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# RACE matters

WHAT'S RACE GOT TO DO WITH IT?



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### Why Should I Use This Tool?

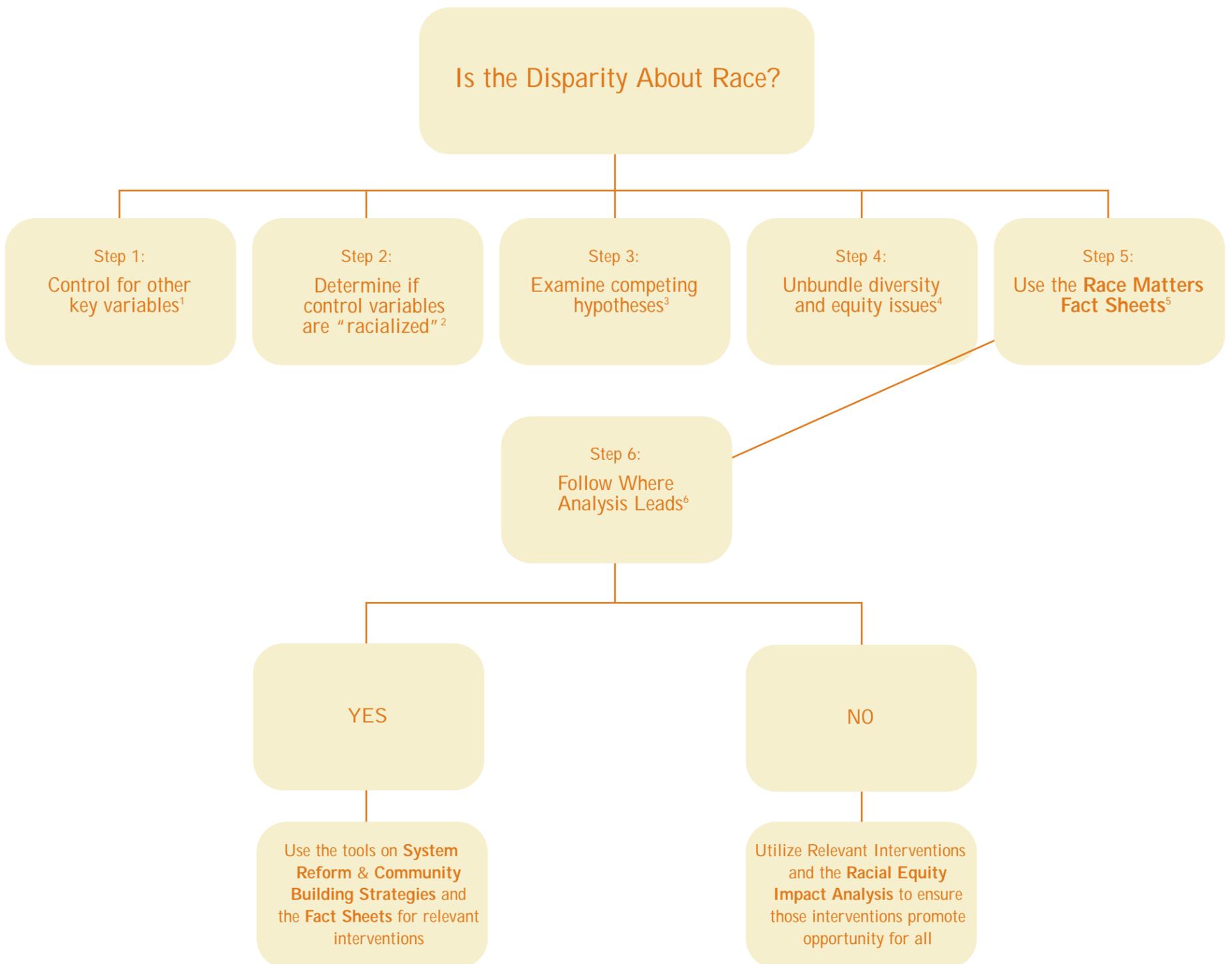
- Advocates need to make a strong data-based case about racial disparities. Otherwise, discussions about race easily “fall off the table,” get diverted into side arguments, or default into ideological camps.
- Sometimes race matters in situations that aren't even presented in racial terms. We need to know when that's the case so that our work can be effective.
- Most of the time the story behind the initial data is far more complicated than those data reveal. We need to know that story fully so our work can be effective.
- Sometimes race isn't a major factor, even when a situation is presented as such. Because race so often is a major factor, we need to protect the space for that claim to be made.

### What Will the Tool Accomplish?

It determines whether disparities are products of unequal opportunities by race or the result of other factors.

### How Do I Use It?

Perform the following six steps to sort out if the disparity is about race.



1. **Control for other key variables.** Before concluding that race matters, be sure to control for key factors such as age, income, and education level. Specific issues will have additional key factors that can explain differences (such as region of the country, state-specific policies, and the like). If racial differences remain after other key factors are taken into account, the case is strong that race matters.

2. **Determine if control variables are themselves “racialized.”** Key control variables can themselves be the result of race mattering. For example, while income, educational level, and residential location are important control variables, they are the result of policies, practices, and processes that have racial dimensions (consider job discrimination, disparities in educational funding, residential segregation). Thus, the argument that an issue is about poverty **rather than** race or education **rather than** race or neighborhood **rather than** race is, on the face of it, insufficient. These claims can only be made accurately if racial disparities disappear **within** groupings (e.g., that poor people regardless of race have comparable experiences with a public system, or that high school graduates regardless of race fare similarly in the job market, or that all middle income neighborhoods regardless of population demographics enjoy similar levels of public and private sector investment).

3. **Examine competing hypotheses.** This is another way of reminding you to review other possible explanations for disparities and control for these variables in your analysis. In effect, you want to see if other explanations can be eliminated before claiming with empirical confidence that race matters for a given outcome.

4. **Unbundle diversity and equity issues.** Just because racial diversity exists among actors in a given circumstance doesn't mean that the situation is free of racial inequities. Indeed, human service research reveals that decisions by caseworkers of color can mirror those of their white counterparts, with everyone contributing to inequitable racial outcomes. The point here is that embedded racial inequities are easily produced and reproduced – usually without the intention of doing so and often without even reference to race (a dynamic that one writer calls “laissez-faire” racism). That's why the production of opportunity for all has to be an intentional process in which all racial/ethnic groups must be involved.

5. Use the **Fact Sheets** in this Toolkit to get a head start on your analysis. The Fact Sheets use national data wherever possible to document how race matters, controlling for other key variables where such research is available. They also offer the theories and complexities behind how race matters on a given issue. You can investigate the same kinds of questions addressed in these **Fact Sheets** in your local area or in a given public system.

6. **Follow where the data and analysis lead.** If you have done all of the above analysis, you are ready to answer the question, “What's race got to do with it?” If the answer is “a lot,” then addressing race becomes a meaningful and necessary part of your work, and you have done a solid analysis to make the case. Other tools in this Toolkit can help you do work that reduces disparities and promotes opportunity for all. If the answer is “less than I had originally thought,” then this is less likely to be a situation for raising race as an issue, since those who are already skeptical about the extent to which race matters will be able to find ready ways to diminish that claim. In either case, though, the work to be done around any given issue will benefit from use of the **Racial Equity Impact Analysis** to prevent new or further unequal opportunities by race.