Changing the future
Building Racial Equity Across Baltimore’s Workforce Ecosystem

Prepared for ABC by
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# Table of Contents

1. **Racial Equity Matters for Workforce Development**
2. **Racial Equity Research Study: Baltimore City**
3. **Summary of Findings**
4. **Racial Equity Indicators: A Baltimore Ecosystem Snapshot**
5. **Awareness and Self-Assessment**
6. **Establishing a Common Language**
7. **Applying a Racial Equity Lens**
8. **Putting it into Practice: Recognizing Choice Points**
9. **Making Data-Driven Decisions**
10. **Putting it into Practice: Technical Assistance for Data-Driven REI**
11. **Creating a Community of Practice**
12. **The Work Ahead: Reflections & Recommendations**
13. **For Practitioners**
14. **Putting it into Practice: Eliminating Barriers, Developing Pathways**
15. **For Employers**
16. **Putting it into Practice: Procurement Policy for Racial Equity**
17. **For Private Foundations**
18. **Putting it into Practice: Engaging Community Voices**
19. **For Public Partners**
20. **Cultivating New Leadership**
21. **Leveraging Partnerships for Systemic Change**
22. **Conclusion**
23. **Appendix A • Methodology**
24. **Appendix B • Glossary**
25. **Appendix C • Ten Essential Questions for Workforce Development, Program Review, and Evaluation**
26. **Appendix D • Endnotes**
Racial Equity Matters for Workforce Development

African American workers in Baltimore City are largely employed in lower-wage industries and occupations, tend to earn less than their white counterparts, and experience higher job turnover.\(^1\) African Americans own nearly half of all businesses in Baltimore, yet employ only 2% of the city’s paid employees and account for only 1.4% of all sales.\(^2\)
African Americans are not concentrated in these low-wage and high turnover occupations accidentally. Nor is it a coincidence that African American businesses are severely underresourced and struggling to access markets. Historic patterns of racial discrimination in Baltimore reinforce disparities in housing, transportation, education, healthcare and economic development that buttress racialized barriers in the workplace. The resulting increases in crime, unemployment, poor health, taxes and economic stagnation are costs that are borne collectively. While advancing racial equity requires focusing on the needs of workers of color, such systemic changes benefit all of Baltimore’s citizens. The elimination of racial inequity is critical to Baltimore’s long-term economic growth; our success as a city hinges on changing the prospects for the African American workforce.

Organizations engaged in the development of Baltimore’s workforce, from public schools and vocational centers, to reentry job training programs, to the employers, private foundations and public agencies that support these programs, can dismantle racial barriers and promote equitable, sustainable economic growth. A system of workforce development focused solely on placing workers into more of the same high turnover and low-wage jobs, will not. Those engaged in workforce development must continually ask, “How are we helping to reduce or disrupt the inequities that exist for communities of color?”

ABC envisions an economy in Baltimore and throughout Maryland where structural and institutional racism is being dismantled and provides equitable opportunities for all people to work, advance and build financial security and generational wealth to benefit their families and communities. Our work addresses the impacts of structural and institutional racism on access to employment and opportunity for wealth and strives to change the future for African Americans, especially as it relates to workforce development and economic outcomes. If we are to truly “move the needle” in advancing racial equity, while creating a more economically viable and sustainable Baltimore, we must work to eliminated racialized structural barriers to economic opportunities for African Americans.

### Racial Equity Research Study: Baltimore City

We must be able to measure, using common metrics focused on outcomes, the efforts of our work to advance racial equity through Baltimore’s workforce ecosystem. During fall of 2017 and spring of 2018, ABC partnered with Elizabeth Kennedy, Associate Professor of Law & Social Responsibility at Loyola University Maryland, to conduct a qualitative research study designed to measure the impact of ABC’s work advancing racial equity throughout Baltimore’s workforce development ecosystem. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with practitioners, employers, policymakers and philanthropic foundations. Questions were designed to measure how stakeholders are currently (if at all) applying a racial equity lens...
to the development and implementation of their training programs, funding processes, and internal policies and culture. The study was also designed to identify gaps in the current understanding and application of a racial equity lens, as well as to uncover emerging best practices and opportunities for leveraging strategic partnerships.

