

# Methodology: Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Anti-Hunger Policies

*Our hope is to build on this method for future projects. This methodology is offered as a possible pathway for other organizations, policymakers, and implementing agencies to use in developing a racial equity lens for their work, whether inside or outside the nutrition field.*

## How the Racial Equity Lens was Applied

Achieving racial equity means that all people, regardless of race, have fair opportunities to enjoy equality. To ensure that the methodology contributed to this outcome, methods put the needs of communities of color at the center of the analysis. The process was divided into two steps: first, closing divides based on race so that programs achieve equal outcomes for participants of all races; and second, ensuring that communities of color reach optimal outcomes, in our case, around nutrition. Both steps are integral to realizing racial equality.

Below are the five stages used to apply a racial equity lens, followed by questions asked at each stage:

**Stage 1: Do not assume that the program or policy did not already apply an equity lens.** Many anti-hunger programs already include an equity lens or efforts to promote equity in their program design—for example, gender or class equity. Programs serve lower-income communities, so their overall goal is to help people with fewer resources achieve equal outcomes. But for many reasons, some within the program’s purview and some outside its control, equal outcomes are not always the result. Using additional equity lenses, including a racial equity lens, can move the program closer to its goal.

**Stage 2: Analyze the outcomes for each racial and ethnic group.** If outcomes are not equal across participants of all races, then there is room to use a strengthened racial equity lens to adjust the inputs to achieve equal outcomes. The way to do this is to put the needs of communities of color at the center of the analysis in order to identify whether or how barriers to equal outcomes are addressed and how these program or policy elements can be improved.

**Stage 3. Analyze why and how the outcomes of each racial and ethnic group were different.** Once racial and ethnic disparities are identified, it is important to respond to the history and other factors that created these divides. Understanding the “why” and “how” behind the data is critical, especially when determining which recommendations are the most culturally sensitive and appropriate in addressing the historical trauma associated with the disparity.

**Stage 4: Use a racial equity approach to ensure that experts of color are equitably engaged in leading this project and shaping the narrative.** To see what it means to equitably engage people of color, please see text box below. Any racially equitable approach enables and empowers people of color to make decisions about how their narrative is

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “CENTER” THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR?

“Centering” means simply focusing attention. All decisions are informed by the barriers facing communities of color and solutions aimed at overcoming those barriers. Barriers and solutions are at the center of our thinking and discussions.

### EQUITABLE ENGAGEMENT: MORE THAN JUST PARTICIPATION

Equitable engagement is different from participation. When experts of color are asked for feedback after a project has been designed, but before it is finalized (or, in some cases, even after it is finalized), they are participating. Experts of color do not hold real power in making decisions—for example, about framing how concepts are communicated. Often, there is no requirement or expectation that the project will include the feedback that participating experts of color have given in the final product.

Equitable engagement involves experts of color from the beginning and empowers them to drive the conversation at each stage: design/planning, implementation/execution, and evaluation. Experts of color also have real decision-making power in shaping the narrative, determining who should be at the table, etc. Equitable engagement also gives them appropriate credit for their ideas and work and compensates them for their time.



portrayed. It is critical to racial equity that people of color be empowered to exercise true leadership. This project, for example, empowered authors and researchers of color who are experts to lead the development of the methodology.

During our consultations, we met with program participants who are people and experts of color. Participants in programs are experts on the strengths and weaknesses of the programs. Feedback from people who receive or have received nutrition benefits should guide research areas and topics. Some of the topics were identified solely by listening to the perspectives of recipient experts of color.

Engaging with participants directly is an integral part of using a strengthened racial equity lens in order to empower the agency of participants, even when qualitative or quantitative research has not yet caught up.

**Stage 5: Consult with people doing this work.** Often, policy recommendations are inadvertently made in siloes. Initial consultations with experts on the issues should be made, but additional meetings with people who work with communities that receive nutritional support, including staff who help implement nutritional programs, are critical. When possible, learn about the racial equity work that nonprofit staff, intermediaries, and program implementers are already doing, and look for opportunities for the anti-hunger field to apply a racial equity lens.

## Questions to Ask at Each Stage: Properly Applying a Racial Equity Lens

Below are detailed questions that should shape the process of gathering and evaluating information. This general methodology can be used to apply a racial equity lens to any policies and programs.

**Stage 1. The first methodology principle is not to assume that the policy/program did not *already* apply an equity lens.**

Ask questions such as:

- a. What are the different aspects of this policy?
- b. Do we have the data, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, that we need to analyze possible disparities, the extent of equality in outcomes, etc.?
- c. In what ways does each aspect contribute to producing equal outcomes for people of color and whites? In other words, what is being done intentionally to close racial divides?
- d. In what ways is the program neutral? Neutral policies provide the same level of services and support to everyone, so they neither improve nor worsen racial inequities.
- e. In what ways do policies put people of color at a further disadvantage? How do aspects of the program harm the effort to achieve racial equity?

