To contact Associated Black Charities about research or technical assistance regarding use of Policy Applications of a Racial Equity Lens, please contact A. Adar Ayira, Project Manager, in the Middle Initiative, aayira@abc-md.org, 443-334-7792.

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The City of Seattle introduced its Race and Social Justice Initiative in 2005. In doing so, it was the first city that had ever undertaken a specific initiative focused explicitly on improving community well-being by addressing institutional racism and eliminating racial inequity.

Public policy has played a pivotal role in both creating and dismantling the structural and institutional barriers that have disproportionally affected marginalized groups, including racial groups, in America. Although the most obvious racially discriminatory policies have been overturned or mitigated, factors that disadvantage communities of color—intended and unintended alike—continue to operate in American society and in public policy.

ABC and our partner organizations consistently receive questions from policy-makers and other leaders regarding practical applications of a racial equity framework in assessing the racial impacts of policies, practices, and programs. These questions represent a larger shared vision of fairness that is more likely to be achieved if we can increase effectiveness in evaluating the impact of policies on all groups of Maryland residents. This shared vision places Maryland firmly in the forefront of high caliber policy development. Using a racial equity lens in developing policy puts Maryland at the forefront of cities and states that directly address racial equity. Removing structural and institutional barriers that have racially disproportionate impacts on residents increases Maryland’s reputation as a livable state and strengthens its economic vibrancy.

This pocket guide is a concrete educational tool for policy leaders and others wanting to translate their commitment to justice and equity to practical applications.

The Challenge

Most policies are developed from a “universalist” perspective that assumes everyone has equal access and opportunity. Such an approach, however, does not account for the structural and institutional barriers to opportunity that continue to operate in American society. Racialized barriers don’t just hurt individual racial groups; they hurt our national economy, generating losses on earning gaps by 2030 would increase U.S. GDP by 16%—more than $5 trillion a year—increasing corporate profits by more than $450 billion and federal tax revenues by more than $1 trillion.

As Maryland’s population grows and changes, becoming more racially diverse, it is even more critical to examine how policy—legislation, budget priorities, regulatory issues, judicial decisions, and other policy that affect opportunities, access, and day-to-day lives of residents—is likely to impact the different groups in our society, especially those who have been historically cut off from fully benefiting from economic opportunity.

Leading With Race . . .

Race has thus far maintained an intractable role in American society. Specifically addressing this issue, not from a personal or interpersonal perspective, but from the often invisible structural and institutional perspective—is essential.

As we developed this pocket guide we learned that some are concerned that use of an equity lens benefits some groups and not others. Research has shown, though, that inequity is damaging to the economic well-being of communities, regions and nations alike. Using a framework that carefully acknowledges the detrimental economic and social impact of racism from a structural and institutional framework is not beneficial only to particular groups—it benefits the entire state. By using a racial equity framework, decision-makers signal that they recognize challenges faced by some groups ultimately and adversely affect everyone. Intentional and consistent use of a racial equity framework prepares our state for the demographic changes to come by expanding pathways to opportunities that advance the overall interests of as many Maryland residents as possible.

Ten Essential Questions for Policy Development, Review and Evaluation:

1. How is an equity lens incorporated within the policy?
2. Does the policy explicitly account for potential racially disparate outcomes? If so, how? If not, how can it be incorporated?
3. How is an equity lens incorporated in tracking policy outcomes?
4. Will the policy increase access and opportunity for communities of color? How?
5. Will the policy have a positive impact on racial / ethnic equity, inclusion and full participation of all people (in the process, in implementation, in breadth of outreach and participation, in decision-making and culture of decision-making, etc.)?
6. Will the policy protect against racial violence, racial profiling and discrimination? How?
7. What are the mechanisms in place to ensure accountability (such as equity-focused benchmarks or indicators)?
8. Do the lens and tools for accountability incorporate a racial equity framework? How?
9. What are the economic and social benefits of incorporating an equity lens in this policy?