Together with the interview responses, additional quantitative and qualitative data were obtained and analyzed to measure the degree to which institutions and organizations engaged in workforce development have:

- an accurate understanding of the concept of “racial equity,” as distinguished from “racial equality” and "diversity";
- made a public commitment to advancing racial equity;
- identified measurable outcomes consistent with racial equity goals;
- collected and disaggregated data to measure outcomes consistent with racial equity goals;
- implemented policies and practices intentionally designed to advance racial equity;
- fostered a workplace culture that is intentionally equitable and inclusive; and
- collaborated with other stakeholders in the workforce ecosystem around racial equity.

The data collected through this study helps us to better understand present conditions, while also helping us to measure change over time.

The workforce ecosystem is a socio-economic community supported by interacting organizations and individuals who educate, train, prepare, place, hire and support workers. This ecosystem includes workforce training practitioners, support service providers, community based organizations, employers/business owners, entrepreneurs, legislators, policy makers, advocates, jobseekers and workers. The ecosystem is fueled by federal, state and local grants; private foundations; tuition and fee revenues; and individual donations.

Stakeholders also include employers, social service agencies, the juvenile and criminal justice systems, public agencies, elected officials, and developers. Funder requirements, governmental regulations, and employer demand impact this ecosystem from above, while worker advocacy, consumer demand, and public partnerships shape the system from below. For meaningful progress toward racial equity, all stakeholders must have a shared vision and commitment to holding one another accountable. Explained one employer, "Race is critical in the workforce space because in some cases, if those you are serving do not have a good experience, they may not try again. You have an obligation to be a responsible steward of their hopes, and if you are not a responsible steward, you may prevent them from ever trying again."

**Applying a Racial Equity Lens Means**

- **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;
- Developing solutions that reflect strategies to eliminate policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race.
A significant number of individuals and organizations engaged in workforce development recognize that serving a majority African American population is not, alone, a strategy for advancing racial equity. However, the majority do not apply a racial equity lens when designing or implementing programs, or to their own internal workplace policies, practices and culture.

Only a minority of workforce practitioners, funders and employers have implemented policies and practices intentionally designed to advance racial equity. A larger number report individual and institutional interest in creating such policies and practices but cite the need for additional technical assistance and leadership for implementation.

While practitioners, program officers, and workplace managers express strong commitments to racial equity, few serve organizations that have made racial equity an explicit goal in their mission statements, strategic plans, or marketing materials. Most providers, as well as the private foundations that support their work, have not identified measurable outcomes consistent with racial equity goals. This makes it difficult to measure an organization’s progress on these goals, or to hold them accountable when no meaningful progress is made.

Most workforce practitioners, funders and partner employers do not systematically collect and disaggregate data (or, in the case of funders and governmental agencies, require the reporting of such data) to analyze the impact of their programs on racial equity. The competitive environment for workforce programming reinforces these “data deserts,” as organizations are reluctant to share outcome-level data that may harm their chances of obtaining funding from other sources.

Grant funders and employers are more comfortable talking about economic justice and inclusion, which they perceive as more inclusive, than racial equity, which they...
perceive as potentially divisive. Some cite concern that policies giving priority to African Americans could run afoul of federal law. Others recognize that “race-neutral” or “color-blind” policies focused solely on economic empowerment can reinforce racial inequity and hinder their mission.

- Across Baltimore’s workforce ecosystem, there is an urgent need for creating workplace cultures that are intentionally equitable, diverse and inclusive. Few organizations engaged in workforce development—most notably at the private foundation level—have staff and leadership that reflect the racial demographics of Baltimore City. This lack of representation is cited by stakeholders as a significant barrier to programmatic success.

- While there appears to be consensus that advancing racial equity requires individuals to engage in difficult conversations about race, there is a lack of acknowledgment that these conversations are difficult for different reasons. Acknowledging racial barriers faced by participants forces practitioners of color to recall countless personal experiences with racism in the workplace. For many, this can be a traumatic exercise, one for which practitioners need the same kind of social and professional support as program participants.