For more information on how your organization can apply a racial equity lens, both internally and through your decision making on policy, advocacy, and implementation, please use the [Racial Equity Assessment Tool](#), created by the Alliance to End Hunger.

**Stage 2. The second methodology principle is to analyze the outcomes of different racial and ethnic groups.**

Ask questions such as:

- a. What is the racial and ethnic makeup of the population that this program serves?
- b. How does each racial and ethnic group fare with each outcome that is measured—for example, iron levels or food insecurity?

**Stage 3. The third methodology principle is to analyze how and why people of different racial or ethnic groups have different outcomes.** Investigate possible reasons for different outcomes:

- a. What are the factors that contribute to producing a specific outcome for a specific ethnic or racial group? Potential answers could have something to do with the design of the program or its implementation, or they could be unrelated factors.
- b. How are these driving factors different among each racial and ethnic group facing this same outcome?
- c. How are these driving factors similar among each racial and ethnic group facing this same outcome?
- d. What is the history behind this driving factor? When and where did it originate? What has been its impact on individual families and the larger community within each racial or ethnic group?
- e. Given this history, how might this driving factor impact the ability of community members to experience this program, or aspect of this program?
- f. Given the history of this driving factor, what aspects of the program might need to change to reverse these trends among each racial or ethnic group? Will these proposed changes have unintended consequences

that inadvertently hurt communities of color and the areas they live in?

- g. Given this history, how might communities of color respond to the proposed changes to the driving factors? Do they support these changes?

**Stage 4. The fourth methodology principle is to empower experts of color to lead this project and shape the narrative.**

- a. How are the processes within our organization empowering experts of color to lead the conversation without reducing their role and their work to mere tokenism?
- b. Do the time and money allocated to the project accurately reflect our organization's commitment to racial equity as an important priority?
- c. Who are the true decision makers regarding this project? Were project leads identified in a process that is racially equitable? Do experts of color hold real decision making power or are they merely consulted for feedback?
- d. Are we inviting conversations and comments from current and former participants of color in the programs? Are we unconsciously valuing formal research or other standard data sources over the perspectives and recommendations from people of color who have lived experience with these topic areas and programs?

**Stage 5. The fifth methodology principle is to consult with people doing this work.**

- a. Which organizations could help us understand how programs are implemented on the ground?
- b. What do participants and staff who work directly with programs in their community think is working and not working? Why?
- c. Are there additional specific factors or barriers that cause a particular racial or ethnic group to have poorer outcomes? Is there anything that was left out of the list for Stage 3 that should be included for additional research?
- d. What ideas do participants, former participants, and/or frontline staff have on things that need to change for results that are racially equitable?
- e. After the recommendations have been prepared, ask people on the ground what they think. Would the recommendations achieve equal outcomes for people of color? If not, ask them to draw on their experiences as implementers or participants to suggest changes.

**In organizations where hiring practices and internal culture do not yet reflect the racially inclusive demographics needed for an intentional process such as the one outlined in this methodology, organizational boards, management, researchers, and staff are encouraged to consider the following:**

- **Perhaps your staff is not racially diverse.** Think about how the overall culture could shift to become more racially inclusive and equitable. What should be different about hiring practices, and other practices?
- **Perhaps you have a racially diverse staff, but the decision making process is not racially equitable.** Think about how internal decision making processes could shift to become more racially inclusive and equitable, perhaps starting with individual projects. Organizations need to reach a point where people of each racial/ethnic group affected by the policy or program are equitably engaged in decision making. Refer to the racial equity assessment tool linked below for best practices on racially equitable decision making.<sup>1</sup>
- **Review research on similar issues from experts of color.** Very often, this work has already been done. It may be on a smaller scale and/or released with less publicity, so finding it may require using some innovative approaches. In addition, people of color who live and work in marginalized communities have great ideas for overcoming the barriers set up by structural inequalities, ideas that very often prove to work quite well. We encourage bringing more attention to these ideas and giving credit to their originators.
- **Consult with experts of color as the project takes shape,** especially in its beginning stages to develop a better understanding of how to frame the narrative and learn about research and other resources you may otherwise have overlooked.
- **Create an advisory board of color whose members are people who are most impacted by the issues,** both those at the outset and those that emerge as the project proceeds. This should result in regular gatherings of experts of color, including experts by virtue of academic research background and experts by lived experience. The advisory board should play a key role throughout all stages of the project.
- **Review the reasons why certain groups experience unequal outcomes** (refer to the questions under the third stage) and brainstorm targeted ways that can reverse these trends. Get thoughts from your advisory group or consultant(s) of the impact of these innovative ways as well as the community's likely response to these changes.

<sup>1</sup> "Racial Equity Impact Assessment." Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation [https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment\\_v5.pdf](https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf)