

# **Racial Equity Theory of Change**

## **Worksheets**

**Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change  
281 Park Avenue South  
New York, New York 10010**

## **STEP #1: Compose Your Desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO)**

*(30 minutes)*

The first step in the racial equity theory of change (RETOC) process is the most important: deciding **What We Want**. This means clearly defining the outcome that will be the focus of your reform/change effort over the coming months and years.

In real life – in your organization or community – this process will take time because you will want to build a sense of collective investment in the work and agree on the answers to questions like these:

- ❑ What specific area of racial disparity are we seeking to eliminate?
- ❑ What is the geographic target for our effort? Community? County? State? Region?
- ❑ What will “racial equity” in our outcome look like?
- ❑ When do we expect to see results? What is our timeframe? Two years? Ten years?

Here are some examples of broad anti-racism vision statements:

o undo institutional and structural racism – the structures, policies, and behaviors that create segregation and inequity in every aspect of daily living.

*--ERASE Racism Initiative, Long Island, New York. 2001*

To end institutionalized racism in city government; and to create a community that is enriched by diverse cultures, with full participation of all residents.

*-- Race and Social Justice Initiative, Seattle, Washington. 2004*

To provide a welcoming, nondiscriminatory environment with respect and opportunity for all.

*--Mayor's Racial Harmony Initiative/Create CommUNITY, St. Cloud, Minnesota. 2003*

And here some hypothetical ones more tailored to organizations like ours:

To eliminate racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in my city/county/region by the year 2011.

To achieve racial equity in child welfare practice and outcomes ..... by the year 2011.

To eliminate close the achievement gap in high school school performance .... by 2015.

***1) Work with your group to develop a REO, and write it out.***

## **STEP #2: Unpack Your Racial Equity Outcome Into Building Blocks**

*(30 minutes)*

Here, we begin **Setting Our Priorities**. Usually, we think of BIG racial equity outcomes like those offered as examples above. These are the types of outcomes we ultimately want. But, we have to unpack those big outcomes into smaller **building blocks** so that we can be focused, realistic and consistent in our planning and action.

So, for example, if we we're after "elimination of juvenile racial sentencing disparities" we need to specify racial equity building blocks like:

- ❑ juvenile arrest rates that are similar across racial groups
- ❑ equal access to quality recreational programs
- ❑ alternative and proportionate sentencing for all youth
- ❑ similar community policing tactics across communities
- ❑ similar juvenile justice and law-enforcement institutional cultures across communities

One helpful way to identify building blocks is to flip the thinking process and ask: *what barriers to this desired racial equity outcome must we cross or eliminate in order to be successful?* Knowing these barriers is another way of thinking about the building blocks necessary for success.

**2a) Brainstorm among yourselves for about 20 mins to develop an initial list of five or more building blocks.** Try to come up only with those you believe are most necessary.

**2b) Then take another 5 mins to agree on three of those that you think might be reasonably within your reach as an individual or organization.**

Note: In the real world you would use research, advice from experts, and maybe a few brainstorming sessions to identify these priority building blocks. Today, we're cutting this very short to get a start on the work.

In the juvenile justice example, the Racial Equity Outcome is:

"To eliminate racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in my city/county/region by the year 2011."