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**Racial Equity Indicators: A Baltimore Ecosystem Snapshot**

**Awareness and Self-Assessment**

Of Baltimore’s 611,648 residents, 63.3% are Black or African American, and 31.4% are white. In 2017, the average wage for African Americans was $38,798, while the average wage for white was almost double at $66,612. This gap persists across industries and occupations, reflecting historical and contemporary discrimination in the Baltimore metropolitan area. Yet of the organizations examined in this study, only a small minority operate workforce programs that speak explicitly about race and the role that structural racism plays in the workplace. Most workforce training curricula focus on sector-based skills, and do not prepare participants to navigate issues of race in the workplace or work intentionally to change racialized systems themselves. As greater attention is paid to the impacts of systemic racism within our cities—police violence, incarceration rates, school segregation and educational attainment—the workforce ecosystem is slowly accepting its role in dismantling racialized barriers to opportunity, advancement, and equity.

Stakeholders described a recent shift toward understanding that a mission of placing workers in jobs is not, alone, enough to change underlying systems that perpetuate racial inequity. Most young workers interviewed reported a lack of internal expertise or capacity to do so. A significant number had sought the assistance of an outside organization to conduct an institutional self-assessment and develop a racial equity plan. According to Race Forward, the Center for Social...
Innovation, racial equity strategies must be systemic, race-explicit, and outcome-oriented. To be effective, these strategies must not only tackle the effects of systemic racism, in the form of racialized barriers, but also its root causes, in the ways systems create and perpetuate racialized outcomes. These strategies cannot simply be embodied in an organization’s mission statement; they must be specific, strategic and measurable.

Multiple practitioners acknowledged that their materials and curricula did not include any discussion of the realities of systemic racism and implicit bias that their participants would likely encounter in the workplace. As one practitioner explained, “In trying to send a message that participants can be successful through our program, we may have overemphasized individual effort and personal responsibility.” While the majority of those interviewed reported a desire to make strategic changes to their programs, internal workplace policies, data collection and analysis, only two had in fact made those changes. Others reported that due to limited resources, they felt mission-bound to tackle barriers they had the ability to dismantle, such as by helping workers with transportation, child care, or expunging criminal records. Through this work, however, some recognized that they were, “creating the false impression that getting in the door was the final goal, when in fact it was just the beginning.” Our findings are consistent with a recent national scan of nonprofit and philanthropy serving organizations, in which a majority had stated a commitment to racial equity work, but less than a third had developed strategies or strategic frameworks to guide that work.

Modeled after our framework for policy-makers and legislators, ABC developed a racial equity lens for workforce practitioners in 2017. Our “Ten Essential Questions for Workforce Development, Program Review and Evaluation,” guides workforce organizations through a process of uncovering internal and external racialized barriers, as well as the steps necessary to create, design, and implement programs using a racial equity lens. After applying the Ten Essential Questions to their workforce programs, many practitioners concluded that they, or their organizations, were not being intentional about racial equity, and that they needed to conduct a more thorough self-assessment of their programs, policies, practices and workplace cultures. One provider described the impact that using the Ten Essential Questions has had on their ability to apply a racial lens to their program: “We tell our program participants that they truly are the experts of their own lives. But in thinking through these [Ten Essential] questions, we realized we weren’t treating them as the experts who should be shaping our program design.”

“

We are innovating as we go, to be frank, and for me personally, this is a learning experience. I am chomping at the bit to go through REI training and understand it fully myself. I am very much as the same table as our grantees.”

–Private grant funder

Is racial equity a goal stated in any of your materials, strategic plan, internal or external communications?

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Funders: 40% Yes, 60% No
Practitioners: 10% Yes, 90% No
Employers: 0% Yes, 100% No
The voices of workers and job-seekers can provide meaningful assessment data, yet most programs reported maintaining only minimal long-term contact with their program graduates. Explained one provider, “We think we are providing our participants with the support they need. But are we? We need more formal and ongoing feedback from our graduates—as well as those who still can’t access our program—to know if what we are offering is meeting the genuine need out there.” One practitioner cited a strong bias among grant funders for workforce programs that can guarantee job placements within 30, 60 or 90 days, which creates a disincentive for developing long-term supports and ongoing engagement.

