluation also is used to:

- Judge the merit of an intervention.
- Determine whether the intervention deserves continued funding and support.
- Affirm or dispute the assumptions on which the intervention is based.
- Hold leaders and organizations accountable to the communities they serve.

All these functions make evaluation an instrument of power, especially because organizations turn to evaluators to help them determine if and how their services, programs and practices truly contribute to racial equity and how they can be improved. Evaluators—as well as funders, program managers, advocates and community leaders—have started considering the role of evaluation in creating a more equitable and just world, contesting the canons of science and positioning evaluation as part of a larger movement for racial equity and social justice. Evaluation, a field that has already revised approaches to ensure *responsive* evaluation, *democratic* evaluation and *transformative* evaluation, is now undertaking efforts to ensure *culturally responsive* evaluation and *equitable* evaluation.

Debates inside and outside the profession are often reduced to whether evaluation should be value-free and impartial, or whether evaluation should intentionally promote racial equity through its methodologies, as if they are mutually exclusive.

This debate creates a false dichotomy, wasting precious time that we can use to hone the practice of evaluation that is in service of racial equity and scientifically rigorous. We can also use the time to educate people who direct nonprofits, advocate for social justice and lead community change—who are not immersed in the study and practice of evaluation—about what they can expect from such evaluations, and not be confused about rhetoric, philosophies and the like. Simply put, they need to know how to do evaluation that supports their racial equity agenda. It is time for us to shift our focus to how we practice in a way that facilitates racial equity, learn from our experiences and keep pushing the practice forward.

Evaluation in service of racial equity is a practice, not an aside, a checklist, a course or something you do only if the funder wants it. We must engage in a real dialogue about the myths of evaluation that stand in our way, our own biases, our understanding about systems that perpetuate racial inequity and poor community engagement and our actions as evaluators to help create healthy, just and equitable communities.

How do we get there?

As a field, evaluation practitioners need to focus on intentionally breaking down and changing several evaluation-related practices that are especially relevant to racial equity goals. In essence, evaluators have to:

- Go beyond technical tasks and have the knowledge and skills to challenge strategies intended to end disparities in education, health, housing and other areas.
- Engage early in the development and improvement of a strategy so they can raise questions and concerns about *who* is driving the strategy, *with* whom and *for* whom. Funders and organizations typically do not engage evaluators until after their strategies have been developed or are ready for implementation.
- Compel funders and organizations to take the time to define and understand the "community" and be clear about who in that community is supposed to benefit from their strategies.
- Meaningfully and authentically engage the community most impacted by the initiative to learn about their lived experiences and community knowledge, which can guide the practice and use of evaluation.
- Learn about the history of the country, as well as the communities in which they are working to understand—with humility and a systems lens—how past and current institutional structures and policies contribute to power differences and the racial oppression and disparities experienced by people and communities of color today.
- Self-reflect and transform their own thinking and practices. They should also bring in partners with complementary competencies to help respond to the issues and needs that will inevitably arise during the process. This can help them become more connected to relevant fields (e.g., racial justice, organizational development, group facilitation, conflict resolution) to be able to tap into those resources.
- Create an evaluation process to confront and deal with power issues, including differences in power between funders and grantees, between leaders and staff in organizations, between large established and small grassroots organizations and last but not least, among the evaluator, participants and the sponsor or client.

- Design evaluation to use multiple methodologies and studies to assess different types of changes—individual, organization, system and community. Different methods must be used to understand and map complex relationships and connections, identify emerging developments that could facilitate or hinder change and call out intended and unintended outcomes and consequences. This rigorous approach is necessary to assess systems change that can move us toward racial equity. It has to become a *primary* practice in evaluations in service of racial equity. This also means there must be sufficient time, resources and thoughtfulness to coordinate, integrate and make sense of the findings across studies, and use them effectively to improve and move the needle toward racial equity. Too often, funders and organizations don't do this and the knowledge generated by the studies becomes fragmented, diminishing the true value.

- Maximize the use of evaluation by incorporating evaluation into other capacity-building activities. Funders to social justice organizations have to continuously test, improve and learn from strategies to achieve racial equity. Evaluation is often viewed as a threat or something "off to the side." Evaluators alone cannot advocate for use of evaluation findings. Evaluation has to be part of technical assistance, trainings and other capacity-building activities to help communities *and* funders transform findings into usable knowledge. Too often, funders don't invest sufficient resources for the evaluator and other partners to coordinate their efforts or simply leave it to them to "work it out among themselves." This oversight undermines the potential of the evaluation.

None of the above can occur in a vacuum. Evaluations and evaluators are part of an ecosystem of philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, scientist establishments, public agencies, professional associations and the consulting industry—all of which have to do business differently if the practice of evaluation can aid in progress toward racial equity.

How can this series of guides help you as evaluators?

This series of guides, ***Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity,*** is designed to help you exercise your own agency to better use your expertise to achieve racial equity and improve the services you provide your clients and the communities they support. It integrates and further expands on the work of many evaluators who have pushed the envelope through developing new concepts such as multicultural validity, culturally responsive evaluation and equitable evaluation. It also incorporates ideas from systems thinking, organizational development and other fields to help you put evaluation that is in service of racial equity into practice. The series is split into three guides and while they are all connected, they do not need to be read in order, or in full, to be valuable.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

The beliefs and ideas funders, advocates, community leaders, evaluators and others carry that can make everyone anxious and apprehensive about practicing evaluations for this purpose.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

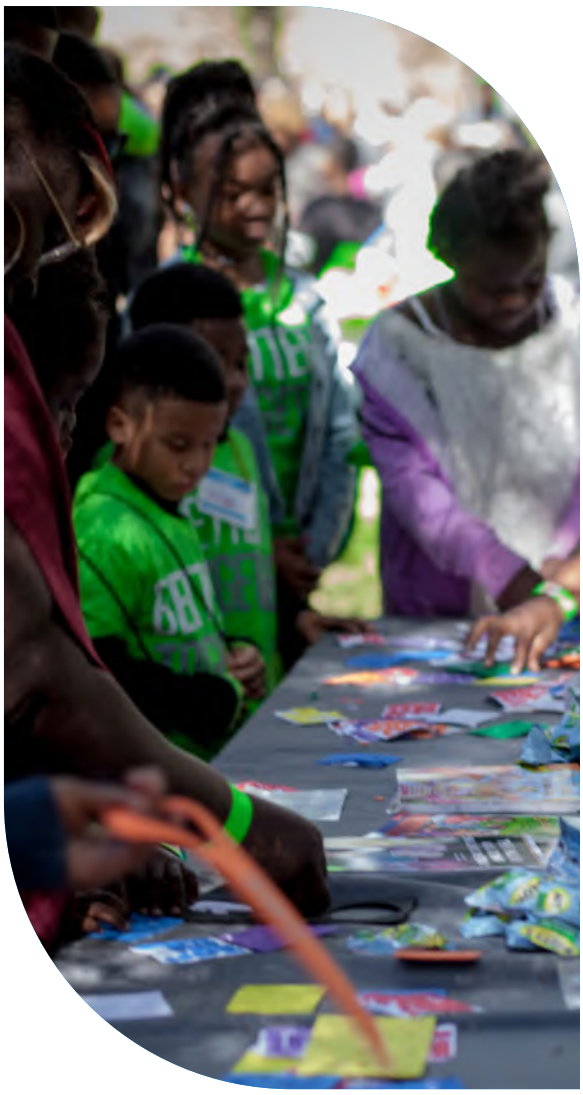
Implicit biases that influence evaluation practice and evaluators' understanding of systems and the use of a systems lens in evaluations.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

Responsible, responsive and genuine engagement of communities in the evaluation process and as an outcome in evaluation.

For some the background may seem obvious or rudimentary, especially if you understand structural racism and/or you have experienced racial discrimination. For others, there might be new information and suggestions that can lead to different insights, especially if you have limited understanding about structural racism and/or have never experienced racial discrimination.



This series as a whole:

- Presupposes that evaluation can be used to advance racial equity without diminishing scientific merit.
    - If you don't believe you have a responsibility to use evaluation to promote racial equity and social justice, you could undermine and even harm communities.
- Represents work in progress while reflecting the current state of the field.
    - Evaluation continues to evolve in response to the U.S. political and social climate.
    - Evaluators continue to exercise their agency, work to embed evaluation into strategy and be honest with themselves, their peers and their clients about how everyone can change the way they go about the business of evaluation.
- Uses the terms *people* and *communities of color* for consistency to refer to the collective of people who identify as African Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Indigenous, Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.
    - This term, along with others such as BIPOC (Blacks, Indigenous and Other People of Color) and Latinx have their own meaning in specific contexts, and it is not the task of this guide to determine which term is correct in which instance.
- Is written by real people who bring their expertise, passion and lived experiences to their work.
    - You'll find technical information as well as expressions of the writers' convictions about evaluation along with personal accounts of their experiences. .

The time to act is now, while individuals and organizations are eager to learn and open to making positive changes toward racial equity, and while our country works toward healing and recovering from the pandemic and civil unrest.

Practice Guide
Doing evaluation in service of racial equity: Deepen community engagement

Why focus on engagement?

The term community engagement is so easy to say. The term connects people with each other, and it seems so simple, so natural and so human. We place the term community engagement before a convening, meeting or act as a symbol of our good intentions (Chavis & Lee, 2015). It conjures images of neighbors making and delivering food to vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, people of color advocating for equitable treatment of young Black men and residents at a county council meeting expressing their concerns about the lack of healthy and fresh food in the community. It is so common a term that we almost never define it or explain what we mean by it.

When left undefined and not operationalized, the notion of "community engagement" in evaluation ranges from engaging grantees to surveying community members and using them to help collect data and discussing the results. There are challenges.

- The amount of time it requires to engage community is not aligned with expectations of funders and organizations that are implementing the initiative.
- The support to enable the evaluator, funder, nonprofit and community leaders and other partners in the work to engage with each other in an authentic and meaningful way is seldom addressed.
- The status quo for how community members are involved in decisions that influence their lives is rarely changed.

In this practice guide, we'll explore these challenges and learn how to go beyond asking community members for input and involving them in data collection and interpretation, to make sure community members are treated justly both in the evaluation and in the initiative. It is organized into four sections:

1. Meaning of community engagement.
2. Definition of community and ways to learn more about community.
3. Operationalization of engagement in service of racial equity.
4. Common types of choices and decisions that evaluators encounter when supporting community engagement.

A few things to know before you continue reading:

- The term ***community*** in this guide refers to the community that is most impacted and supposed to benefit from the initiative being evaluated and does not refer only to a physical place. (What community is will be described in Section 2.)
- The term ***community members*** used in this document refers to both community leaders and community members who should be involved in the evaluation. The distinct roles of community leaders and community members are important, but it is beyond the scope of this guide to discuss this in detail. Only in one section of the guide is the distinction described to make a point about the way a community is organized to support the members who are part of the community.
- The phrase ***funders and organizations*** refers to the philanthropic institutions, government agencies and nonprofit organizations that fund and implement the initiative being evaluated.

Section 1:
Meaning of community engagement

Evaluators who intentionally use evaluation to advance racial equity are responsible for making sure that community members most affected by the work that is being funded and evaluated are involved in the evaluation, which should contribute to the members' ability to influence decisions that affect their access to resources and opportunities and their fair and just treatment by those in power.

In an evaluation to advance racial equity, evaluators also work to ensure that the community members' interests and priorities are in the forefront of funders', organizations' and policymakers' agendas. This responsibility is crucial in two situations: Where the funder has been and continues to fund the organizations that don't have deep roots in the community, but know how to write compelling proposals and have a long-standing relationship with the funder; and where the organization that does not have deep roots in the community continues to "represent" the community.

In evaluations in service of racial equity, community engagement goes beyond getting community members' input and lifting up their voices, by contributing to their ability to influence decisions that affect their access to resources and opportunities and their fair and just treatment by those in power.

This is meaningful community engagement (that is, responsible, responsive and genuine engagement without tokenizing community members) and it goes beyond how community engagement in evaluation is typically practiced.

Evaluators wanting to do evaluation in service of racial equity can start by:

- Sharing decisions about the evaluation design and implementation with community members and being explicit about where their power begins and ends.
- Making sure that the initiative's assumptions, approach and strategy are appropriate—in terms of culture, history, capacity and impact—for the community that is supposed to benefit from it.
- Involving the community in framing the problem and determining what success looks like to help align the initiative's assumptions with the strategy and the evaluation.
- Involving the community in interpreting the results to make sure that progress or lack of progress is accurately understood and contextualized, and decisions for improvement are properly informed.
- Ensuring that the community that is supposed to benefit from the initiative are treated with fairness, justice and respect.

For evaluators to create authentic community engagement, they have to be brought into the initiative's core team while the initiative is being designed. If they are brought in after the initiative has been designed, they can—as part of their role and scope of work—assess and document the extent to which community members are involved and work with the funders to improve their community engagement strategy.

Section 2:
Definition of community and ways to learn more about community

As mentioned in the introduction, community is a term and an idea that is thrown around a lot and everyone assumes that everyone else understands what it means. In evaluations in service of racial equity, it is important that evaluators develop a deeper understanding of that community.

Appreciating what community is and isn't

Community is about people and relationships. Community is not a place, a building or an organization, nor is it an exchange of information over the internet. Neighborhoods, companies, schools or places of faith are contexts and environments for community, but they are not communities themselves.

Community is formed when people have relationships with one another based on some sort of connection they feel.

They have a sense that they share a similar history, identity and/or interest and this sense is powerful enough for them to feel connected. This feeling also means people know who is and isn't part of their community, which can lead to a stronger bond among those who are part of the community. However, it can also lead them to exclude, disregard and even mistreat those who are not part of the community.

People form and maintain communities to meet their needs (Chavis & McMillan, 1986; Chavis & Lee, 2015). For instance, Black people have formed relationships and community where they live and beyond based on a sense of their shared history of racial oppression. Therefore, an initiative designed to advocate for just treatment of young Black women and men by law enforcement has to be clear about which "community" is most affected and supposed to benefit—specifically the young Black men who live in a particular city or, more generally, all young Black men and women ages 18-30 who live in the United States. The initiative's approach, strategy and evaluation will have to be different depending on which community is the focus.

Because community is about people and relationships, evaluators (and funders and others who are supporting and implementing the initiative being evaluated) should not assume the following:

- The community is homogenous. It is not, even when it appears so from the outside.
  - On the contrary, a community is made up of more communities because people tend to have multiple social identities and belong to multiple communities at any given time. Therefore, a community is diverse even if it doesn't appear that way from the outside. Think as simply as adding a gender overlay to a community of people of Mexican heritage in Los Angeles, for instance. Men, women and people of other genders might experience the community in different ways, even when they share the same heritage.

What community is

- **Community is about people and relationships.**
- **There are communities within a community.**
- **Community leadership comes in many different forms, both formal and informal.**
- **Communities evolve and change.**

- The community is represented by leaders such as elected officials, executive directors of nonprofit organizations, advocates, neighborhood association presidents and others like them. That is not true; there are informal leaders as well.
  - Community leadership comes in different forms depending on the community members' histories, cultures and experiences. There are both formal and informal leaders in communities, including the people mentioned above as well as people such as the business owner who supports many community events, the older woman who everyone loves and listens to because she is wise, warm and always there for everyone and the spiritual leader (see for example Colby, 2018). Community leadership may not be as diverse as the full community they represent either. There can often be members of a community whose interests are not represented in said leadership.
- The community is static. On the contrary, it is always evolving.
  - Communities evolve and change because relationships are dynamic and also due to a variety of factors that are sometimes within their control (e.g., election of new leaders) and sometimes not (e.g., global and national forces that change the demographics of a community).

Evaluators must go beyond what they see as "community" to develop a deeper understanding of the community most affected by an initiative.

Learning who the community is

Funders and organizations usually determine the communities that their work is supposed to benefit the most, but it is up to the evaluator and other partners helping to implement and evaluate the initiative to learn about that community to appropriately engage the community members. There is no end to how much learning evaluators can do about a community. If we, as evaluators, are learning about a community as we should be, we can articulate things about the community that we didn't know before. We should also find our assumptions about the community being challenged by our new knowledge.

Here are several ways that evaluators can go about learning more about the community that is supposed to benefit from the initiative they are evaluating. These steps do not have to be conducted in a sequential manner; they can be carried out simultaneously and iteratively. Evaluators will have to triangulate the data, especially when there is limited data about the community.

Collect and compile information about the community's demographic makeup and disaggregate the data to the extent possible.

Evaluators should help funders and organizations working on the initiative understand the diversity of the community affected and the "subcommunities" that may be embedded within this community. It is helpful to compile any existing data and study the trends and patterns by race and ethnicity. If it is possible to further disaggregate the race and ethnicity data by additional dimensions such language spoken, country of origin, age, income, gender, disability status and sexual orientation, that would be ideal. However, this is not always possible especially in rural communities where data are limited. If existing data are limited, you can collect the data needed by working with community leaders, conducting a literature review or tapping into local colleges and universities to see if there are studies that have already collected demographic data that they can use.

Identify organizations that serve and support the community and ask them about their constituencies, service recipients and characteristics of groups that make up the community.

Another way to get to know the community is to look up information about the community (e.g., books, the internet, newspapers), which will give you a hint about the groups of people who live there. Either on websites and/or by combining terms that include the "racial/ethnic group" plus "programs" or "services" plus "issues" (and name of the geographic area if it is a place-based initiative), you may be able to identify organizations that provide direct services to particular segments of the community, advocate for concerns of specific groups of people in the community, and support different networks of people in that community in a variety of ways. Editors of newspapers or magazines and hosts of radio stations for communities are excellent sources of information about the community. You could contact these entities to ask them questions such as:

- How would you describe the community you serve or work with—their culture, history and shared values?
- Who do community members turn to for help when they have a question or a concern, besides your organization?
- Are there differences between groups of people in the community and why?
- What issues and concerns have you reported on?

Visit the community if it is located within a physical place.

