Definitions

Universal: Universal policies assume a universal societal norm, which has historically been white, male, and able-bodied. Broadly conceived universal programs are more likely to exacerbate inequality than reducing it.


Racial Equity Framework / Lens: A racial equity framework/lens is an approach to the world that involves analyzing data and information about race and ethnicity, understanding disparities and learning why they exist, looking at problems and their root causes from a structural standpoint, naming race explicitly when talking about problems, and developing solutions that reflect strategies to eliminate policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race.


Resources


Ten Essential Questions for Workforce Development

For the Field of Workforce Development

Applications of a Racial Equity Lens to the Field of Workforce Development

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Ten Essential Questions for Workforce Development


Racial Equity "...is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, children and youth of color will comprise the demographic majority in our nation by 2054. Our nation’s economic survival will depend upon the inclusion of people of color in all sectors of the economy and in all segments of the workforce. We must work together to eliminate the race-based policies, stereotyping, and negative cultural messaging that have truncated the prospects of so many deserving American citizens.

CHANGING THE FUTURE: Stepping Toward Equity....

The Business Case for Racial Equity, a recent publication from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Ahuram Institute, found that if the average income of people of color were raised to just 2.3% of the average income of whites, total U.S. earnings would increase by 12%, representing nearly $1 trillion. The earnings gain would translate into $810 billion in additional corporate profits, $290 billion in additional federal tax revenues, and a potential reduction in the federal deficit of $310 billion, or 2.3% of the GDP [in 2013’s dollars]. To unlock this potential, we need an on-going, intentional investment in entry-level, workers of color — including training efforts to build workers’ skills for career advance- ment. Without this commitment, the skills gap will continue to widen, leaving those with the fewest opportunities even more marginalized, and our economy at large will continue to sustain permanent losses. Simply put, intentionally increasing the opportunities for some — those most in need — will have huge benefits for ALL.

Removing the race-based systemic barriers that are limiting people of color is not a matter of social justice or morality, it is an economic necessity. To overcome the challenges of the digital economy, we need a workforce that is well-trained, ambitious, and free of demonizing social hindrances. By building the capabilities of our most marginalized populations and expanding their career opportunities, Maryland can lead the nation in launching a platform that will begin to solve the most serious workforce challenge of the 21st Century. We can also create conditions that allow everyone to flourish and contribute meaningfully to the economy.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor market isn’t merely stratified at the macroeconomic level. It is segregated at almost every job level. Different races and ethnicities are clustered in different sectors. Latinx workers make up about half of all farm workers and laborers, 44% of maintenance workers, 43% of maids and house cleaners, Blacks, who make up just 11% of the workforce, account for more than a third of home health aides and about 25% of both security guards and bus drivers. As evidenced by these statistics, both Blacks and Latinx are huddled in rather low paying jobs with limited options for economic advancement. Whites, on the other hand, make up more than 80% of the country’s workers. But they account for nearly all farm managers and ranchers (96 percent), construction managers (93 percent), engineers (96 percent), and CEOs (90 percent).”

ABC is a strong advocate for racial and economic equity for over 30 years. Our mission is to advocate for and facilitate the creation of measurably healthier and more prosperous communities throughout the State of Maryland, by promoting leadership and philanthropic investment. “Throughout three decades of formulating change to foster positive change, ABC has collected and analyzed evidence of racial disparities. We know and have demonstrated that our nation must address the institutional and structural barriers that exist within our country. With this focus, ABC views the workforce ecosystem as our “change lever.” This document provides the guidance workforce practitioners need to design, implement, and evaluate workforce programming that addresses issues of race and promotes inclusion — at ABC, we refer to this practice as applying a racial equity lens to workforce practices.

CHANGING THE FUTURE: Workforce Development Applications of a Racial Equity Framework: Background

Cities and states across the country have been developing racial equity tools that pertained to workforce development since the early 2010s. In 2012, the Race and Social Justice Initiative, led by the City of Seattle, created an Equity Toolkit that lays out a process and set of questions to guide the process of addressing racial equity and social justice throughout various elements of society. One of the most important contributions to emerging workforce development practices from this initiative is the assess- ment worksheet that allows organizations to answer each of the six questions outlined in the toolkit and make it relevant to their program, policy, initiative or budget issue.