Establishing a Common Language

“We aren’t speaking a common language about our mission and how it relates to race.” –Workforce practitioner

“If folks are coming to the table without a common language and common knowledge that they can share, it’s going to make it harder for us to hold each other accountable.” –Workforce practitioner

“We’re going to do whatever it takes to create wealth building opportunity in Baltimore. The vast majority of that will benefit African Americans, just by the sheer scale of the numbers, but that’s not the lead. If you lead with racial equity, we aren’t talking about the same thing.” –Employer

Naming race as a structural barrier is an important first step toward understanding the root causes and persistent effects of racial inequity. Yet nearly all interviewees reported that talking about race, especially racialized barriers for workers, is a struggle. As one practitioner explained, “Race was the elephant in the room. Our trainers didn’t know how to talk about it—some of them may not have even really thought about it. But we need to have a common language about race to understand—and navigate—the racialized workplace. Otherwise we are just setting [our participants]—and our partner employers—up for failure.”

While workforce development is an industry unto itself, race and racial equity are rarely mentioned in training, technical, or academic literature. While the workforce literature proposes a multitude of solutions to the problems of putting people to work, such as through targeted vocational education and industry partnerships, scant attention is paid to understanding the causes of underemployment from a structural standpoint. For several organizations, the Ten Essential Questions helped fill that gap in the conventional workforce framework. As one provider explained, “Using the TEN ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS helped us..."
“...I’m convinced there is a university education that’s being had every day on the streets in Baltimore, by those living that education. When you survive some of the toughest neighborhoods in Baltimore City, it takes courage, it takes thoughtfulness. You must be insightful, you must be intuitive, you must have grit, you must have determination. There are so many attributes you need just to survive, and we have yet to give full credit for those attributes. These skills are not valued because those who make the rules don’t value them.” – Private grant funder

develop a common language around objectives we already had. Incorporating a racial equity lens didn’t mean changing our organization’s direction; it meant asking the right questions to ensure that we were more effectively carrying out the organization’s mission.”

For example, applying a racial equity lens to traditional workforce curricula reveals that most programs focus almost exclusively on mitigating perceived deficits, rather than validating individual’s assets. For some workers, while they may be seeking formal employment for the first time, few programs explicitly recognize and affirm the relevant work skills they may have developed elsewhere—within their households, on the streets, even in prison—and linked those skills to what would be required of them on the job. As one employer implored, “I’m convinced there is a university education that’s being had every day on the streets in Baltimore, by those living that education. When you survive some of the toughest neighborhoods in Baltimore City, it takes courage, it takes thoughtfulness. You must be insightful, you must be intuitive, you must have grit, you must have determination. There are so many attributes you need just to survive, and we have yet to give full credit for those attributes. These skills are not valued because those who make the rules don’t value them.”

Similarly, a review of contemporary workforce training curricula reveals little explicit training for job-seekers about racial discrimination in the workplace, such as identifying and responding to implicit and explicit bias; the role of code-switching in the workplace; examples of institutional and structural racism; or individual and collective organizing strategies for preventing mental, emotional and physical health impacts of working in a racialized workplace. One organization that recently incorporated these concepts into their curriculum explained, “We’re now devoting class time to establishing a common language around race, and role-playing ways of dealing with bias in the workplace. We are careful not to send the message that participants should conform or subsume their own identity, but rather focus on building the communication and conflict management skills that allow them to be their own special person within a racialized workplace.”

Every stakeholder interviewed referenced the challenges of facilitating conversations about race. “When you are a white colleague in the room, even if you really get it you don’t want to say what you really think because you are worried that your black friend over there will be

“Part of this work needs to be putting yourself in situations to have these conversations. They don’t have to be uncomfortable—but they can be!—but when we have these conversations we can’t be biting our tongue on these big issues.” – Practitioner
offended,” explained an African American practitioner. “Or, if I do say what I really feel, and it gets uncomfortable, then they can’t say what they really think. So instead, we end up being nice and politically correct instead of really dealing with the issues.” Explained another, “Part of this work needs to be putting yourself in situations to have these conversations. They don’t have to be uncomfortable—but they can be!—but when we have these conversations we can’t be biting our tongue on these big issues.” Several interviewees described the challenge of engaging around issues of racial equity in organizations with almost exclusively white leadership. “This is hard, this is really hard to do; it’s really hard to talk about. I understand that [as a white person] I’m not the right person to lead a [racial equity] training for my organization. 60% of our staff are black and extremely aware of the industry and the stigma and the… barriers that are there just for being a certain color, because they are that color. As somebody who is white and whose instructors are white… we must try not to do more harm, when we mean to do good.”