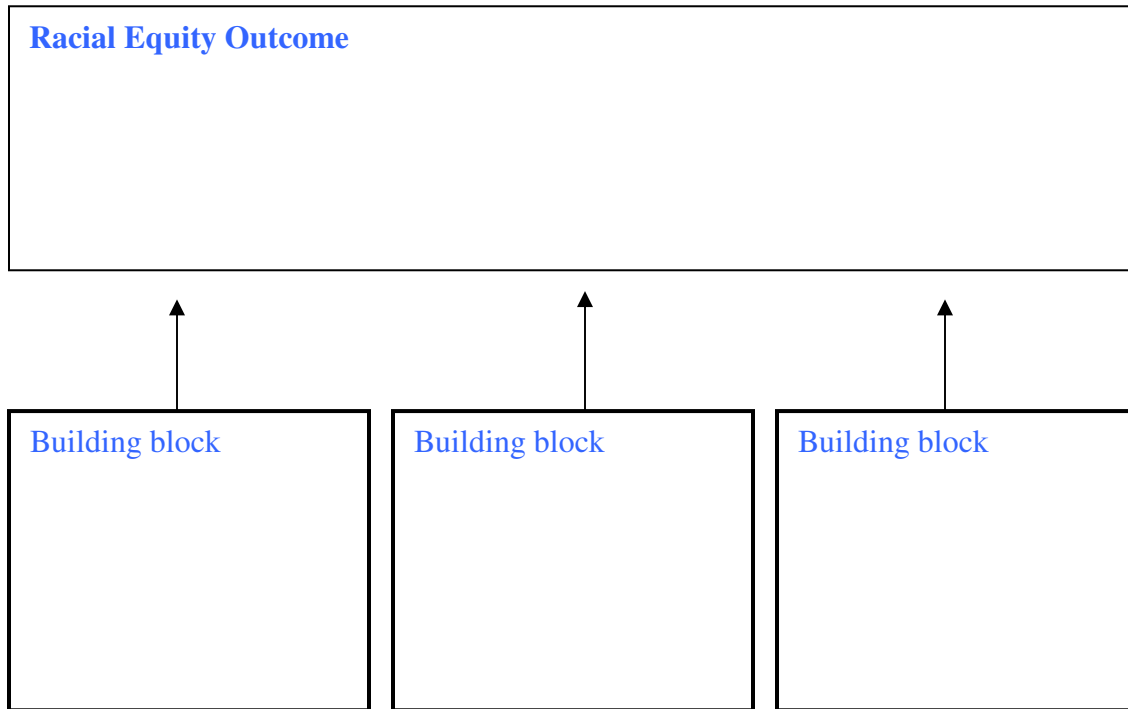
And, the three "reachable" building blocks identified are:

- **Similar arrest rates** for white, black and brown youth in the same community or region for any given offence
- **A wider menu of positive recreational options** for local youth
- **Alternative sentencing options** for local judges: options that are more proportionate to the crimes committed, and that take the devastating community impacts of mass incarceration into account.

**2c) Write down your Racial Equity Outcome and your three reachable building blocks.** You might want to use the template on the next page.

**2d) Take the last 5 mins, list other building blocks that you believe are important, but beyond your immediate reach.** You might be able to assist others working in these areas or join in collaborative or coalitional strategies.

# INITIAL STEPS IN THE RACIAL EQUITY THEORY OF CHANGE



Identify building blocks that are important but not directly in our control:

### **STEP #3: Identify What Supports or Impedes Your Building Blocks**

*(30 minutes)*

Now you are ready to get down to business!

By this point, you have

- clearly defined the racial equity outcome that will anchor our effort
- unpacked its key building blocks, and
- decided which ones will your priorities, given your situation and capacities.

With these steps complete, our structural racism analysis recommends we concentrate on obstacles and supports related to our chosen building blocks in three areas (PPRs):

- P: public policies
- P: institutional practices
- R: cultural representations

Perhaps the biggest challenge here is coming up with the “cultural representations” – the racialized assumptions, images and social narratives that shape the political, business and other institutional contexts in which decisions are made about the allocation of social resources. Yet trying to identify these is crucial, because this “common sense” plays a huge role in sustaining structural racism.

Note: Again, in the real world this step may require us to reach out to experts and others who can help identify the most important “PPR” barriers for each building block. Research may be an important tool here, so this is not a step that can be completed in one short brainstorming session.

***3a) Brainstorm about the policies, practices and cultural representations that will determine whether the building blocks you identified earlier (the bottom row of “boxes” in your map) are reached.*** You might want to use the template on the next page.

***3b) Select 2-3 items among all the PPRs that, in your best judgment, represent the most significant barriers or supports for each building block.*** Note that some policies may impact more than one of the building blocks you identified.