If the community of interest is based in a physical place, you can identify bridge-builders and community leaders with the help of the funder, grantee, other local organizations and professional networks. Drive around in a community and visit local restaurants, corner stores, convenience stores, barbershops and other local businesses and speak to their owners or managers. Stop by the schools and community centers and speak to the principals and executive directors and frontline staff. Ask them about who is influential in the groups of people they come into contact with. Check out bulletin boards in public places where people advertise for services and look for postings about association meetings, festivals and other types of gatherings. Attend these and speak to the people who organize and host them.

Bridge-builders are people capable of crossing cultural boundaries and helping you learn about the community (Endo, Joh & Yu, 2003). As you work with the bridge-builders, you might want to observe their behaviors (e.g., how they approach and greet different community leaders and residents) and ask them about who has the most knowledge about the community, what the state of relationships are across different groups of people in the community and who the leaders are or where the power resides (Lee, 2007). Ask questions such as:

- Who do community members turn to for help when they have a question or a concern?
- In what ways do people get involved in the community?
- What types of civic institutions are there in the community?
- What issues have brought people together or divided people in the past and present?

Examine data and/or review studies about any racial and ethnic health, education, housing and other disparities and inequities.

These data provide another source of information for further understanding about the community of interest. For example, in a place-based initiative, the data for a particular community could reveal a health disparity between Black people and White people and an even wider health disparity between Indigenous people and White people. This could mean that an initiative designed to benefit Place X must be tailored to the different subcommunities within the larger community of color there. In a national initiative to shift narratives about people of color, the narrative about Native Hawaiians is different from the narrative about Native Americans and Alaska Natives. The narrative about Black women is different from the narrative about Black men. When examining the data, ask questions such as:

- What are the differences between racial and ethnic groups and within each group with regards to their health, education, housing and other outcomes?
- What are the differences in how they are treated?
- What are the factors and root causes contributing to the disparities and inequities (see Practice Guide – Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems)?
- Who are the community leaders and advocates on the issues?
- What challenges have they faced? What progress have they made?

You can then share the information you gather and learn with the funders and organizations involved. It can be used to develop a plan to engage the community around the initiative's theory of change and logic model to check if the strategy is appropriately tailored to the community of interest and the specific groups of people within that community.

Once you have a better understanding about the community most affected by the initiative and their values, traditions, cultures, histories and experiences, you can continue to engage the community members in culturally appropriate ways in the evaluation's design and implementation.

Learning about a community takes time and resources (e.g., staff, travel expenses) and funders, organizations and evaluators have to be prepared to negotiate and arrive at a budget and timeline that are realistic. Trade-offs will be inevitable. For instance, a foundation may not be able to report to the board as scheduled because the evaluator learned about a conflict in the community that could affect the initiative and needed to be explored more carefully before launching the initiative or implementing the evaluation.

Section 3:
Operationalization of engagement in service of racial equity

Evaluators working in service of racial equity have to operationalize what it means to engage the community in a way that moves the community toward developing the power to influence decisions that affect their lives. Engaging the community in this way not only ensures more robust data collection and offers research findings that increase the validity, accuracy and trustworthiness of information, it also ensures that the knowledge generated by the evaluation is accessible and useable to the community (Bowman et al., n.d.).

Exhibit 1 lists questions that evaluators can pose as part of the engagement process throughout the stages of evaluation. Some of these questions come from the "By Us/For Us" framework for engaging and reaching out to Indigenous communities (Bowman et al., n.d.).

Exhibit 1: Illustrative Questions to Ask to Engage Community

Interpretation & Learning	Planning	Implementation
What do you want to learn from the evaluation to help you advocate for more equitable policies and systems?	Are we still adhering to the agreements? Which ones have we been less successful in adhering to and why? What agreements do we need to change?	Do the findings help you and your community advocate for more equitable policies and systems and reduce disparities? Why or why not?
What does change and success look or feel like that will signal progress toward racial equity?	Are there any emerging opportunities and challenges affecting your community that the evaluation could help you tackle? Is there any data the evaluation can provide to assist you?	What is the story to be told? Who should tell it and who should hear it?
How do you want your story to be told to ensure no harm is done to your community, and more importantly, to help change narratives about your community?	Where can the evaluation and we, as the evaluator, do better to support the community and the pursuit of racial equity?	Which parts need to be framed carefully to prevent negative consequences for the community?
What experiences have you had, if any, with past evaluations and what was helpful and not helpful about the evaluations?	Aside from the evaluation, is the initiative supporting the community in the way it was intended? Why or why not?	Which parts of the story can be shared publicly and which can't? Who decides this and when?
What is meaningful involvement to you that does not look or feel like you are being used in a tokenistic way?		What reports or other products based on the evaluation could generate support for your advocacy for racial equity?
What can get in the way of your involvement?		What needs to be improved in the evaluation?

It is important to acknowledge that evaluators' capacity to ask and answer these questions are shaped in part by the funders and organizations that are supporting the initiative. Together, they all dictate and shape the following conditions, which determine the extent and success of the community engagement process:

- Amount of resources available for community engagement as part of the initiative and the evaluation, especially in the beginning of the initiative.
- Length of time for the community engagement process before funders and organizations want to see implementation or process outcomes.
- Mindsets, myths or mental models of the evaluators and partners that are responsible for managing the initiative about the function of evaluation beyond collecting, analyzing and reporting data.
- Facilitation skills of the evaluator.
- Willingness of each party, especially the funder or the organization, to share the power of decision-making with community leaders and grantees.

The evaluation profession and evaluators cannot change the practice of community engagement alone. Funders and organizations who are part of the ecosystem of grantmaking, implementation, capacity-building, research and evaluation and advocacy must be willing to change the way they contract, grant, implement and practice. Only this can truly help implement community-centered initiatives and to put community members in the driver's seat—two increasingly popular and common ideas in initiatives about power-building, racial equity and social justice. Nevertheless, evaluators who want to practice evaluation in service of racial equity have to make choices about how much engagement they can do; these choices are discussed next.

Identifying and working with community leaders, beyond the obvious choices

In evaluations in service of racial equity, it's about more than lifting up community voices and authentic engagement. It's about intentionally going beyond the obvious choices to identify and engage both informal and formal community leaders to help make decisions about the initiative (if the evaluator is brought in before the initiative is designed) and the evaluation. The obvious choices are the go-to people who are noticeable to the outsider, such as executive directors of nonprofit organizations, service providers, elected officials, faith leaders and advocates. While these individuals certainly play a role in the communities they serve, live in or work with, they are not the only community leaders.

There is a layer of community leadership that may not have the formal recognition or public visibility to be in the forefront, but still have influence and more importantly, most likely have deep knowledge about their communities' needs and priorities. These leaders are usually invisible to the outsider yet can be more in touch with a wider range of community members. They include people such as the elder whose wise counsel is frequently sought by community members, the woman trusted by her neighbors because she takes care of their children, the owner of a local corner store that everyone respects because he gives back to the community or the parent who other parents turn to about their concerns with their children's school.

In short, you need to look beyond the apparent layer of leadership to other types of leaders who have deep and real knowledge about their community. Their insights are needed to ensure that the evaluation helps address any unfairness and injustice their members experience. You can also ensure that the funder and organization and other partners in the initiative know about all the leaders in this layer of leadership.

Here are some tips for how to do identify and engage the less apparent, and perhaps more important, layer of community leadership.

Ask the organizations implementing the initiative.

These organizations often have relationships with community leaders as part of a community advisory board, volunteer work or other community engagement structure. They can provide guidance about how the evaluator could learn more about the community.

Understand how communities are organized.

It is highly unlikely that you would invite the entire community to be involved in the evaluation. You must be able to identify and engage the leaders or representatives—who may or may not be part of the organizations funded to do the work, as mentioned before, which also means you have to understand something about how communities are organized to support their members, share information and strengthen their community.

The organization of a community is rooted in the community's history, culture and context. For instance, the church plays a major role in the organization of the Black community as do Black sororities and fraternities. There is historical context for this. The faith leader and the leadership of the sororities and fraternities are often viewed as leaders in Black communities, whether at the national or local level. In Native American and Alaska Native communities, the Tribal Council plays a significant role in governing the tribal community and supporting their members (Bowman et al., n.d.). In these communities as well as in Native Hawaiian communities, elders are considered to have knowledge and wisdom and community members often turn to them for advice and support (Bowman et al., n.d.; Van Tilburg et al., 2017). In immigrant communities, the organization may imitate that of the community's country of origin or, more likely, the organization takes on a hybrid structure that builds on the traditions of their homeland and adapts to fit the "American Way." For example, rotating credit and hometown associations (they have different names depending on their members' country of origin) and cultural groups are prominent in newer immigrant communities where members are working toward economic security while maintaining their culture by passing the traditions on to their youth (Maynard, 2004; Oh, 2007; Wang, n.d.). Leaders of these groups act as resources and leaders for their community members.

The above types of leaders are sometimes obvious to the outsider and sometimes not. They include both formal leaders who are elected or appointed as well as informal leaders who people naturally turn to for help because of their role in the community. These leaders are present at all levels geographically, whether it is the Black community in the United States or the Salvadoran community in Washington, D.C. You can start by inviting the obvious, visible leaders to get involved in the evaluation, while continuing to seek out other informal and perhaps less visible leaders. Examples of these more obvious, visible leaders you can start with include editors of ethnic or local neighborhood newspapers, directors of local nonprofits, directors of offices of racial equity or immigration affairs in local governments, school principals and presidents of neighborhood and civic associations.

Be mindful of the nature of relationships between community leaders and different groups of community members.

It matters who you invite first to ask the question about how the community wants to be involved and how evaluators convene them. Evaluations are political because they are often viewed by the people who participate in them as judges and influencers of whether initiatives are funded or not, and therefore which organizations get funded. In evaluations in service of racial equity, the political nature of the evaluations is even more pronounced because there is a lot at stake for communities of color. Therefore, it matters a great deal who gets invited to have a say in the evaluation, when and how.

You might be working in communities with close-knit networks. You can be perceived as "taking sides" or preferring one community over another if word gets out that you are engaging with one group before another. This is especially important to keep in mind if you happen to share the same racial and ethnic background as one of the communities or you are from the same community.

Evaluators who want to practice evaluations in service of racial equity need to self-reflect on their own worldviews, explore their own implicit biases about people who share and don't share their racial and ethnic identities and be mindful of how others perceive them—as educated professionals and also based on their race, ethnicity and other obvious demographic characteristics.

You also have to be mindful about who you are working for or contracted by because your affiliation with the funder or organization can affect people's perceptions and assumptions about them. If community members are skeptical about the funder or organization, you have to explore why they feel this way and be honest with the funder or organization about what you learned. You also must be careful not to replicate the funder or organization's practices that contribute to the community members' skepticism, be transparent with community members about the purpose of the evaluation, and ensure that community members are meaningfully engaged in the evaluation.

While evaluators are not responsible for repairing the relationship between the funder or organization and community members, they are responsible for ensuring that the evaluation provides information that could improve the relationship and more important, not do further harm.

Engaging community means building community capacity to use data for advocacy

Community capacity—knowledge, skills, resources, relationships and commitment—to use data for advocacy is a critical element of racial equity work. Organizations that represent communities of color range from large established national institutions to smaller emerging organizations and grassroots volunteer groups that work at different levels of geography. The latter may have little to no exposure to evaluation and the use of data and findings for advocacy. Evaluations in service of racial equity need to consider this limitation and work with the funder and other partners implementing the evaluation to integrate community capacity-building into the initiative supports. Here are some suggestions.

Make evaluation useful and not a mystery.

Evaluators have a tendency to use jargon and mystify evaluation by using technical concepts and terms to describe scientific rigor and the methods they use. This leaves community members with the impression that evaluations can only be done by people with doctoral degrees and/or people who are considered "experts." In conducting evaluation in service of racial equity, you have to do what you can to prevent or change this impression and show how you value community members' knowledge and experiences by focusing on the community's equity concerns while using approachable language.

Build in time to educate and train community members about data and evaluation.

There are perceptions among some community members that data reflect white supremacy values and their use diminishes progress toward racial equity. The problem is not data, it is the ways in which data are misused—deliberately or not—to hinder or facilitate racial equity. Data can be equally used to defend and safeguard actions toward racial equity. (The Practice Guide – Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths discusses myths about evaluation that can get in the way of racial equity.) Evaluators who are committed to using evaluation to advance racial equity can build in time during the process to help community members understand the strengths and limitations of the data, including:

- Who makes up the sample for the evaluation and how representative is the sample.
- What data collection methods were used that are familiar to the cultures of community members.
- What can and cannot be generalized and concluded from the data.
- What circumstances surrounded the time when the data were collected that might have affected the responses. For example, rates of a health condition may appear to "spike" during a particular time period. The spike could suggest an actual increase in the health condition or perhaps just an increase in the reporting of the condition due to a change in health policy or research practice. That's why it is important to ask if there were any major policy changes, demographic shifts or major events that influenced data collection during the time the data were collected.

Methods of Engagement

Now that you understand more about community, how to learn about the community's members and what it means to engage community members in a way that supports racial equity, let's discuss the methods for engagement.

A partnership between the evaluator, community leaders, funder and organization and other stakeholders that is focused on using the evaluation for collective learning and strategy improvement.

One way to involve community leaders in the evaluation is to establish partnership with them that focuses on making the evaluation culturally appropriate, useful and intentional about supporting progress toward racial equity. You could use this partnership to determine:

- Whether the methods are culturally appropriate.
- How the rest of the community might perceive the evaluation in relation to the initiative.
- How community members might receive the findings and potential use for the findings.
- Ways to communicate the findings beyond the community to ensure no harm comes from sharing them.

The learning partnership can be informal or formal. Most important, you want to be intentional about including and addressing the following as you establish the learning partnership:

- Clear criteria for selecting partnership members.
- A diverse group of people that is representative of the community's demographic make-up.
- Clear expectations about roles, activities and timelines.
- Clear process for decision-making.
- Time and space to facilitate relationship and trust-building among the participants.
- Fair compensation for their time and removal of any barriers to their participation (e.g., meetings outside traditional working hours if their participation cannot be part of their daytime job, language assistance, child care, etc.).

Large- and small-group discussions about the pathway of change.

Funders and organizations have their idea about the type of change they want to see and how the change occurs, but community members are the ones who have the lived experiences to know what it takes to achieve that change and what amount and type of change are feasible. You can engage community members directly to discuss the change process, or you can work with grantees to do this, depending on the circumstances (e.g., your proximity to the community of interest, the cultural appropriateness of you doing it directly, etc.).

Keep in mind that community members have responsibilities that might make it hard for them to attend a two- to three-hour meeting during the day, and you can consider conducting this discussion in the evening or on a weekend to accommodate these important conversations. If you choose to meet virtually, you must make sure that everyone has sufficient digital access and knows how to use the technology. You also need to consider language needs, in which case you can use simultaneous interpretation equipment or conduct separate discussions in a different language entirely.

During the discussions, it is important that you:

- Take the time to share your worldview about evaluation, what it means to use it in service of racial equity and how you plan to do this. Don't just talk about the importance of doing it, emphasize how (i.e., what you will do).
- Use approachable language. Don't use evaluation jargon (e.g., outputs, immediate outcomes and intermediate outcomes). You can use the questions suggested below to start. You can also invite participants to stop the use of jargon and ask for explanations in real time.
- Be prepared for push back because of any negative perceptions or experience the community members have had with evaluation in the past. You can ask the community members about their experiences, what made them negative and what a positive experience with evaluation would feel and look like.

There are a few ways you can invite community members to describe the pathway of change, including:

- You can provide them information about the inputs and the general outcomes desired, and then ask them—as an exercise—to write an article for the local newspaper about what happened, what specifically changed as a result of the initiative and how. You can do this exercise in small groups, see what each group comes up with, facilitate a large-group discussion about where the groups are similar in their views and expectations and where they are different and help build consensus about the final pathway of change that makes sense for their community.
- You can ask them the following questions to guide the discussion and development of a pathway of change:
  - Given the resources you have for the initiative, what do you expect to be different immediately? How will you know there is a difference? What will you see, hear or experience that tells you there is a difference?
  - What do you expect to be different after the initiative has been going on for more than a year? How will you know there is a difference?
  - Do you think there will be more or less fairness and justice for your community or certain groups of people in your community? Why do you think that? What does more or less fairness and justice look or feel like?
  - What do you think will help facilitate the work to get to that difference you just described? What could stand in the way of making that difference?
  - What do you think are the strengths in your community that can be leveraged to help make that difference? Where do you think you could use some more help?

Assistance with data collection.

It is not uncommon for evaluators to engage community members by asking them to help with data collection. Don't ask community members to help you collect data simply for the sake of doing it because it's cheaper, it's better for optics and/or you can't easily enter the community yourself. If you are going to engage the community in data collection be sure to ask yourself: **what's in it for them, not what's it in for me?** To do this type of engagement in service of racial equity you should also pay and train the community members for their efforts in data collection. (You should also consider paying community members for their time to advise or engage in the evaluation.) In addition, remember to put trainings in place that take into account the schedules and needs of community members. Perhaps that means running trainings on Saturdays and providing child care. At the same time, you have to make sure that asking community members to help you collect data does not put them in harm's way when they are going house-to-house to administer a survey or if others perceive them to have privilege and power by working with the evaluator. You need to provide them with adequate training and tools to collect quality data, navigate interpersonal relationships, maintain confidentiality and stay safe.

Large- and small-group discussions about the findings.

It is equally important to involve community members in the interpretation of the findings because they will have better insights into what was going on in the community or larger context that affected the outcomes, and they can validate the outcomes and trends. You can do any of the following to engage them:

- Present the findings and facilitate a discussion with the community members, using guiding questions such as:
  - What surprised you about the findings? What didn't? Why?
  - Are there other changes—positive or negative—that the initiative contributed to that are not captured in these findings? How do you know that the changes are connected to the initiative?
  - What events, circumstances and other forces might have affected or shaped the outcomes?
  - Do you think the initiative has helped make things more equitable and for who specifically? Why or why not?
- Share the findings with them and ask them, in small groups, to interpret, write or narrate the story of what happened. You will learn about which findings are important to the different participants—and how the findings are interpreted—based on what they emphasize in their stories. Their stories can also validate what you found as well as correct or sharpen any of the findings and interpretation of the findings.

Effective facilitation is essential

In all the activities described to engage community, you will notice that effective facilitation is key. If you have training and experience in facilitation, then you can incorporate the facilitation easily and naturally into the evaluation. However, if you don't, you might want to find a skilled partner for these tasks.

What is effective facilitation with racial equity in mind? There are many resources out there, especially about facilitating effective meetings. In addition to the advice offered by these resources, evaluators need to consider issues specific to privilege and power among the participants because of their race, gender, other demographic attributes and position in their organizations and/or communities. This guide does not go into detail about how to become an effective facilitator, but we've included resources at the end. For effective facilitation that keeps racial equity in mind, make sure your facilitation:

- Applies adult learning principles.
- Uses dialogue as the foundation for communication, which is more structured than conversation but less structured and adversarial than discussion or debate—it seeks to build understanding and supports inquiry, rather than advocacy for one's agenda or ideas.
- Has clear purpose and key takeaways for participants and is transparent about the process.
- Builds empathy to enable participants to see things from another person's perspective.
- Understands who the participants are that have privilege and power and gives them specific roles during the discussions to manage their influence (e.g., "observer" or "sounding board" that you can check in with during breaks).
- Has tactics to respond to language or behaviors that suggest racial and other forms of bias (e.g., call for a break and speak to the person separately, pause the discussion and address how the words or behaviors made others feel).
- Uses a cross-racial team of facilitators.

Section 4:
Decisions and choice points you will likely encounter

When you involve community members in the evaluation, there are certain types of choices and decisions you will encounter and have to make. While they pertain to different situations, they all have a common element. You will inevitably have to decide:

- How much time and resources you have to truly engage the community—within and beyond the budget you have for the evaluation.
- How and when to push back on the funder and organization if the budget and timeline do not allow for authentic community engagement.
- What trade-offs you have to make and communicate to the funder if the community cannot be engaged to the extent desired.
- Where your boundaries are in terms of your personal investment in the process and in the community.

Here are some example situations.

Community members you speak to and involve in the evaluation are disappointed, even upset, about the initiative and how funders' or implementing organizations' promise of change for racial equity and social justice is seldom kept.

It is common for community members to perceive you as an extension of the funder or organization or as having the ear of the funder or organization, and to share their feelings with you about the initiative and the funder. If you are perceived as a community member because of your race, ethnicity or cultural background, they may be even more open and direct and expect you to advocate on their behalf. You may hear these sentiments when you are introducing yourself, during data collection and during discussions about the pathway of change and the evaluation findings. As an evaluator committed to racial equity and using the evaluation as a way to help advance racial equity, you cannot ignore their concerns.

What you can do

You have to decide how much risk you are willing to take to push the conversation, especially if the funder or organization may not be open to criticism. You can do the following (none of the suggestions are mutually exclusive):

- Ask the community members if they have shared their concerns with the funder or implementing organization. If they have, you have to decide what you can do to amplify their concerns. If they haven't, you have to determine if the community members are willing to meet with the funder or organization to discuss their concerns, and how you could broker the connection.
- Raise this issue with the organization from the start, without revealing the community members' identities unless you have permission to do so, and discuss what will be different this time compared to the past.
- Query and, if necessary, challenge the funder or organization's involvement of community in the initiative.
- Use the evaluation as a tool to continuously and explicitly ask how the findings and knowledge generated are used to make improvements, not only in the initiative but in the relationship and interactions between the funder or organization and community members.
- Support the community members in their use of data to support their concerns and advocate for their community.
- Check yourself and make sure you have all the information necessary to facilitate the tension among all the parties, and where your own implicit biases about the funder, organization or community might be affecting your response.

After receiving a grant, community members share priorities and issues of concern that the funder may not be interested in, or even opposed to, supporting for a variety of reasons.

We have all encountered situations like this example: The funder's priority is prevention of teen pregnancy. When you conduct discussions with community members to understand their activities and progress to prevent teen pregnancy, the members tell you they are most concerned about the lack of quality prenatal care for Black mothers, regardless of the mothers' ages. While they understand the importance of pregnancy prevention, the immediate problem is the high rate of maternal illnesses among mothers in their community. What should you do as a practitioner of evaluation in service of racial equity? On one hand, the funder has been clear about what their priorities are and what they are not open to funding; on the other hand, the rate of maternal illnesses in this community has steadily increased in the past five years and the community needs funds and technical assistance to address this racial disparity.

What you can do

You have to decide how far to "push" the issue and do the following:

- Help the funder understand the importance of responding to the community's needs to build relationships and trust as part of supporting equitable change.
- Do some initial homework to understand the root causes for the increasing rate of maternal illnesses and help the funder connect the dots between teen pregnancy, maternal illnesses and the root causes so they can see how they might support the community within their funding and other priorities.
- Help the funder reassess their funding and selection criteria and grant expectations, especially if the funder intends to fund another cohort of grantees.

Influential community members consistently dominate discussions and offer opinions about the evaluation outside the discussions, and other members tend to stay quiet or are less insistent about their ideas.

There are several considerations to weigh in this type of situation, including:

- If the dominant community members have more power and where their power is coming from.
- Whether there are cultural differences—based on race and ethnicity, gender, language or age, for example—as well as biases of different types (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia) among the community members that impact how they express themselves in group discussions.
- Their perception of you, both in terms of your demographic attributes and your role as the evaluator, and how that might affect their responses to your questions.
- The way you set up, structure, facilitate and document the discussions that could enable this behavior.

What you can do

Take time to better understand the people and what shapes their interactions with you and each other, and then you can decide how to respond to the dominant community members to help them become aware of their behavior, to mitigate the risk of upsetting them, to solicit their help in encouraging others to speak up—and intentionally create space for other members to share their feedback and ideas. You may have to spend more time with the less vocal people outside of large-group discussions to understand their perspectives. You also can make more informed decisions about how to restructure and facilitate the discussions more effectively, including bringing in another person to facilitate, so you can participate more freely as the evaluator instead of as both the evaluator and facilitator.

The community has capacity needs other than the capacity to use data.

You may be working with community members to develop the pathway of change or discuss the use of data for a health equity initiative, and learn that the community struggles with advocating for systems and policy change. This capacity is important for the community to be able to ensure that their members have fair access to resources and opportunities.

What you can do

It is beyond your scope of work and capabilities to assist the community in this regard, but you can discuss this limitation with the funder or implementing organization to explore what resources, technical assistance or training can be offered to the community to build their advocacy capacity. You also might want to help the funder or organization connect the collection and use of data to advocacy.

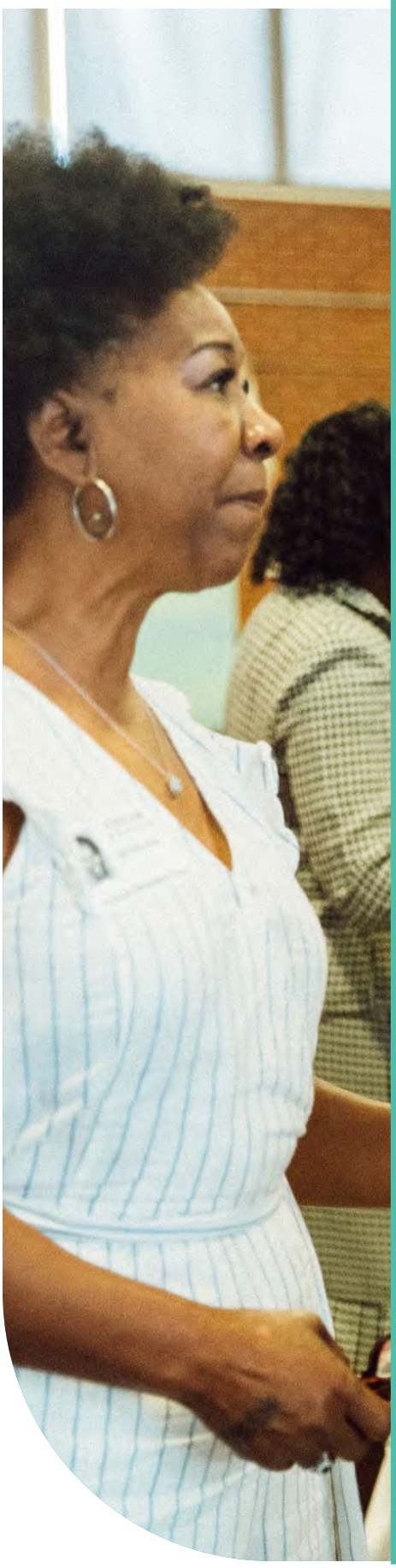
Elected leaders, public agency staff and other people who make decisions that affect the community perceive the community as lacking in strengths and assets, and use language that suggests only deficits in the community. This is especially common for low-income communities of color.

Studies show that community members frequently self-organize to support their members, resulting in informal and formal support networks to leverage the members' social capital and the community's strengths and assets (Felton & Shinn, 1992; Griffiths et al., 2009; Yeh et al., 2015). Often, the myth that communities of color have problems carries an implicit implication that people of color have to be "fixed" and are not capable of co-creating solutions that work for them.

What you can do

When you are conducting the evaluation, you have to call out language that suggests people of color as problems even if it causes friction and approach it as a learning moment for everyone about why the implication is inaccurate, how recognizing and understanding the community's assets and strengths can provide a foundation from which to design an effective intervention and evaluation and that the goal is to fix the system and not the people.

Engage communities to define the problem and fix the systems that are not working for them, not to fix the people who live in them.



A story for your reflection

Our organization was conducting a workshop about data collection and analysis for a group of nonprofit organizations that work in a city whose residents are majority Black. We were in the middle of discussing ways to engage community members in the evaluation. A popular method is to recruit people from the community to help collect data, especially in communities that tend to be suspicious of outsiders. Then, two people shared that while they understand the importance of having data collectors that share the same racial traits as the community, they have found it difficult to hire any Black researchers who are qualified. For studies they recently conducted, they advertised in the local universities' news bulletins and worked with faculty members they know to help identify Black students who might be interested and have the skills to administer a survey.

They managed to hire six Black undergraduate students to administer a survey in one of the neighborhoods in the hope that the students, being of the same race as the residents there, could convince people to complete the survey. According to the people who recruited the students, it was a disappointing experience because the students did not follow instructions and were unable to get the response rate they had expected. They simply can't find any good researchers of color, they said. At this point, several other Black participants in the workshop looked like they were upset and one person got up and left the workshop.

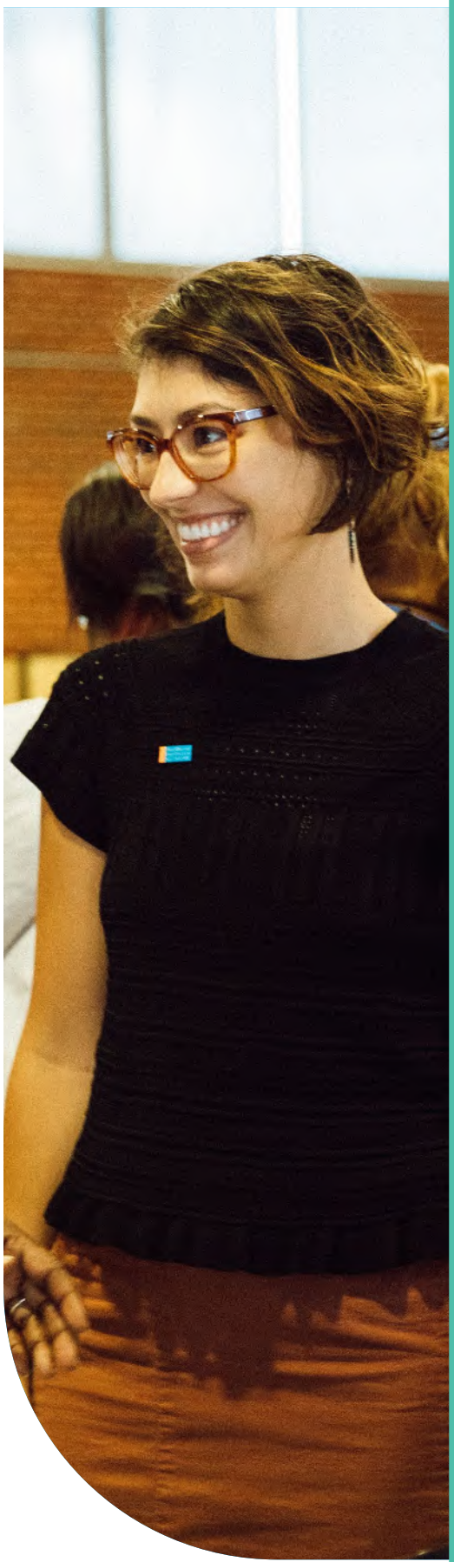
- What underlying assumptions and narratives are operating here?
- What criteria should be communicated in the recruitment of researchers to help with the data collection? Why?
- What training, feedback and other support should be provided to the people helping collect data, regardless of how much experience they have?
- What considerations need to be discussed with them about potential challenges and solutions?
- What would you have done if you encountered such a situation?
- Would you be comfortable or uncomfortable in that situation? Why?
- What additional skills, knowledge and tools do you think you'd need to respond to such a situation if you encounter it in the future?
- What skills, knowledge or tools you wish you had if you encountered such a situation before?

Take the perspective of the community members and see the "whole," find ways to build relationships, contribute to the community, connect the dots and weave a story that respects the community's histories and contexts.

While you have a scope of work and a budget for the evaluation, you are also working with a community of people that is made up of relationships. The budget most likely did not account for time to get to know people, reading or listening to news that is relevant to the community but not necessarily directly related to the intervention or evaluation and assisting the community with any matters that come up naturally and may have nothing to do with the evaluation.

What you can do

You have to make a choice about how far you are willing to go to take the perspective of the community members about what they want from the evaluation, build relationships and care for the community, which takes time and resources. This could include challenging the funder and their investment in the evaluation, or deciding that the evaluation is not worth doing because you can't tell a complete story. At the same time, you also have to take care of yourself and, if you work for a company, comply with the company's policies and practices. Where the boundaries are for you and/or your company and how much you are willing to take the perspective of the community are questions you'd have to answer.



Story for your reflection

Our organization conducted a study, funded by the local government, to evaluate an initiative to address day labor in the county. The day labor issue was especially contentious because day laborers tend to gather near a park, adjacent to an affluent residential area. We invited and convened several day laborers, neighborhood and civic leaders, advocates and legal counselors working with immigrants including undocumented immigrants and local government staff, to form a committee to guide the evaluation. We implemented several strategies to deal with the power differences in the meetings:

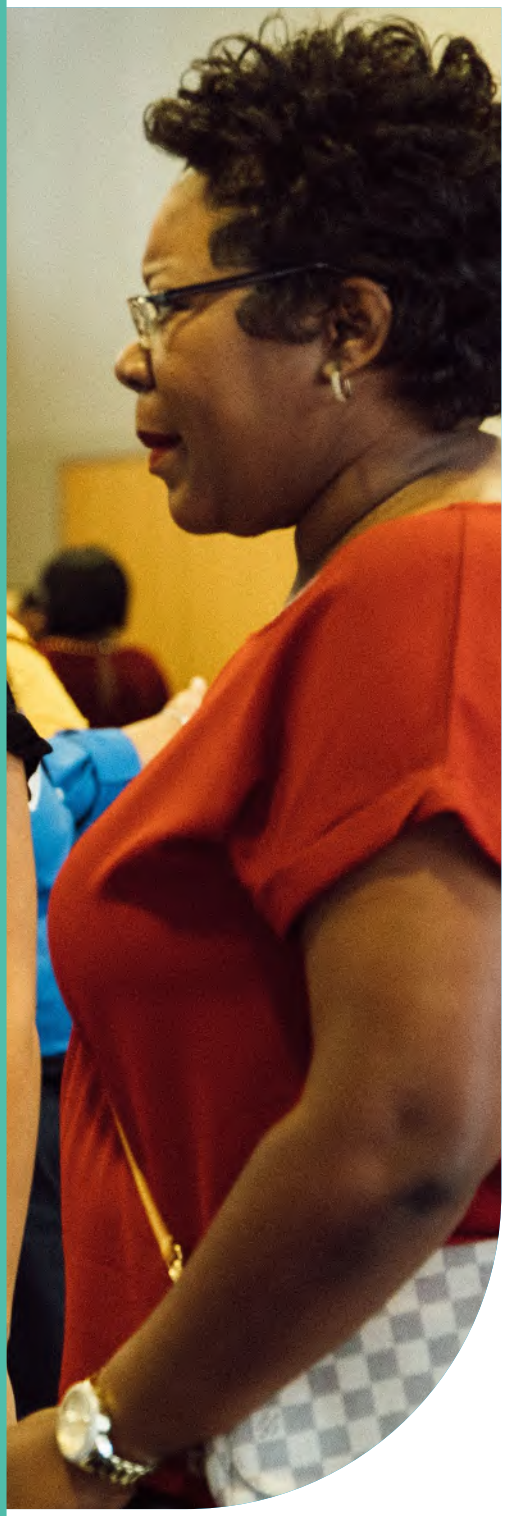
- The number of day laborers in the meeting was equal to the number of all the other participants to help increase the confidence of the day laborers to speak up.
- Each meeting was split into two parts—the first half was conducted in English and the monolingual Spanish-speaking participants used simultaneous interpretation equipment, and the second half was conducted in Spanish and this time, the monolingual English-speaking participants used simultaneous interpretation. (The second half did not duplicate the first half of the meeting.)
- The facilitators spoke either English or both English and Spanish fluently.
- We took time before each meeting to go through the agenda with the day laborers, prepare them to participate in the meeting and address any questions or concerns they had before each meeting. This was especially important because sitting down at the same table with government personnel was not an experience the day laborers had in their home countries or here in the U.S.
- We also took time to prepare the other participants and made sure that they understood the ground rules to address any implicit biases and demonstration of power that could have come up during the meetings.
- We were mindful to break down evaluation-related terms and discuss how the information shared during the meetings and generated by the evaluation would be used.

After a few meetings, the day laborers decided they needed to organize and appoint leaders from their community to represent them. By this time, we got to know the day laborers, many who were professionals in their home countries (e.g., physicians, engineers) and are now doing construction work. We learned about their hardships, the families they left behind and their perceptions of American culture. Our team made the decision to meet with the day laborers in the evenings to discuss their options for organizing and developing the leadership needed to interact with the local government and neighborhood leaders. An attorney who provided legal services to immigrants also volunteered to work with the group.

In response, one of the local government staff people contacted our team to let us know that the contract did not have sufficient funds for these "extra" meetings and we were going beyond the scope of our work. She was upset that we didn't inform her about these meetings. We made it clear that hours for the meetings in the evening were not charged to the contract at all; we were volunteering our time, much to the local government staff person's disbelief.

We believe the relationship-building we did with the day laborers helped us better understand their community, which would help us do a better evaluation.

- How would you have responded to the day laborers' wish to organize?
- How would you have responded to the local government's concern?
- What skills, knowledge and tools do you think you'd need to respond to such a situation if you encounter it?
- What skills, knowledge or tools do you wish you'd had if you encountered a similar situation before?



Conclusion

Community engagement is a prevalent concept and practice that many people buy into, no matter if they are the funder, program manager, technical assistance provider or evaluator. Funders, evaluators and other stakeholders have to be brought into the idea that effective community engagement isn't just the right thing to do, it actually enables leaders to make better decisions and improvements in approaches, strategies and actions. The challenge lies in the details of the community engagement process: Who are the community and subcommunities, who are the leaders, what are culturally appropriate ways to engage the community members, etc. It is not just about including some community members in a meeting, lifting up their voices in reports with the use of quotes or inviting them to present their work to funders during board meetings or site visits. Evaluators who practice evaluation in service of racial equity must attend to the details of community engagement, in spite of the amount of time and cost, because it leads to higher-quality data. This quality is essential to inform decisions that affect the lives of people who have been historically excluded and oppressed, and to facilitate progress toward racial equity. The investment in building relationships and engaging community members also leads to a more transformational use of the data for advocacy and change.

If we truly want racial equity, it's time to stop referring to community and discussing engagement in general terms. We need to get specific and commit to the communities we work in and with.

Resources

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Knowles, M. (1984). *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning.* Jossey-Bass

Lora, K. (2011). Keys to effective facilitation. Paper presented at Project Management Institute (PMI) Global Congress 2011—North America.

Training and Web-based Resources

AORTA, a worker-owned cooperative devoted to strengthening movements for social justice and a solidarity economy. https://aorta.coop

Center for Equity & Inclusion. The CEI Equity Facilitation Intensive is an opportunity to foster personal growth and develop the facilitation skillset needed to lead complex and often challenging conversations, trainings or coaching sessions. https://ceipdx.org/facilitator-intensive/

Community Tool Box, Developing Facilitation Skills (including political discussions)
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/group-facilitation/facilitation-skills/main
https://ctb.ku.edu/sites/default/files/chapter_files/facilitating_political_dialogues_workshop.pdf

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PRACTICE GUIDE SERIES

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity

Diagnose Biases and Systems

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Contents

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity : Diagnose Biases and Systems

To our readers

From our earliest days, our founder W.K. Kellogg articulated a formula for change that relies on the leadership and authentic engagement of local community members. As he wrote, "...it is only through cooperative planning, intelligent study, and group action – activities on the part of the entire community – that lasting result can be achieved." This formula paired with a resolute commitment to eliminate racism's enduring effect on the lives of children, families and communities, guides how we support and work alongside grantees.

Although this commitment to racial equity began decades ago, it was not until 2007 that the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) board of trustees committed us to becoming an anti-racist organization. That explicit directive accelerated efforts to examine every aspect of operations and grantmaking from that perspective. In that effort under the leadership of WKKF President and CEO, La June Montgomery Tabron, we identified and named racial equity and racial healing, leadership development and community engagement as our "DNA"–approaches so essential that they are embedded in every aspect of the Kellogg Foundation's work.

In evaluation, the seeds for that were planted decades ago. For example, the Kellogg Foundation funded the American Evaluation Association's Building Diversity Initiative in 1999, explicitly focusing on diversifying the evaluator pipeline and promoting culturally competent evaluation practices. Today, the foundation again finds ourselves leading the field in moving beyond culturally competent evaluations to equitable evaluation (i.e., using evaluation as a tool to shine light on racial inequity and social injustice, and to improve solutions that create a world in which every child thrives).

Practicing equitable evaluation is not, cannot and should not be only for evaluators of color. As a group of professionals, we all bear the responsibility and obligation to do so. In May 2020, the world witnessed George Floyd's appalling murder. Together, people worldwide joined throngs of demonstrators marching in solidarity for a common humanity and calling for leadership and justice on behalf of one man and many others senselessly taken by police violence. As an evaluator, I believe evaluation can be a tool to promote democracy and advance equity. Equitable evaluation can render power to the powerless, offer voice to the silenced and give presence to those treated as invisible. The tools we employ–authentic data collection, analysis, reporting, learning and reflection–can debunk false narratives, challenge biases, expose disparities, raise awareness, level the playing field and reveal truths for measurable positive progress in our society.

As evaluators of color, we have been grappling with how to go beyond the rhetoric of why evaluation currently is not helping to advance racial equity to actual practice. We struggle with questions such as: "Should evaluation be value-free and agenda-free?" "Do our own lived experiences, values and cultures have a place in our evaluation practice?" "How do we bring our whole selves to our work – our intellect, our passion and our histories?" Moreover, we wonder how evaluation can authentically facilitate the advancement of racial equity–so the stories of communities of color are fully told and understood, so the solutions emerge as truly their own.

Every day, we find ourselves asking more questions, pivoting our thinking, wrestling to demystify technical jargon and quite honestly, sometimes wishing we were doing something else, especially on days when we must defend our stance, expertise and identities. "How to" is emerging as something we need to develop so the community of evaluation professionals and evaluation consumers will review, peruse, use, critique, refine, revise and enhance the content of practice guides, all in service of achieving racial equity. With such context and background, this series is produced.

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity consists of 3 practical guides for evaluation professionals who want to do this important work and/or who want to better understand it. Rather than debating the value of evaluation in service of racial equity, we are offering a way forward. We do not pretend to have all the answers. However, we hope this series takes some of the mystery out of evaluation practice and shows how to authentically use evaluation to advance racial equity. There is no single tool, framework or checklist that will transform someone into a practitioner of this type of evaluation. It requires lifelong commitment to self-reflection and learning, as well as racially equitable solutions to change deep-rooted racist systems. This guide aims to show **how** to incorporate this core value and alignment into the evaluation practice.

There are three guides in this series, and this is **Guide #2:**

Guide #1:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

Guide #2:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Guide #3:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

We are grateful for Kien Lee, Principal Associate of Community Science, for her leadership in developing and writing this series of practice guides, with support from other Community Science staff. We would like to thank the following individuals for their insightful reviews and feedback in revising the content: Holly Avey, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Nicole Bowman, Bowman Performance Consulting; Elvis Fraser, Sankofa Consulting; Melvin Hall, Northern Arizona University; Cynthia Silva Parker, Interactions Institute for Social Change; Daniela Pineda, Informed Insight; and Courtney Ricci, The Colorado Trust.

We would also like to thank WKKF colleagues on the evaluation, communications and racial equity teams for their roles in fine-tuning and finalizing the guides.

We welcome you, our readers, to share your comments and suggestions in making the guides the most useful for evaluation practitioners in our collective pursuit of **Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity.**

Huilan Krenn, Ph.D.
Director of Learning & Impact
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

November 2021

Evaluation and racial equity: How did we get here?

What was happening in our country and in the world when we began writing this series?

When we started writing this series of guides about evaluation in service of racial equity, the world was experiencing a major public health crisis and much of the United States was facing civil unrest in response to police brutality. These events highlighted the existing cracks in our communities and in our country along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, making them visible to many White Americans who had previously ignored, dismissed, minimized or denied their existence. The unrest, coupled with the disproportional impact of COVID-19 on Native Americans, Blacks and Latinos made it more difficult for people to remain ignorant or tolerant of racism. It became clear that certain groups of people, because of their skin color, limited education, immigration status or other traits, are still subject to a kind of oppression that denies them fair and just access to opportunities and resources that enable them to thrive. In certain cases, the opportunity to simply survive is not even available.

Suddenly, organizations and corporations were in search of strategies for increasing their own diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Age-old symbols of white supremacy (e.g., Confederate flags, public statues of Confederate generals and sports team mascots that promote harmful stereotypes of Native people) were being eliminated. Terms such as "white fragility," "white privilege," "anti-Blackness," "unconscious bias," "allies" and even "systemic racism," exploded into mainstream news. We recognize these issues have existed for generations. However, many people were recognizing them for the first time as they were no longer able to remain ignorant of their presence.

This context is relevant to evaluation. Evaluation at its best should generate knowledge, and knowledge—when made accessible to people who have been oppressed—contributes to their ability to make change. Evaluation also is used to:

- Judge the merit of an intervention.
- Determine whether the intervention deserves continued funding and support.
- Affirm or dispute the assumptions on which the intervention is based.
- Hold leaders and organizations accountable to the communities they serve.

All these functions make evaluation an instrument of power, especially because organizations turn to evaluators to help them determine if and how their services, programs and practices truly contribute to racial equity and how they can be improved. Evaluators—as well as funders, program managers, advocates and community leaders—have started considering the role of evaluation in creating a more equitable and just world, contesting the canons of science and positioning evaluation as part of a larger movement for racial equity and social justice. Evaluation, a field that has already revised approaches to ensure *responsive* evaluation, *democratic* evaluation and *transformative* evaluation, is now undertaking efforts to ensure *culturally responsive* evaluation and *equitable* evaluation.

Debates inside and outside the profession are often reduced to whether evaluation should be value-free and impartial, or whether evaluation should intentionally promote racial equity through its methodologies, as if they are mutually exclusive.

This debate creates a false dichotomy, wasting precious time that we can use to hone the practice of evaluation that is in service of racial equity and scientifically rigorous. We can also use the time to educate people who direct nonprofits, advocate for social justice and lead community change—who are not immersed in the study and practice of evaluation—about what they can expect from such evaluations, and not be confused about rhetoric, philosophies and the like. Simply put, they need to know how to do evaluation that supports their racial equity agenda. It is time for us to shift our focus to how we practice in a way that facilitates racial equity, learn from our experiences and keep pushing the practice forward.

Evaluation in service of racial equity is a practice, not an aside, a checklist, a course or something you do only if the funder wants it. We must engage in a real dialogue about the myths of evaluation that stand in our way, our own biases, our understanding about systems that perpetuate racial inequity and poor community engagement and our actions as evaluators to help create healthy, just and equitable communities.

How do we get there?

As a field, evaluation practitioners need to focus on intentionally breaking down and changing several evaluation-related practices that are especially relevant to racial equity goals. In essence, evaluators have to:

- Go beyond technical tasks and have the knowledge and skills to challenge strategies intended to end disparities in education, health, housing and other areas.
- Engage early in the development and improvement of a strategy so they can raise questions and concerns about *who* is driving the strategy, *with* whom and *for* whom. Funders and organizations typically do not engage evaluators until after their strategies have been developed or are ready for implementation.
- Compel funders and organizations to take the time to define and understand the "community" and be clear about who in that community is supposed to benefit from their strategies.
- Meaningfully and authentically engage the community most impacted by the initiative to learn about their lived experiences and community knowledge, which can guide the practice and use of evaluation.
- Learn about the history of the country, as well as the communities in which they are working to understand—with humility and a systems lens—how past and current institutional structures and policies contribute to power differences and the racial oppression and disparities experienced by people and communities of color today.
- Self-reflect and transform their own thinking and practices. They should also bring in partners with complementary competencies to help respond to the issues and needs that will inevitably arise during the process. This can help them become more connected to relevant fields (e.g., racial justice, organizational development, group facilitation, conflict resolution) to be able to tap into those resources.
- Create an evaluation process to confront and deal with power issues, including differences in power between funders and grantees, between leaders and staff in organizations, between large established and small grassroots organizations and last but not least, among the evaluator, participants and the sponsor or client.

- Design evaluation to use multiple methodologies and studies to assess different types of changes—individual, organization, system and community. Different methods must be used to understand and map complex relationships and connections, identify emerging developments that could facilitate or hinder change and call out intended and unintended outcomes and consequences. This rigorous approach is necessary to assess systems change that can move us toward racial equity. It has to become a *primary* practice in evaluations in service of racial equity. This also means there must be sufficient time, resources and thoughtfulness to coordinate, integrate and make sense of the findings across studies, and use them effectively to improve and move the needle toward racial equity. Too often, funders and organizations don't do this and the knowledge generated by the studies becomes fragmented, diminishing the true value.

- Maximize the use of evaluation by incorporating evaluation into other capacity-building activities. Funders to social justice organizations have to continuously test, improve and learn from strategies to achieve racial equity. Evaluation is often viewed as a threat or something "off to the side." Evaluators alone cannot advocate for use of evaluation findings. Evaluation has to be part of technical assistance, trainings and other capacity-building activities to help communities *and* funders transform findings into usable knowledge. Too often, funders don't invest sufficient resources for the evaluator and other partners to coordinate their efforts or simply leave it to them to "work it out among themselves." This oversight undermines the potential of the evaluation.

None of the above can occur in a vacuum. Evaluations and evaluators are part of an ecosystem of philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, scientist establishments, public agencies, professional associations and the consulting industry—all of which have to do business differently if the practice of evaluation can aid in progress toward racial equity.

How can this series of guides help you as evaluators?

This series of guides, ***Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity,*** is designed to help you exercise your own agency to better use your expertise to achieve racial equity and improve the services you provide your clients and the communities they support. It integrates and further expands on the work of many evaluators who have pushed the envelope through developing new concepts such as multicultural validity, culturally responsive evaluation and equitable evaluation. It also incorporates ideas from systems thinking, organizational development and other fields to help you put evaluation that is in service of racial equity into practice. The series is split into three guides and while they are all connected, they do not need to be read in order, or in full, to be valuable.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

The beliefs and ideas funders, advocates, community leaders, evaluators and others carry that can make everyone anxious and apprehensive about practicing evaluations for this purpose.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Implicit biases that influence evaluation practice and evaluators' understanding of systems and the use of a systems lens in evaluations.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

Responsible, responsive and genuine engagement of communities in the evaluation process and as an outcome in evaluation.

For some the background may seem obvious or rudimentary, especially if you understand structural racism and/or you have experienced racial discrimination. For others, there might be new information and suggestions that can lead to different insights, especially if you have limited understanding about structural racism and/or have never experienced racial discrimination.

This series as a whole:

- Presupposes that evaluation can be used to advance racial equity without diminishing scientific merit.
    - If you don't believe you have a responsibility to use evaluation to promote racial equity and social justice, you could undermine and even harm communities.
- Represents work in progress while reflecting the current state of the field.
    - Evaluation continues to evolve in response to the U.S. political and social climate.
    - Evaluators continue to exercise their agency, work to embed evaluation into strategy and be honest with themselves, their peers and their clients about how everyone can change the way they go about the business of evaluation.
- Uses the term people and communities of color for consistency to refer to the collective of people who identify as African Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Indigenous, Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.
    - This term, along with others such as BIPOC (Blacks, Indigenous and Other People of Color) and Latinx have their own meaning in specific contexts, and it is not the task of this guide to determine which term is correct in which instance.
- Is written by real people who bring their expertise, passion and lived experiences to their work.
    - You'll find technical information as well as expressions of the writers' convictions about evaluation along with personal accounts of their experiences.

The time to act is now, while individuals and organizations are eager to learn and open to making positive changes toward racial equity, and while our country works toward healing and recovering from the pandemic and civil unrest.

Practice Guide
Doing evaluation in service of racial equity: Diagnose biases and systems

Why focus on biases and systems?

Everyone has racial biases, whether they like to admit it or not. They can have a stereotype—positive or negative—about a racial or ethnic group and when they meet someone from that group, they often treat that person differently without even realizing it. It is important to recognize that implicit biases are deeply rooted and that even individuals with the best intentions can have them. Good intention or not, racial biases can cause harm. And it is up to the individual feeling the bias to decide if it is harmful—saying "that wasn't my intention" does not change the outcome for the person or community on the receiving end. This is why it is so important for us, as evaluators, to put in the time and work to uncover and address our implicit biases so we can better understand ourselves so we can make better decisions and bring attention to others in our circles.

As evaluators, we also have to be intentional about approaching every evaluation with a systems lens especially in service of racial equity. This systems approach is essential because racial inequity is the consequence of longstanding, complex and interwoven systems. A systems lens allows us to examine those complexities to better understand why certain patterns and trends keep recurring, despite the amount of investment by philanthropy and government to change those patterns and trends.

If you don't accept racial inequity as a systemic problem or don't believe that you have a responsibility to understand and work to address the systemic issues that contribute to certain patterns and trends of behavior, you are part of the problem. You could be undermining and even harming people in the communities you are working to serve. The following sections help show you how to better serve people and communities of color as an evaluator.

We understand this may not be easy to think about or admit. However, it is time to be honest with ourselves and move forward with that new information, regardless of how uncomfortable it may be. Without equitable access, opportunity and consequence in sectors that provide basic needs such as education, health, housing and more, we will not achieve racial equity. You have a responsibility to ask why certain patterns and trends of behaviors keep recurring. And a systems lens can help you find answers. See the resources at the end of this guide for more.

In this guide, we'll explore how to become aware of our implicit biases and to understand and diagnose systems. It is organized into four sections:

1. **Sample Scenarios:** Illustrates how racial prejudice and racial inequity can show up in a seemingly benign way with serious implications.

2. **Implicit Bias:** Describes three types of biases you might be maintaining as part of your evaluation practice, despite your best intentions to promote racial equity.

3. **Systems Lens:** Explains the use of a systems lens in an evaluation designed to help advance racial equity.

4. **Choices and Decisions:** Contains a set of situations you might encounter when conducting an evaluation that is in service of racial equity and the choices you might face.

Section 1:
Sample scenarios—What do racial prejudice and racial inequity in evaluation look like?

This section uses two scenarios that illustrate how racial prejudice and racial inequity can show up in seemingly benign ways in evaluation but can have very real and serious implications.

