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RACE matters

SYSTEM REFORM STRATEGIES



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Why Should I Use This Tool?

Some otherwise good ideas in system reform can fall short of maximizing opportunity for all if they are not intentionally examined for how they play out around race. This tool helps you avoid unintended inequitable results.

What Will the Tool Accomplish?

It offers a systematic process for assessing opportunity for all in policy and practice reform by walking you through key questions you should ask about reform strategies.

How Do I Use It?

- Review the examples of common policy and practice reforms, their unexpected limitations, and how they can be corrected to promote opportunity for all.
- Then use the questions below the examples to walk through your own proposed policy or practice reform. The answers to these questions should produce an improved design by identifying any extra steps needed to produce equitable results.

Type of Intervention	Limitation	Example	Additional Considerations: Value Added by Focus on Embedded Inequities ¹
POLICY FORMULATION (without intentional race-focused lens)			
1. Creating means-tested policies (e.g., CHIP, EITC)	Because people of color have disproportionately high rates of poverty, this strategy will address their situation, but it does not address barriers to access.	Eligible families of color are under-enrolled or under-subscribed for available benefits.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The use of culturally competent community-based outreach workers has proven successful in increasing the enrollment of children and families of color in programs like CHIP. Predatory income tax preparation services are disproportionately located in low income communities of color. The creation of VITA sites with user-friendly outreach in these areas enables residents eligible for EITC and other tax benefits to obtain these without losing a high proportion of what they should receive due to exploitative commercial services. A Racial Equity Impact Analysis can be performed to understand where shortcomings in policy formulation exist and thus enable policy to be re-crafted to promote equitable results.
2. Creating risk-focused policies (e.g., child welfare)	Because people of color are disproportionately situated in higher risk circumstances, this strategy can address their situation, but it will not guarantee that they'll be treated equitably within these situations due to racial stereotyping.	Children of color and their families with the same characteristics and circumstances as comparable White children and their families are placed into foster care at higher rates.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Decision-making about children and families can be improved with the use of culturally appropriate assessment tools and cultural competence training for caseworkers. Ideally, this is coupled with caseload reduction to reduce caseworkers' need to make quick judgments and team decision-making that incorporates family and community stakeholder perspectives. Affected communities' power must be enhanced so that they have the ability to ensure their equitable treatment. A Racial Equity Impact Analysis can be performed to understand where shortcomings in policy formulation exist and thus enable policy to be re-crafted to promote equitable results.
3. Providing vouchers, IDAs, other "currency" so recipients can purchase goods, supports, and services	Because people of color have, on average, less income and assets, this strategy can provide needed resources (although the availability of such resources is typically miniscule in relation to the scope of need). For people of color, needed goods, services and supports may either be unavailable, cost more, or offer less return per unit of resource.	In attempting to use an IDA to purchase a home, people of color are subject to mortgage discrimination and redlining. The purchase of a house in a predominantly non-white community is likely to result in lesser asset accumulation than the purchase of a house in a predominantly White community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The availability of asset-building or choice-enhancing opportunities must be coupled with active enforcement of fair housing and credit laws, fair real estate practices, equitable urban development, and other laws and decisions applicable to the particular asset or choice issue. Penalties for non-compliance must be sufficient to deter discrimination. Affected communities' power must be enhanced to ensure their ability to advocate for equitable results.
4. Authorizing policies that appear problem-solving but that aren't proactive in considering race-based effects	Because embedded inequities are subtle and pervasive, failure to be explicit about them is more likely than not to reproduce disparate outcomes.	The use of baby toxicology tests may be a valuable health precaution, but because they are most likely to be conducted in inner city hospitals, low-income communities of color may be at disproportionate risk of having their children taken from the home for findings of drug exposure.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The use of a Racial Equity Impact Analysis in advance of policy development, adoption and implementation can ensure that a decision-making body does not leave racial equity to chance (because chance is likely to perpetuate racial inequity). Affected communities' power must be enhanced to ensure their ability to advocate for equitable results.
Add your policy proposal here.	Apply a racial equity analysis to determine if the policy has limitations. Give the limitations.	Give an example of the limitation.	What changes need to be made to promote racially equitable results?
PRACTICE REFORM (without intentional race-focused lens)			
1. Closure of deep-end or worst-performing institutions (e.g., mental institutions, worst-performing schools)	Because people of color are disproportionately relegated to these institutions, this strategy can simply push disproportionality to the next-poorest performing location.	The closure of mental hospitals in favor of insufficient community-based services and supports shifted the racially disproportionate institutional population to a racially disproportionate street population, which contributed to a racially disproportionate prison population.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Closure must be combined with the use of tools that reduce racial bias in assessment and decision-making about clients and the recognition of culturally diverse strengths that create a platform for successful outcomes. The availability of a continuum of adequately-funded supports is necessary so that remaining institutions/services produce good outcomes. Affected communities' power must be enhanced to ensure the sustainability of change. The use of a Racial Equity Impact Analysis in the process of decision-making will ensure that racial equity isn't left to chance (because chance is likely to perpetuate racially inequitable results).
2. Caseload reduction	Because people of color are disproportionately found in public systems, this has the potential to improve their experience of those systems.	Caseload reduction offers the opportunity for caseworker decision-making grounded in more data, but if caseworkers cannot recognize the strengths of families and communities of color, treatment may not improve.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Caseworkers should have decision-making tools that reduce bias and adequate time with clients to reduce quick judgments that tend to rely on stereotypes. The voices of family and community stakeholders should be part of decision-making where caseworker discretion is possible. Cultural competence training can improve workers' capacity to recognize the strengths of families and communities of color.
3. Systems co-location, blended funding	Because people of color are disproportionately found in public systems, this has the potential to improve their experience of those systems.	Combining service systems or funding streams that by themselves weren't explicit about addressing racial inequities is unlikely to produce a better track record regarding opportunity for all.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The use of a Racial Equity Impact Analysis for each system alone and for their collaboration together can begin to surface areas needing attention in order to use these system reforms to serve all children and families optimally.
4. Shift of greater resources to prevention	Because people of color are disproportionately found in public systems, this has the potential to improve their experience of those systems.	Limitations on caseworker resources for prevention and early intervention result in "opportunity hoarding" – reserving these resources for clients who are viewed as most likely to benefit. But this discretionary decision is often grounded in racial stereotypes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Funds should be flexible so that the most effective, earliest interventions are available for all children and families. This flexibility must be coupled with culturally competent early outreach, cultural competence training for caseworkers, and tools that reduce bias in decision-making about resource allocation.
Add your practice reform proposal here.	Apply a racial equity analysis to determine if the practice has limitations. Give the limitations.	Give an example of the limitation.	What changes need to be made to promote racially equitable results?

1. Embedded racial inequities are accumulated advantages for whites and accumulated disadvantages for people of color. These results come from the long-term effects of public policies and institutional practices, the differential perceptions and images of people of color and whites, and the dominant norms and values that privilege one racial group over others.