**Racial Equity Outcome**  
(Taken from the “top box” of your map)

<b>Building Blocks</b> <i>(from your map)</i>	<b>Public Policy Barriers to Racial Equity</b>	<b>Institutional Practice Barriers to Racial Equity</b>	<b>Cultural Representations that are Barriers to Racial Equity</b>

**\* Don't forget to select 2-3 of the most important PPRs for each building block.**

## **TIME CHECK!**

**By the time you have finished this, it should be about 12:00. If it is much later than that right now, you need to speed up.**

**Also, have you gotten your lunch yet? It's available for you now.**

## **STEP #4: Mapping the Local Change Landscape**

*(30 minutes)*

To make the kinds of changes you desire, you must **Know the Nuts and Bolts of Local Power**.

Understanding this overall picture is an important requirement for promoting racial equity because this work is as much political, social, civic and cultural as it is technical and programmatic. It is key to building alliances for action, developing public will to support change, and countering forces of retrenchment.

For this step, you have two choices for your work. You can focus on just one Building Block and explore it in depth. Or, you can look at all of your Building Blocks, and undertake a holistic power and governance analysis. So, considering the PPRs you want to target for either change or support, answer the following questions.

***4a) Which individuals or institutions are key decision-makers relevant to the PPRs in your community, city, county, or state? Which ones are likely to be an allies or obstacles with regard to your interests?***

***4b) What is the political, legislative, institutional or social history relating to the PPRs under consideration? And, who benefits from the current configuration and who are the main promoters or opponents of changes?***

***4c) Are there budgetary or technical aspects to the issue that require specialized knowledge or resources? If so, who provides that analysis? Is this information publicly available?***

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## STEP #5: Gearing up for Action

Now you're clear that the work of racial equity involves taking **Actions to Change or Support a Specific Set of PPRs** either on your own and/or in collaboration with others. These actions must target those who most influence the characteristics of those PPRs in your local context.

But first, you must answer these important preliminary questions.

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**5a) Does your organization have the will to take on this type of work for a sustained period?** Do the board, staff and other leaders within your organization share a race analysis that will prioritize this work? Does the leadership have the courage and commitment to take this on?

If “No,” what concrete steps will you take to increase organizational awareness and understanding of structural racism?

**5b) Does your organization have the capacity to do what's necessary to change or promote PPRs? What specific capacities do you have that will allow you to take specific action?**

Besides staff and financial resources, at least four additional types of capacities may be required:

- analytical – e.g., deep knowledge of specific policy, legislative and regulatory environments; familiarity with racial features and outcomes of specific institutions; capacity to identify and assess power of narratives, images, and other representations linked to race; strategic thinking capacity
- convening – e.g., capacity to bring together disparate stakeholder groups; provide “safe space” for honest discussion with agenda that moves process forward; support ongoing learning community.
- communicative – e.g., ability to frame information for, and reach, critical audiences in local govt., business and civic sectors
- networking – e.g., ability to develop, participate in, and actual membership of, formal and informal networks and coalitions; ability to acquire resources through those relationships.

**5c) What will your organization do as a first step?** With this clearer sense of what your organization can actually invest in an effort to achieve the desired racial equity outcome, you can develop a detailed action plan that is both realistic and in line with your social change vision. What will be your initial focus? What do you think you will have accomplished by the end of year one?

**5d) How will you communicate your plan?** Who will be your messenger? What frame and language will you use? Who will be your audience?

## **STEP #6: Prepare Your Presentation to the Group**

*(30 minutes)*

Your last step is to develop a presentation about your RETOC for the rest group. You will have 10 minutes (maximum) to describe your plan. We strongly encourage creativity in presentation style!

Your presentation will be “judged” in a supportive and lightly entertaining manner by three American Idol judges – Simon, Paula and Randy – and your colleagues in the room.

Here are the evaluation criteria:

- Clarity of racial equity outcome; clarity of the racial analysis that underlies your desired outcome (15 points)
- Description of and rationale for your top three building blocks (20 points)
- Statement of building blocks that are not directly in your control and what, if anything, you are going to do about them (5 points)
- Descriptions of the policies, practices and representations that you must affect in order to get to your building blocks in place (20 points)
- Mapping the individual/institutional supports and obstacles (10 points)
- Analysis of your institutional capacities for conducting the work (10 points)
- Choice of first step and rationale (10 points)
- Communication and messaging strategy (10 points)

**TOTAL 100 POINTS**

- Extra credit! You can get up to 20 points for creativity in your presentation, so have fun!!