Research has shown that exposure to violence affects children's emotional, mental and social development, and that young children present during violent situations don't have the ability to advocate for themselves. Addressing this issue requires a tailored, holistic response to these children's needs. Child welfare agencies, first responders, family courts, women's shelters, support groups for perpetrators of domestic violence, schools, family resource centers and behavioral health services all play a role in the response but are separated by their distinct philosophies, perspectives and functions.

More than a decade ago, Community Science evaluated a national initiative to reduce the impact of exposure to violence on young children and their families and better treat the affected child as a whole person. This initiative had the potential to change institutional policies, procedures and practices and ensure equitable access to behavioral health resources for Black, Latino, Asian American, Native American and Alaska Native families. Community Science examined the way the organizations mentioned above incorporated the histories, cultures and community contexts of these racial and ethnic groups into their policies and practices, and how all that worked together to form a responsive system.

A system has a purpose and typically consists of parts such as programs, organizations and other entities, relationships or connections between the parts, a structure that holds them all together and feedback loops that are intended to maintain the system.

Urban, rural and Indigenous communities participated in the initiative. They each established a coalition that worked together to create a holistic, systemic response to young children exposed to violence and their families. The desired results were sustainable systemic changes that would make it more likely and easier to identify children exposed to violence, refer them to the appropriate services and treat them for any psychological harm caused by the exposure.

Context, culture and history were important variables in all of the communities. These two scenarios specifically related to the Native American and Alaska Native communities involved. These communities were producing different outcomes than their counterparts and the funder was concerned. When the Community Science evaluation team probed the program staff in the communities and the consultants who worked with them about this concern, the following exchanges took place.

Scenario 1

"Why is the tribe still in the planning stage? They should be implementing the program by now. The other communities have already started to report the number of children identified and set up a system to refer the children to services," the funder said.

The local evaluator, who was not Native American responded, "The staff at the tribal agency are still developing the implementation. It is hard to rush them because in Native cultures, the concept of time is not the same as in Western cultures. We have to respect their culture."

Let's dive a little deeper into the local evaluator's response. Is the concept of time really the issue here?

Highly unlikely. The explanation "excused" the Native American grantee's performance with a stereotype about their culture, and reinforced the funder's concerns about the grantee's capacity to achieve the desired outcomes. While the concept of time may be different, it does not mean that Native American leaders ignore deadlines and don't have a sense of accountability.

What is the real issue here?

- The local evaluator and the funder are not Native American and have not taken the time to engage the Native American community and systemically learn about the community, the culture and traditions. Their implicit biases played out under the guise of cultural competency.
- Funders often take a "one-size-fits-all" approach to technical assistance and training. Communities of color and organizations led by people of color, especially local organizations with fewer connections and resources, often need more tailored assistance because of their unique contexts and histories.

Scenario 2

According to the technical assistance provider, "The psychologist may be White but he has lived in Alaska for a long time. He is highly qualified and has years of experience providing behavioral health services to families and children. There is nobody else in the community with the same qualifications and certifications needed to provide psychological services. He reported that the few families that were referred to him came for the first couple of sessions and then stopped coming after that. He has not been able to get a hold of them to find out why."

The funder responded, "This may explain the low number of children referred and treated in that community. This has been such a problem grantee. It's too bad they can't show successful outcomes like the other grantees. Maybe I just need to accept that mental health issues are taboo and Alaska Native families are not as open to getting help as other families are."

Let's dive deeper into the above conversation. Should the White psychologist be accepted by the Alaska Native families because he lives in the same community and are his qualifications appropriate for people from a different culture?

The explanation puts more value on professional qualifications and certifications received from academic institutions than on Alaska Native healing practices, and assumes that length of time in a community is the main condition for acceptance and cultural competency. Living in an area for a long time, even among members of an underrepresented group, does not make you a part of it or necessarily even culturally competent in regard to that group. The explanation also reinforces the funder's perceptions that Indigenous cultures are not open about mental health issues or willing to seek help.

What is the real issue here?

- A clinical solution to the historical trauma experienced by Native American and Alaska Native communities is both inappropriate and ineffective (BlackDeer & Silver Wolf, 2020; Kenney & Singh, 2016; Kirmayer et al., 2014). The grant program requirements needed to allow for culture- and community-based solutions that may have looked different and may not have been perceived as evidence-based by traditional science, which has been dominated by White male scientists.
- The funder framed the problem, determined the solutions and developed pre-conceived criteria for success without engaging the grantees or individuals from the community. Consequently, there was little room to explore the problem and solutions from different angles and uncover and address the implicit biases and structural inequities that could impact the initiative.
- Similar to the first scenario, the funder took a "one-size-fits-all" approach and did not plan for more customized support for any grantee presenting different results.

Here are the implications of the above scenarios:

1. **A systems lens (a way of understanding, identifying and examining systems) is limiting if it does not intentionally and explicitly consider racial equity and, in the situation of Indigenous communities, the distinct history of colonization.** In the above example, the funder, partners and stakeholders did not look at systems change through a racial equity lens or unpack the issues of colonization and tribal sovereignty (Bourgeois, 2020; Bowman & Dodge Francis, 2018). Had they done this, they would have been more likely to:

    - Identify the need to address the historical trauma experienced by Native American and Alaska Native communities due to their history of being colonized.
    - Uncover the implicit biases held about their people and cultures.
    - Discuss issues of power between tribal agencies and state and local agencies and the sovereignty of Native American and Alaska Native tribes.
    - Select more appropriate outcome indicators.
    - Ensure that customized support was provided to the Indigenous grantees.

2. **Everyone has biases that influence their perceptions about and behaviors toward people and cultures different from theirs, even if they have good intentions.** We have to stop and reflect on these biases because these biases can turn into harmful myths, stereotypes and narratives, and consider how they shape the framing of problems and solutions. In these examples, if someone had challenged the stereotypes, the team might have been able to better understand why the grantees were perceived as underperforming and come up with an alternative approach for that community.

3. **Evaluators can, and should, act as social change agents, and this may mean being a disrupter.** As individuals, we all need to challenge assumptions, stereotypes and misinformed preconceived notions. For evaluators specifically, this is critical as those assumptions and notions can have a negative effect on the communities that are supposed to benefit from our work. However, because evaluators are trained to think that any intervention on their part can bias the findings and their role is limited to evaluation, they try to be neutral in their opinions and actions. None of us are neutral. We all, even the best evaluators among us, have implicit biases we carry with us. The good news is, we can work to uncover and address them. Evaluation training has to evolve to help evaluators act as social change agents while still being scientifically principled in their work.

Section 2:
Implicit biases specific to evaluators

Becoming aware of and addressing our implicit biases will not happen overnight and there is no single or simple tool to address them. It is work—a continuous process and a self-reflection journey that can at times be uncomfortable.

The scenarios in Section 1 showcased the types of implicit biases that evaluators are inclined to have. **As evaluators, these implicit biases are activated when we process information to develop evaluation questions, design approaches, analyze data, present conclusions and provide recommendations for improvement.** These biases also affect how we use evaluation to help people who fund, design and implement solutions that aim to contribute to equitable outcomes for people of color.

There are three types of implicit biases we are prone to hold as evaluators:

- How we frame evaluation questions.
- What data and evidence we are more likely to believe.
- What self-interest might be driving our decisions (Moody, 2019).

As john a. powell, director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California Berkeley, asserted, **racial biases typically come from not caring and/or not wanting to know something** (Lyubansky, 2012). This means we have to care deeply about racial equity, we have to be curious and want to understand why inequity happens and most important, we have to want to do something about it. If this describes you, here are some tips for how to get started:

- **Decide that advancing racial equity and social justice is a driving force and a practice for you as an evaluator.** Make that commitment to yourself and to the communities that your work impacts. This means that you:
  - Design your publications, presentations and engagements to bring attention to disparities, unequal treatment, unfairness and injustice experienced by people of color.
  - Do something about it through data, research and evaluation.

As you affirm and reaffirm this commitment, you'll find that the lens you use for evaluative thinking will start to change.

- **Read, listen and immerse yourself in conversations about the history of racism and related issues.** Work to understand different perspectives, become familiar with concepts, reflect on your assumptions and get comfortable being uncomfortable. Find peers who can push you and support you through the discomfort. In seeking out these conversations, remember that it is no one else's job to educate you (especially people of color who are often expected to take on that additional, very often unpaid, burden). Educate yourself first so you can have thoughtful conversations.
- **Keep developing your systems lens in service of racial equity.** Continue to think about systems, power dynamics and issues about tribal sovereignty and their possible implications to your work and the communities you serve. (More on systems lenses later in this guide.)
- **Check yourself.** Watch out for common biases you are prone to maintaining despite good intentions. These are implicit and unless you become fully aware of them, you are likely to inadvertently keep exercising them.

Tips for self-reflection

Our role as evaluators in efforts to achieve racial equity starts with us: our ideas of how the world works that guide our perceptions, behaviors and relationships (i.e., mental models) and our implicit biases.

Here are some questions to repeatedly ask ourselves in every engagement we agree to:

- How open am I to examining my own mental models and how to change them?
- How much time and effort am I willing to invest in learning about different ways to look at the problem and solution, talking to the people who are impacted and developing a community of peers who can help me see my blind spots?
- To what extent do I believe that the histories of different racial and ethnic groups in this country are interrelated and, as a result, racial inequity has an impact on everyone?
- To what extent do I believe that addressing racial inequity in my work makes me less scientifically rigorous?
- To what extent do I believe that as an evaluator, I am not independent of—but an integral part of—the problem of and the solution to calling out unfairness and injustice?

No matter how well-intentioned or committed to racial equity I perceive myself to be, I have to continuously strengthen my capacity to:

- **Be accountable.** Work to:
  - Understand the struggles faced by people of color, immigrants and low-income families.
  - Challenge the underlying systems that seek to maintain the status quo.
  - Hone my ability to know when to come across as the bridge builder, activist, disrupter, etc.
  - Correct misperceptions and help make new connections as this work can cause discomfort for privileged and White people who are not aware or informed of these issues.
- **Be courageous.** This work can mean:
  - Expressing an unpopular view about racism or other forms of oppression.
  - Risking unfiltered and misinformed responses to my views on social or other media.
  - Losing a relationship, or even my job, if I believe that a particular solution or approach could do more harm than good to racial equity in the long run.
- **Be curious.** Keep learning by:
  - Not taking anything at face value.
  - Asking why.
  - Doing my homework.
  - Keeping the larger systems in mind.

Preconceived notions and misconceptions that shape evaluation questions

Even before we develop an evaluation question, we are processing information that shapes that question. The lack of attention given to conditions and systems that contribute to the disparities historically disadvantaged and marginalized racial groups experience is a common issue in evaluations of programs and initiatives to improve outcomes for these groups. We can better design evaluation questions by asking:

Are the evaluation questions framed to focus on the individual as the problem and individual-level change as the outcome, or on the systems and systems-level change as the problem and outcome?

The answer depends on our inclination (and that of our client's) to present the situation in a way that supports preconceived notions that the problems facing people of color are primarily due to individual and community deficiencies. This sort of framing does not serve racial equity because it does not recognize or investigate the underlying structures, relationships, power differences and histories that contribute to the patterns of behavior. Here are three examples of such misconceptions, actual systems issues at play and the implications.

1 **The misconception: Blacks have poor health outcomes because they have unhealthy eating habits and don't like to exercise.**

The systems issues: Fresh and healthy food can be inaccessible and unaffordable. There can be a lack of safe recreational facilities. Quality preventive health care can be inaccessible and unaffordable. There can be a mistrust of the medical community due to a history of experimentation in Black communities.

The implications: The evaluation may find no or limited changes in Black participants' eating and exercise habits because the impact of the systems issues far exceeds any individual behavioral change that can be made.

2 **The misconception: Latino youth have low academic achievement because their parents don't care about education.**

The systems issues: Some Latino immigrant parents have jobs that extend beyond the traditional hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They may have to work two jobs to be able to afford a decent standard of living. In their home countries, school principals and teachers are considered figures of authority; the education of their children are left up to these individuals. In the U.S., PTA meeting times and communication are inaccessible to them and culturally and linguistically inappropriate.

The implications: The evaluation may attribute the low performance of a school to the high percentage of immigrant students and families in the school and neighborhood.

3 **The misconception: Immigrants don't participate in civic activities and don't bother to learn about their civic duties. They only care about their own people and their countries of origin because they send money back to their home countries all the time.**

The systems issues: The conversations and meetings in those civic activities are unwelcoming, and the materials may only be available in English. Some immigrants come from countries where their lives would have been endangered for participating in any civic activities, especially those that relate to political outcomes. The economic conditions in their home countries are dire and they want or are expected to contribute to their families' finances.

The implications: The evaluation may report low rates of participation in mainstream civic activities (e.g., attendance at local public meetings, contribution to charitable organizations such as Goodwill and the Salvation Army and serving on boards). The evaluation may not have measured participation in civic activities that are culturally more familiar to immigrants.

Bias about data sources and the evidence they produce

Bias based on how we view data and evidence can show up in two instances during our evaluation:

- When we are reviewing information to support a theory of change.
- When we are deciding which methodology to use.

In the first instance, when we are reviewing and synthesizing the literature, we should ask ourselves:

- Am I ignoring research and evaluation findings that do not fully support my preconceived notions about a particular racial group?
- How do I determine which information is real?
- Which information or evidence am I more likely to believe?
- Which trend would I be curious enough about to further investigate and why?
- How might my preference about which information to use to make my case cloud my framing of evaluation questions and decisions about which methodology to use?

In the second instance, our data bias can influence our decision about which methodology to use—thereby potentially impacting our findings and conclusion. Our findings and conclusion can influence funders' decisions about renewals, perceptions about a particular racial or ethnic group and knowledge about what works and doesn't work to achieve racial equity.

For example, the use of experimental design, while effective for controlling variability in an intervention's implementation and the environment in which it is operating, is not appropriate for community and systems change interventions that are early in their developmental cycle. However, this has not stopped researchers or evaluators from using the experimental design for community and systems change interventions at all stages of development because it is considered by some to be the gold standard for scientific rigor. Consequently, the evaluation may contribute to inappropriate conclusions and generate the wrong lessons.

On the other hand, some evaluators may be inclined to believe that communities of colors' experiences and outcomes cannot be meaningfully quantified and therefore, qualitative data and stories are more compelling. Therefore, case studies, Most Significant Change approach, Photovoice, and ethnography are preferred. However, qualitative methods may not be adequate to capture the full impact of a community and systems change initiatives. They also limit the ways we can understand the intervention and situation. Diverse methods are better because they can help us see the problem, process, outcomes and context in different ways. (See Guide 1: Debunk Myths for more discussion about preferences for quantitative versus qualitative methodologies.)

Inclination to promote your point of view, approach, beliefs and interest in general

Unlike the two types of biases described above, this last bias is less implicit. We are more likely to be conscious about making decisions that promote our point of view, our approach or our beliefs, values and interests. We may also have to consider other issues such as those related to our livelihood as evaluators. For example, if you are an independent consultant, you may make a decision based on your economic security vs. your personal beliefs. If you are part of an evaluation firm or a nonprofit organization, you may make a decision based on your organization's interests vs. the needs of the community that will be impacted by the evaluation.

Here are some examples of how personal belief bias can show up in evaluation:

- The funder or organization's model for addressing economic inequity is better than any you have seen because it deals with all the limitations of other models and supports what you think is needed to achieve economic equity.
    - Your enthusiasm for the model could cause you to ignore the new challenges posed by the model, thereby impacting the data you collect, analyze, interpret and report.
- You have an opportunity to test your own evaluation framework and show its relevance for examining the effectiveness of the strategy you have been engaged to evaluate.
    - The framework may not be appropriate, but because you are so excited about proving the value of your program and expertise, your decision to apply the framework could go unquestioned.
- You believe that mentoring as a strategy for dealing with poor academic achievement among Black students is inadequate. The best strategy instead is to deal with the root causes.
    - You could be inclined to amplify the negative results in your evaluation report.

This bias can also be larger than you as an individual. Since you may have to win contracts for the consulting firm you work for, you may make decisions based on the firm's self-interest. If you are a faculty member at a university, your decision may be based on the need to get grants and publish to secure tenure.

These are realities evaluators face. The decisions we make take place within a constellation of forces, conditions and issues in philanthropy, evaluation and consultancy that are not always within our control. We have to be honest and mindful of how our decisions can impact the evaluation outcomes with racial equity in mind.

Checking our own biases is necessary but insufficient. It is equally important that we are able to view the initiative or strategy we are evaluating through a systems lens that is explicit about racial equity. This lens can help us take our practice one step further, from recognizing where our implicit biases might lie to how we diagnose the problem and evaluate the process and outcomes.

Using our power to address implicit biases

A form of power is our ability to influence others through our evaluation practice. When we are reflecting on our own biases and those of our team members, we can wield our power—consciously or unconsciously—in a few ways in service of racial equity.

- We could require everyone in our organization or team to develop the skills to check their own biases, apply a systems lens (see next section) and select the most appropriate methodology. If you don't have this power in your role, you could engage leadership to strengthen their ability to conduct evaluations in service of racial equity.
- We could assert our expertise to shift the funder's, partners' and other stakeholders' thinking about supporting evaluations in service of racial equity, and to re-examine their theory of change and strategy through a systems lens. If you don't have this power, you could speak to people within these individuals' network to rally their support.

Section 3:
Facilitating evaluations in service of racial equity requires a systems lens

In this section, we will first define what a system is and then discuss what a systems lens and lever of systemic change mean. With this foundational knowledge, we can then discuss how to apply a systems lens.

What is a system?

A system has a purpose and typically consists of parts such as programs, organizations and other entities, relationships or connections between the parts, a structure that holds all these together and feedback loops that are supposed to maintain the system (Meadows, 2008). Policies, regulations, connections and practices of institutions (public, tribal, private) in sectors like education, housing, transportation and health can function to prevent or limit people of color's access to resources and opportunities. The institutions in all these sectors are interrelated, where a change in one can trigger a change in another—for better or worse.

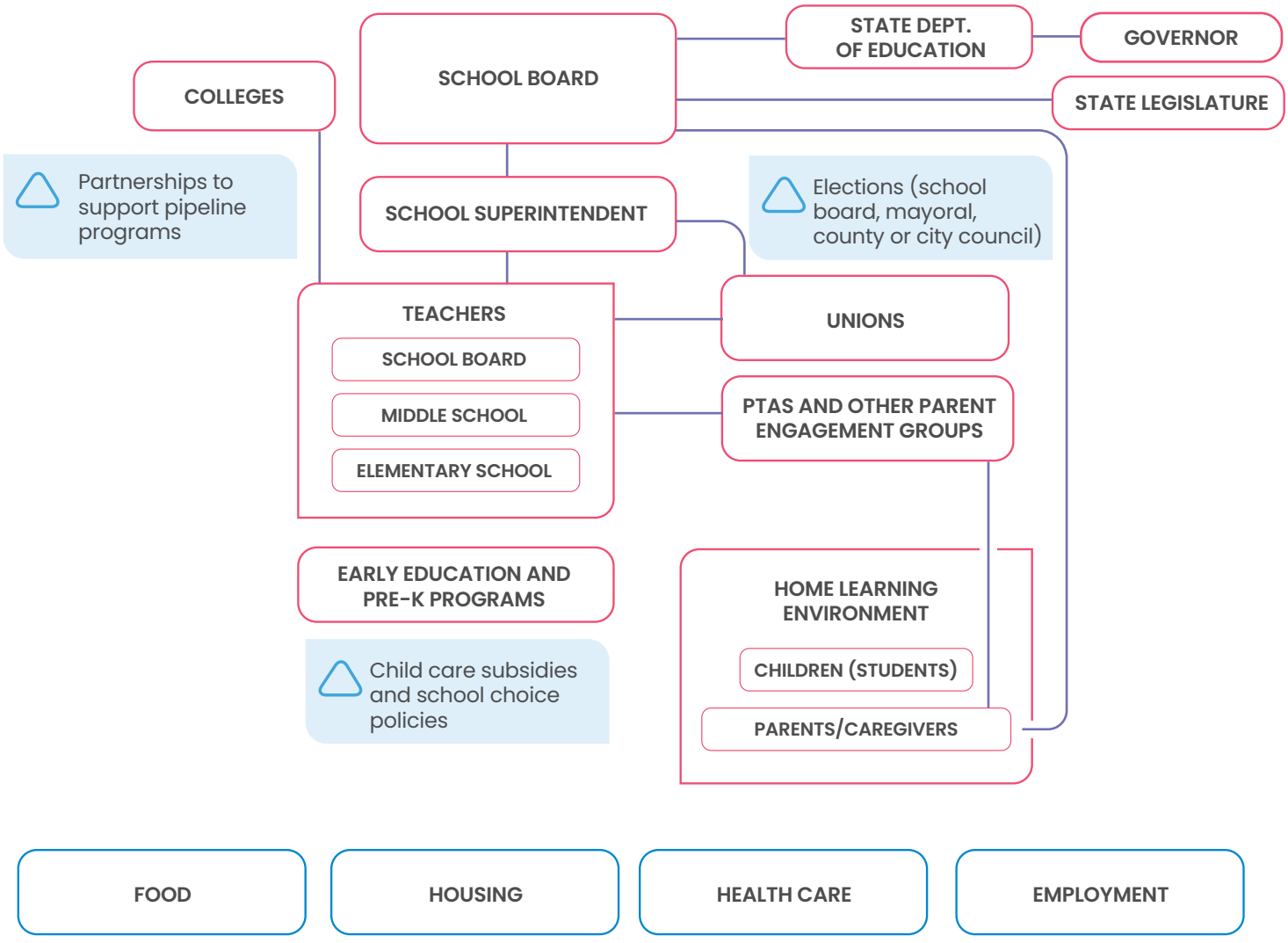
Exhibit 1 illustrates an education system *(purpose)* that is composed of:

Entities that include the school board, local school district, schools, kindergarten programs, parents, students and parent teacher associations (PTAs).

Relationships between parents and the school, the school district and the schools, high school and colleges and parents and PTAs.

Structures that hold the entities and relationships together such as partnerships, elections and school choice policies.

Exhibit 1: An education system



The system is maintained by feedback loops such as parents providing feedback to schools through PTAs and other parent engagement groups, and also to the school board by electing people they feel best represent their interests. (The relationships and structures between entities can vary by state, county and city.)

Systems are large, multi-faceted, interdependent and messy, which makes them hard to "see," break down and change (Meadows, 2008; Stroh, 2015). Our property taxes finance the school system. A high-quality school system can attract families with higher household incomes as well as more businesses to the county. More businesses mean more jobs. Employment opportunities can attract more people to the county who can afford higher-priced homes and pay more property taxes, which then generates more resources for the schools. This loop is self-perpetuating.

However, this loop can also displace existing residents who cannot afford the rising cost of housing. They may have to move to areas with less expensive housing, which means poorer-resourced schools. These schools may attract teachers who are less qualified because the pay is not competitive. This could lessen the families' and their children's access to opportunities and resources offered through the schools and potentially other organizations.

The interdependency of systems can go on and on, as shown by the way the education system connects to housing, employment and other systems in Exhibit 1. The education system can be generalized to any community, and unless we are intentional about identifying and examining where in the system people of color are disproportionately impacted, we risk not shifting systems to become more equitable. (More about this in the next section.)

Ask yourself, what happens when there are racial disparities in education? How do you apply a systems lens to eliminate education inequity?

What is a systems lens?

A systems lens helps connect what we see and experience as unfairness and racial discrimination to the part, relationship and structure that cause the unfairness and discrimination—all within the context of the social, cultural, economic and political environment of the people impacted by the systems. These parts, relationships, structures and their interconnectedness are not always obvious and this is why this lens is necessary. This lens also allows us to identify ways to create change and promote racial equity.

Progress toward racial equity is not possible without systems change

We can have systems change without impacting racial equity because the change may not have any impact on people of color. On the other hand, we cannot have racial equity without systems change. We have to be intentional, focused and strategic from the start of any initiative to identify, name and deal with unfair and unjust policies, practices and actions for people and communities of color.

What does this lens look like? Exhibit 2 uses a tree to depict ways to address racial inequity. This is an adapted version of the iceberg metaphor, a popular way to illustrate a systems lens. The tree is used here to emphasize the need to deal with the "root" causes of racial inequity. What we can observe in a racially inequitable situation are racial disparities in education, health, housing and other conditions (these are the branches and leaves). These disparities are perpetuated by patterns and trends that are less easy to observe, but are identifiable through analysis of data (the tree trunk). These patterns and trends persist due to the way in which systems are set up and function (roots beneath the ground or soil line). Finally, the systems function the way they do because people's mental models about how things should work become baked into the systems over time. These mental models are often hard to extract, analyze and challenge, and eventually become verbalized as narratives (the roots that are deep in the ground, including lateral roots that indicate the spread of these mental models and narratives).

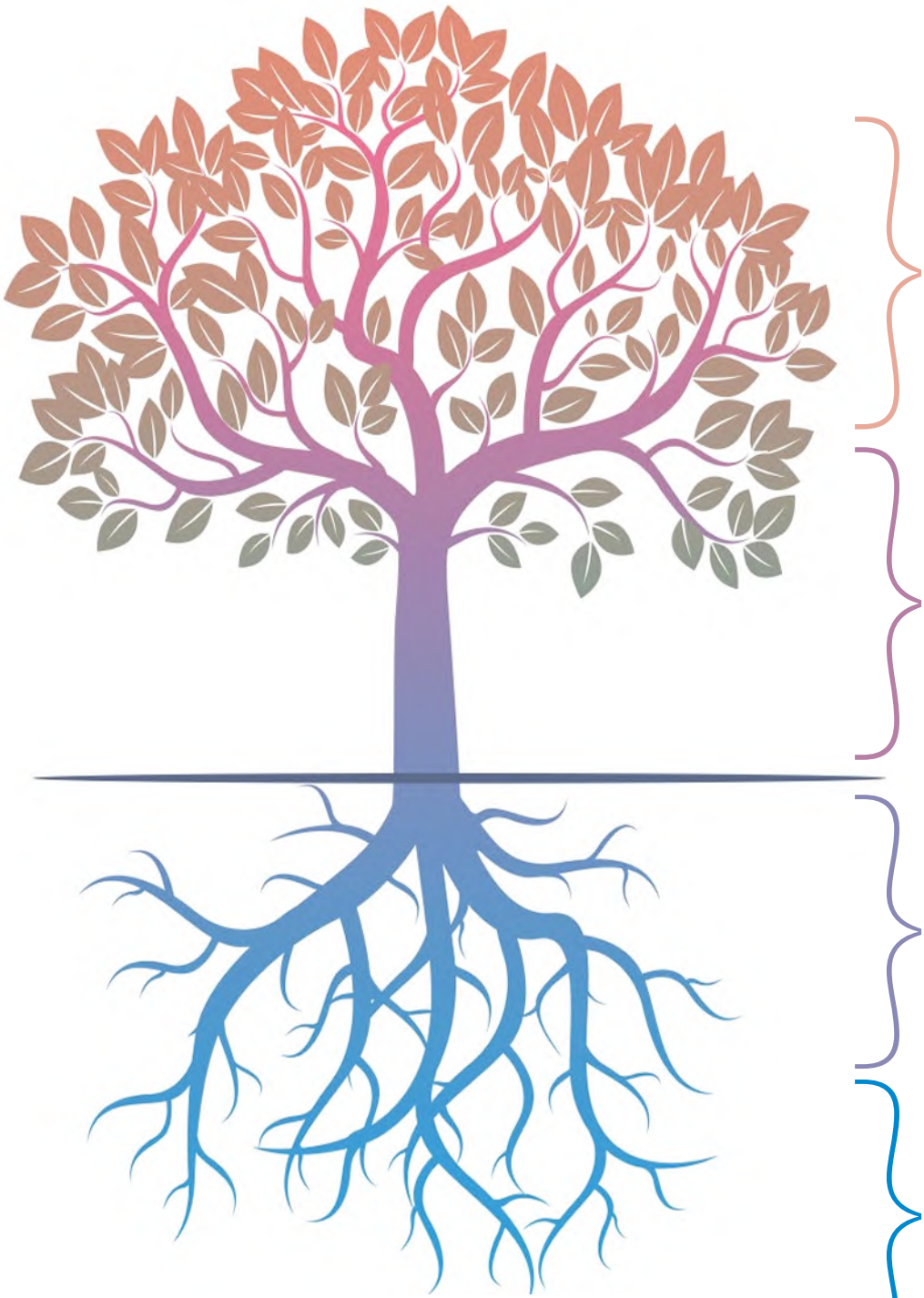
The basic idea is this: we have to dig deeper and deeper to determine the root causes of the unfairness and injustice to understand why different racial groups experience disparate outcomes, and where change needs to happen.

Developing a systems lens helps you be more equipped to:

- Help your client and other stakeholders recognize that racial disparities and other inequities are due to the way systems are designed and interact—not individuals' actions, circumstances or racial and other biases.
- Determine what to measure in efforts designed to move the needle on racial equity.
- Interpret and explain how the changes to move the needle on racial equity occurred—fully, partially or not at all.
- Place the process and outcomes within a larger context of conditions—both enabling and impeding—related to the social, cultural, economic and political environment.

This can help funders, partners, and other stakeholders align their intent (e.g., desire for equity) and their initiatives.

Exhibit 2: A tree metaphor to understand racial equity



Symptoms:
What racial inequities you can observe

Patterns & Trends:
What links many symptoms over time

Systems of Organized Entities, Relationships and Policies and Practices:
What holds the systems together and contribute to the patterns and trends

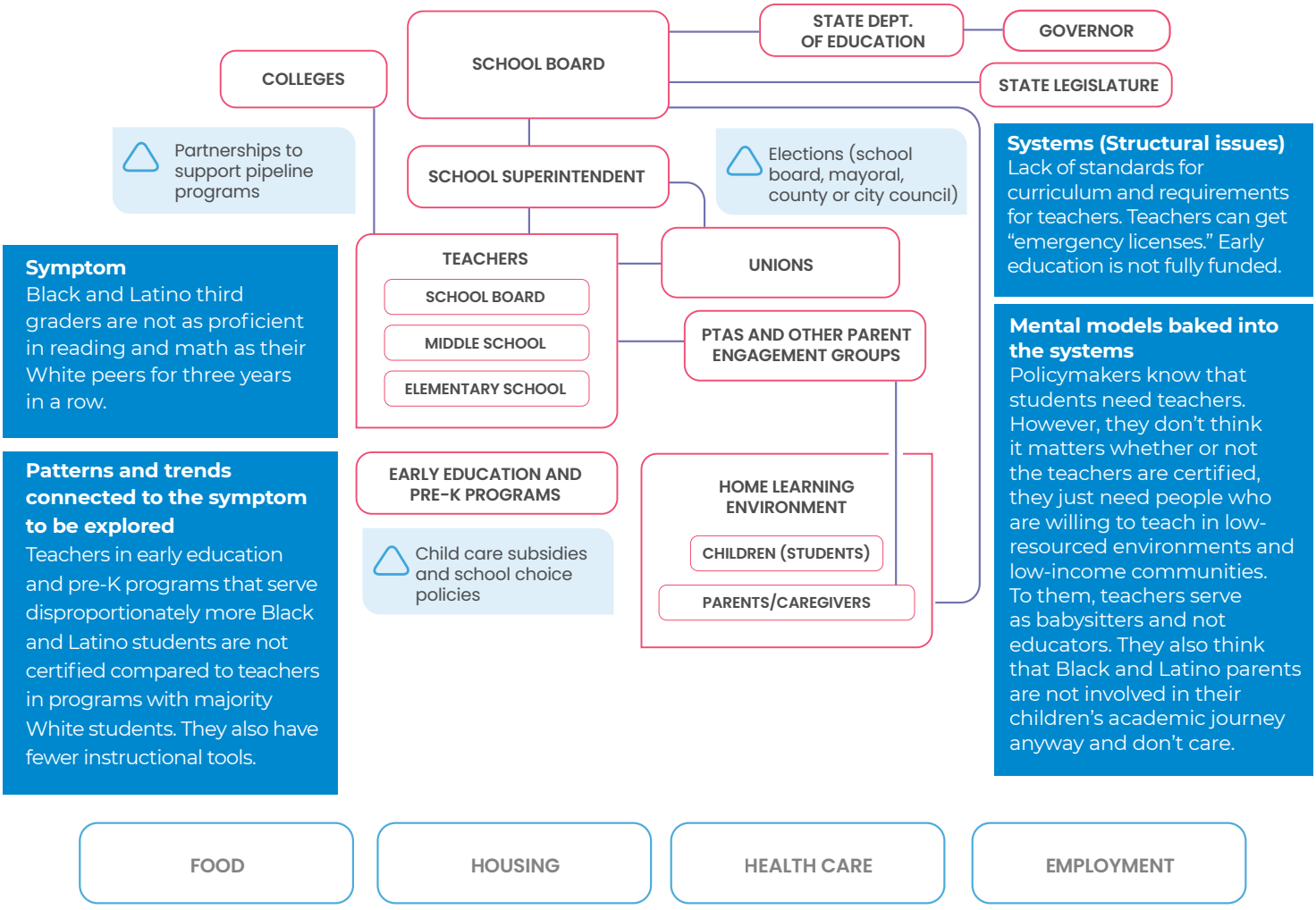
Mental Models & Narratives:
What are people's frames that shape and become baked into the systems of organized entities, relationships and policies and practices

Using the same illustration in Exhibit 1, Exhibit 3 overlays the systems lens to show how you can dig deeper to identify where there is unfairness in the system that contributes to the disparity in reading and math proficiency between Black and Latino third graders and their White peers (this is the symptom that is observable).

As teachers are part of the education system, you might start by investigating the quality of instruction in the programs that disproportionately serve Black and Latino children (this is an example of a pattern or trend that is connected to the symptom). If you find that the quality is inadequate, you then explore the possible underlying reasons. One reason could be the lack of standards for what constitute an effective curriculum and qualified teachers. Another could be the fact that early education is not fully funded by the state (these are examples of structural problems in the system).

If you approach the problem of disparity in reading and math proficiency as an individual problem instead of through a systems lens, you would focus primarily on the Black and Latino third graders' abilities and their home environment.

Exhibit 3: Applying a systems lens to an education system



What is a lever of systemic change?