In July 2016, the City of Seattle created a Workforce Equity Strategic Plan that proposes a definition of workforce equity that that serves as a critical tool for analyzing and comparing workforce strategy- es. The definition states “Workforce equity is when the workforce is inclusive of people of color and other marginalized or under-represented groups at a rate representative of the greater Seattle area at all levels of City employment; where institutional and structural barriers impacting employee attraction, selection, participation and retention have been eliminated, enabling opportunity for employment suc- cess and career growth.” By creating a definition for workforce equity, the City of Seattle is recognizing that by dismantling the barriers existing in its workforce ecosystem, and its public leaders are making the application of an equity lens a clear priority for the City’s entire workforce strategy moving forward.

In Baltimore, ABC is committed to codifying, promulgating and publicizing an equity framework to foment economic transformation within African American and other marginalized communities. To do this work, ABC has been a strong advocate for racial and economic equity for over 30 years. Our mission is to advocate for and facilitate the creation of measurably healthier and more prosperous communities throughout the State of Maryland through policy-related education, advocacy, collaborations, and the incubation and testing of strategic intervention models.

To change the possibilities and value of economic outcomes for people of color in our State, we must first acknowledge the institutional and structural racialized barriers that exist. Then, we must take proactive steps to create, design, and implement workforce programs with a racial equity lens. Below are ten essential questions that work to position the goals of establishing productive practices that will help stakeholders apply a racial equity lens to the workforce ecosystems inputs, implementation, and out- comes. At ABC, we view the ten essential questions as a vital workforce development tool that will benefit professionals in various roles in the field from human resource managers at Fortune 500 companies to employment readiness trainers at community colleges, to case managers at re-entry programs. It is our goal that every professional involved in workforce development will begin each aspect of his or her work by examining the ten essential questions. While it may not always be pos- sible to answer every question in detail, each should at least be considered. Asking these questions is an acknowledgment that workforce development programming is not “universal” or “colorblind” and that incorporating an equity lens into programming will increase growth prospects for Mary- land and all its residents.

The Challenge

Workforce Development is a system of interconnected services and programs that are focused on preparing and placing workers in careers fit for the current economy. Most workforce development is developed from a “universal” perspective, assuming everyone has equal access and opportunity. Such an approach, however, does not account for the structural and institutional barriers to opportunity that continues to operate in American society.

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Without the dignity of jobs with livable wages, benefits, and equitable access to career paths, workers of color face a “catch 22” situation of disproportionate impact. They are expected to be good workers, but they are denied access to the required skills, tools, and jobs needed to fulfill this commitment. ABC believes that the economic disparities between people of color and whites are the result of broken systems, not broken people. The vision of Baltimore City’s workforce development system to identify the “broken” areas and create solutions to transform this system for the good of all.

Leading with Race

Despite the racial disparities and disproportionate challenges cited throughout this document, there is little evidence to suggest many workforce development agencies approach their work with an explicit eye towards racial equity. Effective workforce development approaches must center on an understanding of systemic-level racism in order to produce fair economic outcomes for people of all races.

ABC’s leadership under Name of Walker used to move the City towards a new era and mode of mission-driven work. With his focus on building the capabilities of our most marginalized populations and expanding their career opportunities, Maryland can lead the nation in launching a platform that will begin to solve the most serious workforce challenge of the 21st Century. We can also create conditions that allow everyone to flourish and contribute meaningfully to the economy.

TEN ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, PROGRAM REVIEW, AND EVALUATION:

1) How is an equity lens incorporated within the program design including recruitment & outreach, training and curriculum design, and retention and tracking mechanisms?

2) Does the program design/training curriculum explicitly account for potentially racially disparate outcomes? If so, how? If not, how can it be incorporated?

3) Has the program considered the racially disparate impact that applicant selection mechanisms? If so, has it conducted an analysis to determine how to mitigate this challenge.

4) Does the program’s policy (i.e. rules of participant engagement) protect against discrimination and perpetuate racially inequitable outcomes; if so, how is it addressing this?

5) Will the program increase access and opportunities for communities of color? How?

6) Will the program 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.)

7) Will the program’s policy (i.e. rules of participant engagement) protect against racial profiling and other forms of discrimination? How?

8) Are there changes that could be made to make the program/training curriculum more equitable and inclusive in addressing the structural challenges that negatively impact participants?

9) What are the economic and societal benefits of incorporating an equity lens in this program design?

10) How does an equity lens manifest in day to day operational functions, organizational and programmatic functions within the larger cultural context of the organization?

Before examining these ideas with colleagues, ABC recommends that all stakeholders review the language presented in the glossary listed at the end of this guide.