A lever of systemic change refers to the point in a system that will have a catalytic, multiplier or amplifying effect on the patterns and trends that keep producing the disparate outcomes. You can start identifying levers by looking for where there is and isn't power. Identifying who has the power to push that lever is part of the racial analysis to inform the theory of change and strategy to eliminate the unfairness and injustice that disproportionately affects people and communities of color. The theory of change and its illustration as a logic model are useful tools to check the application of the systems lens. It's where our mental models and implicit biases can show up. Details about how to develop a theory of change and logic model are described in the Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluation (2017) published by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

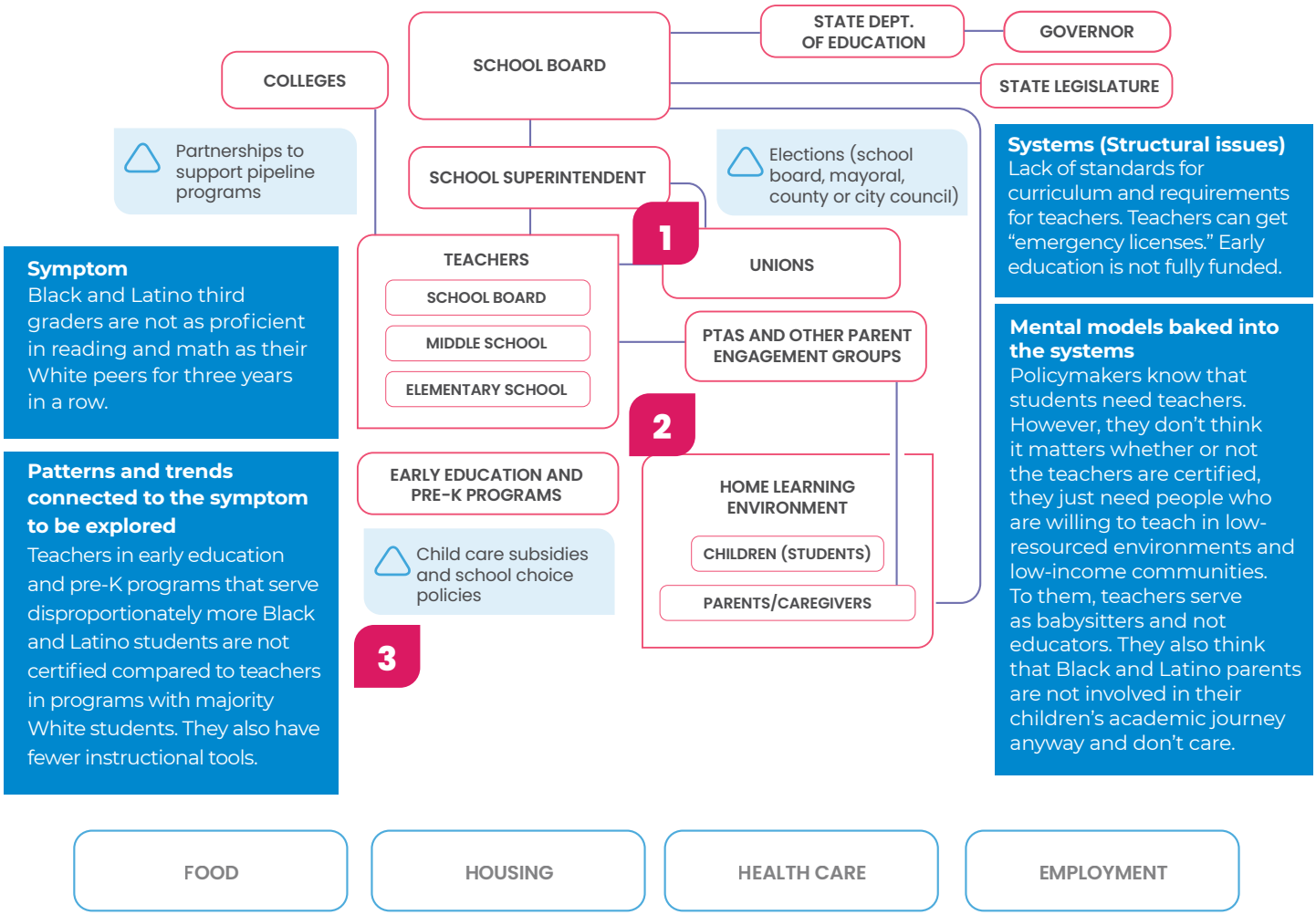
Understanding levers of systemic change helps you be better equipped to:

- Appropriately assess the effects intended by pushing the lever, from the immediate, direct outcome to longer-term, indirect outcomes.
- Help your client and other stakeholders step back and consider what happens when they push a lever.

Using the same illustration as Exhibit 3, Exhibit 4 overlays the levers that could be pushed and pulled to begin to address the disparities. Potential levers include:

- Black and Latino parent involvement in schools to increase schools' accountability to higher performance, resulting in an improvement in their children's reading and math proficiency.
- Establishment of a coalition of parents, advocates, community leaders and school administrators to advocate for standardized, age-appropriate curriculum and assessments.
- Black and Latino parents organizing to run candidates for the school board.

Exhibit 4: Potential levers of change



1 Establishment of a coalition of parents, advocates, community leaders and school administrators to advocate for standardized, age-appropriate curriculum and assessment.

2 Organize parents, and especially parents of color, to:

- Get involved in schools.
- Run candidates for school board.
- Vote.
- Demand language justice.

3 Organize parents, and especially parents of color, to advocate for the full funding of early education.

As a practitioner of evaluation in service of racial equity, addressing implicit biases and applying a systems lens is only a part of the experience. The other part is navigating some typical decisions (or "choice points") that come up when conducting an evaluation in service of racial equity. The next section explores how to do just that.

Possible power plays

The most basic form of power is people's ability to get what they want. When you begin to apply a systems lens to help the funder, partners and other stakeholders sharpen their theory and strategy and identify levers of change, power can come up in the following ways:

- The funder, partners and other stakeholders are part of the system that needs to be changed. Depending on their self-interests and agendas (especially if hidden), they can use their power to facilitate or resist the change—sometimes intentionally and sometimes not.
- Individuals in the communities that are supposed to benefit from the initiative have competing priorities, agendas and self-interests. Similar to the above individuals, they too can use their power to facilitate or resist the change—sometimes intentionally and sometimes not.
- The same situation applies to political leaders and appointees, especially during election years.
- In all the above situations, differences based on race, gender, position and rank and economic status can contribute to the amount and type of power they have.

Unless you are trained to deal with the conflicts that arise from power differences, you should strongly encourage the funder, partners and other stakeholders to seek assistance to address emerging tensions and conflicts due to power differences. You could help explain potential compromises and consequences if efforts to address the issues are delayed. (See the resources at the end of this guide for more.)

Section 4:
Choice points and decisions we will likely encounter

There are choice points we will likely encounter and decisions we have to be intentional about beyond the basics when implementing an evaluation in service of racial equity. There is no right answer. None of these are perfect situations. We have to make the best decision we can based on what we know—understanding that some of them have good results or serious consequences. These include:

- Considering whether or not to pursue an opportunity that might or might not be explicit about racial equity.
- Developing a theory of change, logic model and measurement framework that amplify racial equity, even though the conversations can be difficult.
- Implementing evaluation activities in a way that supports racial equity even if it means more time and resources. Leveraging findings to support continuous learning and strategy improvement because there is no easy path toward racial equity, and challenge the notion that this practice reduces the evaluation's objectivity.

Consideration about whether or not to pursue an opportunity

A potential funder, partner or other stakeholder may not appear to understand or be fully committed to racial equity. Ask yourself: In that situation, would you become their evaluator and seize the opportunity to raise their consciousness or would you decline the opportunity?

If you choose to pursue it, you want to be intentional about:

- Assessing the amount of your time, resources, effort, risks and emotional energy it will require and the return on your investment.
- Considering the influence and power you might have (or not) in the situation, your own biases and the mental models with which you are operating (your own and those of others).
- Determining your own training, strengths and limitations to facilitate discussions to raise their consciousness, keeping in mind that if you are not prepared to manage these discussions, you risk doing more harm than good.
- Examining your own knowledge about racial equity in relation to the issues and communities that are a part of the evaluation.
- Reflecting on your own self-interest to pursue the opportunity (see page 7 for questions to ask yourself).

Certainly, the choice is yours. You can choose not to engage with funders, partners and stakeholders who are not as diverse, inclusive, committed or knowledgeable about racial equity as you'd like them to be. Also remember that whether or not the experience is a positive one is not only up to you. Funders very rarely allocate sufficient funding for the steps, processes and other activities necessary to design and implement an evaluation in service of racial equity. If we apply a systems lens to this situation, we can see that the spread of evaluations in service of racial equity requires changes in an ecosystem that consists of philanthropy, professional evaluation associations, training programs and education curricula and the consulting industry. (The resources section at the end of this guide includes links to some organizations addressing this matter.)

This can be frustrating and exhausting work. If you choose to take it on, be sure to find a network of trusted peers who can support, challenge and celebrate with you along the way.

Development of a theory of change, logic model and measurement framework that amplify racial equity

W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluation contains a detailed explanation about how to develop a theory of change, logic model (visual illustration of the theory of change) and measurement framework. The basics for developing these evaluation products are the same no matter what you are evaluating. However, if you are developing them in service of racial equity, the conversations can be difficult. You have to keep in mind the following:

- Make sure your client, partners and other stakeholders define and agree on key terms, no matter how much they might want to resist or rush the conversations. Here is a general description of equity that you can tailor to the initiative and strategy:

  Equity means that everyone, especially people from historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities, **has fair access to resources and opportunities and the ability to take advantage of the resources and opportunities.**

  - What is meant by unfair and resources and opportunities?
    - Discrimination experienced by people of a particular race at their point of contact with someone from an organization or system.
    - Lack of affordable, healthy and fresh food.
    - Lack of affordable and safe housing.
    - Policies that allow for distribution of funding to already resource-rich neighborhoods.
  - What is meant by ability to take advantage?
    - Knowledge of rights.
    - Skills to navigate complex systems of care.
    - Skills and language to participate in election procedures and processes.
    - Development of social networks to be able to leverage influence.

- Use a **systems lens** to guide the development of the theory of change and target levers of change. Be both persistent and patient in helping people apply this lens because systems thinking may be new to them.
- Name the specific racial population that will experience more equity as a result of the initiative and strategy (e.g., Black youth between ages 12 and 18 years, undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central and South America, low-income Vietnamese families). Don't just use general labels such as "people of color," "low-income communities," "immigrants" or "historically marginalized groups" alone because:
  - Their use allows the funder, partners and other decision-makers to talk in generalities and create broad-based strategies that don't account for unique histories, contexts and experiences (Edwards & McKinney, 2020; powell, 2012).
  - Communities are not homogenous. There are communities nested within communities based on shared histories, identities, lived experiences and geographic boundaries.
  - Quantitative outcomes are frequently averaged, which can potentially mask differences between "worst-off" and "better-off" groups, which could be valuable information (Mayne, 2014).
- Take time to understand how other demographic attributes, such as gender, income, sexual orientation, immigration status and disability can compound racial disparities. People have multiple identities that intersect and create different forms of exclusion (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). We call this intersectionality. Nevertheless, leading with race and racialized outcomes is essential because people's skin color is the most salient characteristic that has shaped stereotypes, assumptions and narratives in the United States, because of the meanings attached to skin color in the U.S. (and globally). Disaggregated data by race and all these other attributes also allows for other forms of inequity to become apparent.
- Be intentional about considering potential unintended consequences (or benefits) for populations other than the one of interest. See if you can lessen the likelihood of unintended consequences.

Racial equity is both a process and an outcome. It is an outcome when disparities due to race and ethnicity are eliminated because people who have been historically marginalized on the basis of their race and ethnicity and where they live now have fair and just access to opportunities and resources and the ability to take advantage of the opportunities and resources. It is a process when people from these communities are no longer treated with condescension as subjects and are authentically and meaningfully engaged as decision-makers in framing the problems and designing the solutions that affect their lives (Center for Social Inclusion, n.d.).

Consider this

The funder, partners and stakeholders want an equitable evaluation approach, but they are not clear on where and how racial equity fits into their theory of change and strategy. If this is the case, your ability to conduct an evaluation in service of racial equity is limited. Before you can design and implement such an evaluation, you first have to help the group:

- Understand racial equity.
- Build in racial equity into their theory of change and strategy.
- Manage their expectations of the evaluation.

Expectations are important as evaluation is not magically going to help advance racial equity simply because they required an equitable evaluation approach. Sometimes, you have a funder who insists on racial equity outcomes that are not realistic in a certain timeframe. You want to work with other partners (e.g., technical assistance provider, intermediary that manages the initiative) to communicate clearly and consistently that these outcomes will not only be unfeasible, but that this expectation actually sets organizations and communities up to fail. In such a situation, you and other partners can help educate the funder about the conditions for racial equity outcomes and how they will be systematically documented as part of the evaluation. You can also suggest that the funder speaks to peers about their experiences. In the event that you don't have other partners to lean on, you still have the same message and can facilitate discussions with the funder about any incremental progress toward racial equity as well as events and conditions that might have impeded progress.

Implementation of evaluation activities in support of racial equity

Issues, challenges and concerns—from poor participation to disagreements between you and other participants—inevitably arise during the day-to-day implementation of any evaluation and its activities. However, in evaluations in service of equity, it is essential to examine these issues, challenges and concerns to make sure that the evaluation itself is not perpetuating biases, supporting the status quo and/or doing harm to communities of color. In other words, you have to be mindful of the power dynamics and manage them. Admittedly, this can be hard for you, the evaluator, because it could mean disagreeing with the people you work with, potentially hurting relationships, and in the extreme case, even terminating a contract. It also means you have to put in more time and resources to address some of the unanticipated, complex situations that come with racial equity work. Here are some common scenarios and considerations for how you might handle them.

Managing turnover in staff and community leadership because people working toward racial equity can become burned out and frustrated

We often treat such turnover as just another event in our data collection. However, in evaluations in service of equity, this sort of turnover isn't just another event. It is a symptom of organizational policies, practices and community norms that don't treat activists and social change agents as whole people. Organizations involved may also not have clear expectations and procedures about staff or volunteer job performance, professional development and succession planning. Consequently, dysfunctional relationships and environments can begin to take root and the symptoms can become conflated with racial prejudice and racism. As an evaluator, it is up to you to understand the root causes of the turnover and to include the context surrounding organizational readiness and capacity to address racial inequity in your evaluation study to the best of your ability, without violating confidentiality.

Consider this

As the evaluator, you could help make funders and executive directors of organizations involved in the work become aware that issues such as organizational dysfunction and the risks that people of color take when they confront powerful people and institutions can have serious consequences for people of color and their communities. Some organizational leaders may not have thought about this or be at a loss about what to do. They may brush it off because you are not perceived as an organizational development expert and staff dynamics was not in the evaluation design. Focus on the desired outcomes—in other words, you need to provide supporting information about instances when the lack of response to these issues have delayed or averted the desired outcomes or created harm, and suggest resources to help the leadership come up with solutions. These resources could include human resource professionals, expert facilitators and organizational change consultants.

Collecting and reporting data on strategies could expose people who are organizing for change to harm

Community leaders of color may likely encounter resistance in their efforts to call out and fight for racial equity and to organize against those with power in their communities. Imagine, if in the middle of your evaluation, a newspaper article describes their tactics as disruptive and some of the leaders start to feel unsafe. The leaders might begin to question the evaluation and be reluctant to share any more information about their strategy and activities for fear of sabotage and for their safety.

Consider this

You should bring up the possibility of the above situation with funders, community leaders and other partners from the outset of the evaluation. Don't wait until the situation occurs and then deal with it. You might ask everyone to consider options for reporting and disseminating the findings. For instance, findings can be reported verbally and not formally in writing. Finally, you can and should request that the funder and partners work with the community leaders to determine if they need assistance with responding to the media.

Shedding light on difficult situations

The community partners, who represent different racial and ethnic groups, may not always cooperate with each other and consequently, activities may stall. Picture the funder getting increasingly frustrated to the point of expressing regret about investing in the collaboration. While it is not in your scope of work to investigate, you have a responsibility to help everyone understand what is going on because if the funder decides not to invest in the communities' cross-racial collaboration in the future, the communities' access to resources and opportunities could be greatly reduced. You would want to use a systems lens—investigate the historical and cultural forces that could affect the partners' perceptions about each other (e.g., one racial group has historically dominated the construction industry and was hesitant about giving access to another racial group for fear of reducing the availability of jobs for their members)—before assuming interpersonal differences are the cause. This could help the funder and the partners understand the underlying structures at play and have the opportunity, through additional support if necessary, to transform their conflict into empathy.

Consider this

Taking the initiative to surface racial tensions and conflicts requires courage and perseverance to see it through. It means also that you could become the central force or "hub" of grievances and other emotional outbursts. You may even be perceived as taking sides because of your race or ethnicity, or as having power because of your association with the funder. You have to be mindful of this and have the skills to disrupt this perception. You have to be ready to be part of the solution as well. You want to consult with an expert facilitator experienced in dealing with disagreements, tensions and conflicts about how to handle the situation, if you don't have the skills yourself. You also want to follow up with the funder to ensure proper assistance was provided to the community partners.

Responding to external shocks

Community and larger events that signal racial biases and inequity could occur in the middle of the project and affect the evaluation by diverting, disrupting or changing its course entirely. For example, in early the 2000s, in the middle of an immigrant integration initiative, anti-immigrant sentiment grew and raids to round up undocumented immigrants became more frequent. Consequently, immigrants were fearful about attending program activities and grantees were unable to achieve their outcomes. In 2020, many initiatives had to pause their efforts because of the coronavirus pandemic. Community organizers, residents and advocates had to redirect their efforts to respond to the urgent and immediate needs of low-income and vulnerable residents.

Consider this

Instead of simply reacting to the immediate issue, you could proactively help the funder, partners and other stakeholders understand what external events could impact the initiative using examples of history (e.g., policies that affect immigration and refugee resettlement, public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, disasters such as hurricanes) and what capacities communities need to build in the short and long term to be able to respond to the events. A systems lens can help you do this, especially because these events have frequently exacerbated the disparities already experienced by communities of color. You could use the evaluation to bring attention to issues that obstruct progress toward racial equity and facilitate discussions to identify levers of changes and help the initiative and the evaluation pivot. In such situations, the evaluation can become part of the intervention. Keep in mind that not everyone is comfortable with this. Help them understand the opportunity and not be derailed by debates about objectivity.

The issues, challenges and concerns described in this section all have implications on the evaluation's timeline and budget. The amount of money funders set aside for evaluations that are in service of equity is almost never enough to deal with the above situations. Yet you are committed to using evaluation to help advance racial equity. Consider how much of the scope will be within and outside of your control, and how much time and effort above and beyond the contract hours and amount you are willing to invest for a purpose that will be larger than you and your organization. Finally, consider the support you need to be able to challenge myths about evaluation and the evaluator's role and to take risks that could affect your job and career.

Choice points and decisions: A story for your reflection

This story is based on Community Science's experience, but we changed some of the information to prevent any association to the actual groups and situation.

We facilitated the development of a logic model for a multi-racial community coalition, whose goal was to ensure proper flow of job training resources from the state government to local jurisdictions (e.g., availability of translation and interpretation assistance, engagement of community leaders) and equitable distribution of the resources to the two major racial groups in the community: Hmong and Black people. The leadership for the coalition's backbone organization was primarily White and the Hmong and Black communities were represented by three and two organizations, respectively. By the second meeting, it became clear to us that while all the participating organizations agreed on the coalition's overall goals, one of the Hmong leaders repeatedly disagreed on the indicators of success, which meant we had to pause the process and work through the disagreement. In the meantime, the backbone organization's leadership was feeling anxious because they were already behind in submitting an evaluation plan to the funder. Conversations between their executive director and us centered on interpersonal conflicts (including speculations about cultural, gender and generational differences) and everyone was impatient to move on.

However, the underlying tension that was showing up as disagreement around indicators and "interpersonal" conflict required the time to examine what was really going on. We applied a systems lens and raised the following questions with all the participants:

- The outcome and therefore, the indicator, pointed to an increase in the Black community's share in the industry typically dominated by Hmong workers. Did this outcome mean less economic security for the Hmong community if more Black people became eligible for jobs in the industry?
- Are the two communities competing for a set of limited jobs – jobs that don't require a degree or a lot of training? How does this type of labor segmentation perpetuate racial inequity?
- The Black leaders were in favor of advocating for a language justice policy, recognizing that the Hmong community often had limited access to opportunities and resources because of the state's lack of translation and interpretation assistance. They were clear that the ultimate goal of holding the state accountable could benefit all the racial groups in the city. How did the Hmong leaders think their participation could benefit all the racial groups and in particular, their Black partners at the table?
- Have the leaders representing the racial groups in the city engaged their own communities in discussions about the coalition's goals? Did they have a strategy to bridge their community members through their respective constituencies?

Exploring these questions started to unearth the mental models that were operating at the leadership and community levels and other systems that needed to be considered beyond the economic system. The logic modeling process provided us, as the evaluator, the opportunity to help the coalition place its work within the larger context of racial equity. At the same time, we recognized that our role was quickly becoming blurred between evaluators and facilitators. Also, they needed more intensive in-person facilitation than we could provide. We consulted with the backbone organization about engaging their funder to request expert facilitation and technical assistance. We identified a couple of expert facilitators who lived in close proximity to the city as well. We spoke to the funder ourselves—with permission from the coalition members—and explained the situation. We learned later that the funder didn't follow up.

If you encountered such a situation:

- What would your response have been, as an evaluator practicing evaluation in service of racial equity? Why?
- Where do you think your responsibility begins and ends, if there is a beginning and an end? How would you have balanced what you knew and didn't know then, and what you were hired to do and not do?
- What would you have done, if anything, to ensure that the funder followed up?
- What other questions might you have asked? Why?

Continuous learning and strategy improvement

Our efforts to achieve racial equity are ongoing and every step forward, big or small, offers a learning opportunity. For this reason, a continuous learning and strategy improvement process is critical in evaluations in service of racial equity. The process must begin the moment you help a funder develop their theory of change and strategy and continue until you complete the evaluation and help them reflect on the findings. Continuous learning and strategy improvement operate in parallel with all the other stages of evaluation (see Exhibit 5). The basics are the same, but the questions you ask are different and explicitly related to issues that come up in racial equity work.

Peel away the layers of the onion during planning

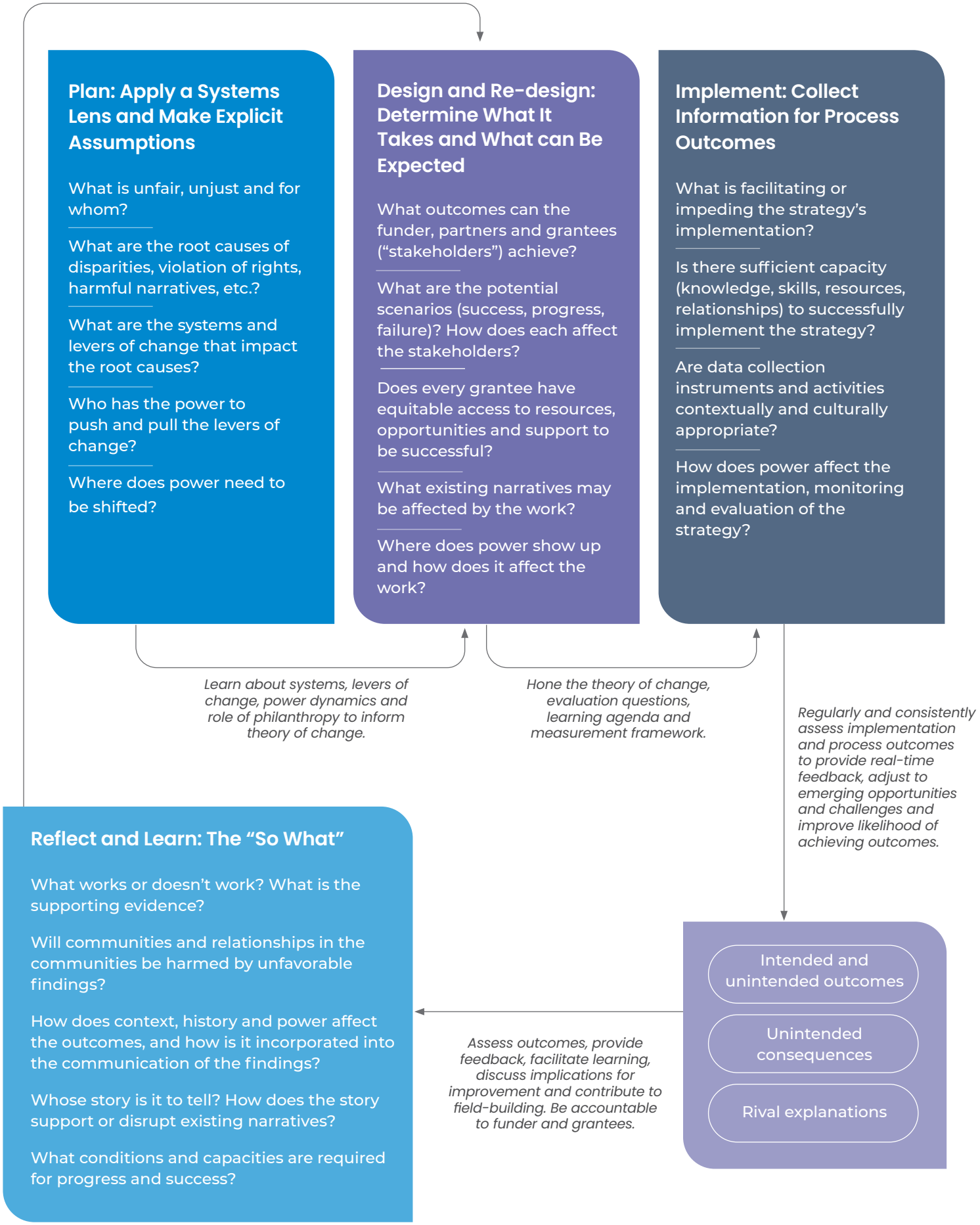
The questions asked in the first stage—planning—involve the use of a systemic lens to inform the theory of change and strategy. This stage itself is iterative as you work with those involved to understand:

- Which specific groups of people are affected by the racial inequity.
- Where in the system the problems are.
- Which levers to trigger to effect change.
- Where the power lies that needs to be shifted.

Learning is happening at this stage as you, the funder, partners and other stakeholders deepen your understanding of the situation and sharpen the framing of the problem.

Sometimes, you enter the process after the funder, partners and other stakeholders have decided the problem and are in the design stage. In this case, you can further explore the problem during the next iteration of the strategy improvement process.

Exhibit 5: Continuous learning and strategy improvement process in service of racial equity



Align goals, strategy, outcomes and capacity during the design stage

The design stage is typically where you help articulate the theory of change, illustrate it in a logic model and then develop the measurement framework and evaluation plan. What is different in an evaluation conducted in service of racial equity are the kinds of questions you raise, like these:

- Who is supposed to benefit from the initiative so the strategy is sufficiently customized to this population?
- What are the risks and benefits for the benefitting population? Could the initiative lead to unintended outcomes that might benefit the population in other ways or benefit another population? Could the initiative inadvertently harm the population in other ways or harm another population?
- How might the initiative influence existing narratives about the people who are supposed to benefit?
- What capacity-building support (e.g., training, coaching, technical assistance) and resources are needed by the people implementing the initiative and the communities who are supposed to benefit so everyone has what they need to be successful?
- Where and how can individuals with power help facilitate the work or impede progress?

Use the data collected to explicitly explore where racial inequity lies

The data collected, analyzed and summarized should be intentional about exploring:

- Unequal distribution of resources and support to the communities that were supposed to benefit.
- Use of power (and by who) to facilitate or impede progress.
- Community, organizational, historical and other events that could have affected the implementation and outcomes.
- Ways to reach deeper into communities to hear the perspectives of the people who were supposed to benefit from the initiative.
- Any unintended consequences that could hurt progress for one racial group even as the initiative benefits or another racial group.

Discuss, reflect and improve

This is undoubtedly the most important part of conducting evaluation in service of racial equity. It requires effective facilitation because the discussion and reflection need to deliberately provide feedback about:

- Prominent and relevant tensions that might exist in the strategy and its implementation due to power differences among the funder, partners and grantees, and whether or not race, gender and other forms of identity affected the dynamics.
- Capacities that need to be further developed, who by and for, to ensure that everyone—especially grassroots, people-of-color-led organizations—can take advantage of the resources and opportunities available to them.
- Areas that need further attention and solutions to overcome barriers that stand in the way of progress toward racial equity.
- Parts of the initiative and mental models about the theory that might need to be let go because they were inaccurate about what communities of color need in order to have equitable access to resources and opportunities and build power.

A story for your reflection

This story is based on Community Science's experience, but we changed some of the information to prevent any association to the actual groups and situation.

We evaluated an 18-month initiative that supported community organizations to apply a racial equity lens to their health promotion efforts. We met with the funder's president and staff several times to discuss the following:

- **Their expectations of change by the end of 18 months, knowing full well that it takes many years before any racial equity-related outcomes become apparent.** We asked this question multiple times and separately with the president and the staff to ensure their answers were consistent and their expectations were realistic. We knew from experience that sometimes leadership has more lofty expectations while staff tend to be more grounded in reality. In this example, they were on the same page. If they weren't, we would have had to point this out and help them arrive at a set of common and realistic expectations.
- **Outcomes that were acceptable and not acceptable to the funder.** We tested different scenarios of outcomes with the funder, from the community organizations' increased capacity to use a racial equity lens to procedural and policy changes in the organizations, to get their reactions to what was acceptable success, progress and failure.

In the middle of the initiative, we learned that the organizations struggled to apply a racial equity lens. For instance, they discussed how they could expand their health care services to different racial and ethnic populations, or how they needed a better system to connect people to jobs, affordable housing and other services. They didn't know how analyze and dismantle the policies, procedures and practices that prevented people from equitable access to resources and to shift the power in the communities they worked in. This evaluation finding implied that the funder needed to invest in more capacity-building support to help the organizations connect the dots between health, racial equity and systems change. The funder increased the support only slightly. To assist the community organizations (and outside our scope of work), we conducted a webinar to help them apply a racial equity lens by teaching them how to analyze and interpret data on racial and ethnic health disparities, frame questions, identify where unequal treatment and inequitable access might exist in the health, health care and other systems and determine strategies and the types of outcomes they could expect in 18 months and beyond.

If you encountered such a situation:

- What would your response have been, as an evaluator practicing evaluation in service of racial equity? Why?
- Where do you think your responsibility begins and ends, if there is a beginning and an end? How would you have balanced what you knew and didn't know then, and what you were hired to do and not do?
- What would you have done, if anything, to encourage the funder to invest more heavily in capacity-building?

Conclusion

As evaluators, we often focus on racial prejudice and implicit biases between individuals as part of our effort to use evaluation as a tool in our struggle for racial equity. We also have to work on ourselves and our own implicit biases. This guide was intended to take it one step further—to connect ourselves to the larger movement for racial equity which requires us to:

- Become mindful about how our implicit biases naturally shape our framing of evaluation questions, our trust of different types of data sources and the evidence they produce, and our inclination to support strategies and initiatives that are consistent with our beliefs, viewpoints, approaches and interests.
- Use a systems lens to understand and amplify the structures, relationships, mental models and narratives that contribute to recurring patterns and trends of disparate outcomes in health, education, housing and other conditions in communities of color.
- Use this lens to also identify the levers of change to disrupt the structures, relationships and mindsets.

It means we have to see ourselves as change agents and perform the above behaviors until they become intuitive in our practice of evaluation. It will not be easy and it will not happen quickly. We have to situate ourselves, based on who we are by race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability and other self-defined characteristics, as well as by our positions in our organizations and in the evaluation profession. Often, we have to fight how others define us, professionally and personally. Also, none of the above occurs in a vacuum. Evaluations and evaluators are part of an ecosystem of philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, scientist establishments, tribal nations, public agencies, professional associations and the consulting industry—all of which have to do business differently if we are going to use evaluation practice to make progress toward racial equity. To reiterate what was said in the beginning of this guide, we have to be courageous, curious and empowered to challenge the conversation about racial equity in evaluation, and to continuously practice evaluation in a way that will help advance racial equity, learn from the experience and improve.

Exercises
Check yourself and your team

- If you are an independent consultant, find a peer or two to process your thinking.
- If you are part of an evaluation team, develop a process and cultivate a brave space for asking questions about each other's potential blind spots and monitoring how they could influence the evaluation design, process and products.
- You can also develop an agreement with your client and other partners to create a non-judgmental space to check each other.

There are many tips about how to create a brave space for challenging each other's assumptions and biases. (See the resources at the end of this guide for more.)

Question bias: framing of evaluation questions and problem

- ☑ **Which dominant narratives am I more likely to buy into without questioning?**
- ☑ **Can the lack of performance or poor performance of a particular person or group be attributed to their cultural traditions or values? What evidence supports this?**
- ☑ **Why wouldn't people of a certain race, ethnicity or cultural background have high aspirations for their communities, families and children?**
- ☑ **Am I using terms in my questions or problem statement that have negative connotations about a particular group of people?**

Data bias: data, evidence and methodology

- Am I inclined to consider only evidence published in peer-reviewed journals? Whose published works am I paying more attention to and why?
- Am I going out of my way to read literature that presents a different viewpoint from my own?
- Is the evidence based on sound analysis, including disaggregation of data by race, gender, income and other intersecting demographic variables?
- Why do I believe that this evaluation methodology is better-suited for the initiative and not any other methodology?
- Am I intentionally paying attention to where and how the methodology or approach might not be appropriate, or is it a blind spot? If so, how do I put checks and balances in place?

Personal belief bias: self-interest and personal agenda

- What is appealing and not appealing about the strategy I am evaluating? Why?
- Do I want a strategy to succeed so badly that I misdiagnose or diminish the challenges at the risk of compromising the longer-term goal to end racial inequity?
- How does my own racial, ethnic and cultural background influence my interests?
- What happens if I don't side with popular views? Is there a personal or professional risk?
- How much power do I have in the situation and how much of that power am I trying to hold on to and why?

Exercises
Explore your preconceived notions

Here are some examples of information based on data that show different trends. Review them and explore your preconceived notions about what information or evidence you tend to believe.

- A 2017 study by the Federation for American Immigration Reform showed how undocumented immigrants received more than $100 billion a year in taxpayer benefits, including prenatal and postpartum care under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. Also, 31% of immigrant families with U.S.-born children use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (La Jeunesse, 2019).

- The IRS reported that in 2015, $4.35 million tax returns were filed using Individual Tax Identification Numbers used primarily by undocumented immigrants who don't have Social Security Numbers (Shoichet, 2019). Undocumented immigrants' draw to sanctuary cities and immigrant-friendly cities is all about finding work, not using benefits, according to immigrant advocates.

- Descriptive statistics published by American Renaissance in 2019 showed that African Americans and Latinos received more assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program than Whites, Asians and Native Americans (Bradley, 2019).

- Evidence compiled by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities showed that in 2014, White working-class adults without college degree made up the largest group of people lifted from poverty by safety-net programs, while poverty rates among people without college degrees were substantially higher for Blacks and Hispanics (Shapiro et al., 2017).

- A study published in Academy of Management Learning and Education, using data from 1964 to 2007, concluded that the effectiveness of diversity training is inconclusive. Nevertheless, corporations continue to believe that such training is essential to their businesses' success (Anand & Winters, 2008).

- An experiment by a team of researchers from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 2017 found that diversity training does not generally result in any behavioral or policy change in work environments (Chang et al., 2019).

Exercises
Check your systems lens

Keep a list of questions to ask yourself.

This list should be a living document. You can add new questions, modify them, delete some of them and so on, as you become better and better at understanding systems and checking your own biases. Here are some questions to get you started.

Questions: identifying systems

- ☑ What important forces (e.g., people, norms, events, laws, etc.) impact how the system or systems work—both positively and negatively?
- ☑ Are there national, state, and local laws, policies, strategic plans, or plans of action that are related to the issue of concern? What might have compelled the construction of the laws, policies, and plans? Who wrote them?
- ☑ What are the upstream causes and downstream effects of these forces?
- ☑ Who is responsible for enforcing or implementing the laws, policies, or plans at the federal, state and local level? Is there a coordinating agency?
- ☑ What are the community-based organizations that engage with and represent the interests of the people most impacted by the laws, policies or plans?
- ☑ What programs exist to support the laws, policies or plans?
- ☑ How are the laws, policies, or plans monitored, regulated and evaluated and who is responsible?

Questions: applying a systems lens to your evaluation

- Does your client have a role in maintaining or changing the mental models and systems that contribute to the racial disparities of interest? What is that role?
- How do you, as a practitioner of evaluation in service or racial equity, assist the client to consistently make decisions that are also in service of racial equity?
- Do you need help facilitating discussions with the client about the systems change they want to effect as well as racial equity? Evaluators typically don't receive training in group facilitation and you may still be developing your knowledge of racial equity so it is okay, and may even be more appropriate, to hire a facilitator with expertise in this area.
- Have you sufficiently disaggregated the existing data relevant to the disparity of concern by race and ethnicity, as well as by other demographic variables such as gender, income, age, education, and location (if it's a place-based initiative) to fully understand the situation and how systems intersect to impact the population of interest?
- How can you learn about the disparities from the communities experiencing them?
  If you are not a member of said community, do you need to build trust first?
- As you apply a systems lens, are you paying attention to the implicit biases you
  might be maintaining?

Resources

Implicit bias and creating brave spaces

Color Brave Space: How to run a better equity focused meeting. https://fakequity.com/2017/05/26/color-brave-space-how-to-run-a-better-equity-focused-meeting/

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Equitable Evaluation Initiative www.equitableeval.org

Center for Evaluation Innovation www.evaluationinnovation.org

National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Toolkit for Consultants to Grantmakers www.nncg.org/resources/dei-toolkit

Systems thinking

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