**Applying a Racial Equity Lens**

Once an organization has engaged in a process of self-assessment and established a language for discussing race, racism and racial equity, it is better equipped to develop strategies to eliminate or revise policies, practices, attitudes and (spoken and unspoken) workplace cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race. For some organizations, the Ten Essential Questions have provided a common approach to designing programs to achieve a goal of racial equity. These questions are also being incorporated into discussions around internal hiring and advancement, data collection and disaggregation, and employer partnerships. Several organizations have contracted with ABC or other external providers to develop workshops and trainings for different segments of their staff, including their leadership team, management, and frontline staff, to apply a racial equity lens to their internal workplaces. Establishing or revisiting the role and composition of community advisory boards can identify new avenues of outreach and recruitment. While many practitioners cited “word of mouth” as the primary source of workers, due care must be paid to the ways in which racialized social networks may reinforce structural barriers to participation.

Another external strategy is to negotiate racially-explicit employer partnerships with the goal of shifting awareness of, and responsibility for racial equity within the larger industry in which they operate. Workforce providers can also engage in strategic advocacy with foundations and governmental agencies around issues of structural and institutional racism. One provider learned that by applying a racial equity lens to their internal policies and practices, they were better equipped to advise partner employers on how to do the same. “We have learned much from our internal assessment process, which we can then use to provide experiential advice to our employer partners. We have made cultural competency and a commitment to equity and inclusion an explicit part of our hiring process. It’s in the job description, it’s in the interview, it’s in the questions we ask of references, and it’s a core criterion for annual performance evaluations. Every search committee includes multiple staff members across lines of difference, to inform the evaluation of that candidate. It can be done.”

“Incorporating a racial equity lens didn’t mean changing our organization’s direction; it meant asking the right questions to ensure that we were more effectively carrying out the organization’s mission.”
Conducting a meaningful self-assessment includes an analysis of internal staffing and leadership demographics. As one practitioner explained, "The leadership of the premier nonprofits that do workforce development...are white. And not only is the leader white, but most of their executive committee is white. And I think many of them have the best of intentions, but...the delivery of services comes off in a matriarchal or patriarchal way when you have folks at the highest levels all representing one experience. And to the client who is being served, [who] can see it, feel it, and understand what the experience represents, they can end up withdrawing from the program." There is real fear of alienating employer partners that must be addressed. However, for some organizations, the process of applying a racial equity lens to their own internal workplaces has made it easier to lead by example, and to have these challenging conversations with employers.

Making Data-Driven Decisions

A recent survey of Baltimore-based workforce organizations revealed that while 100% "frequently" collected data on the race and ethnicity of their program participants, only half as many "frequently" disaggregated the data to look for differences in participation, and only 30% disaggregated the data to look for differences in outcomes. Reasons cited for the disparity between collection and disaggregation ranged from a lack of staff capacity, to limitations in database technology, to a lack of managerial will. Likewise, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported a desire for technical assistance on data collection and disaggregation, as well as help "convincing leadership and staff why this data is important and how it can be used to improve program performance."

Recognizing Choice Points

The mission of Civic Works' Center for Green Careers is to make Baltimore's economy more equitable and sustainable by training residents for emerging "green" jobs. Civic Works had previously helped train workers to conduct asbestos abatement, jobs for which there were few barriers to entry. Almost all the employers engaged in residential green construction, however, initially refused to hire employees with criminal records.

Civic Works understood that they had to make a choice. They could replicate the industry's hiring restrictions in their program enrollment criteria. In doing so, they would be able to place more graduates in jobs, but their program would be less equitable. Or they could choose to enroll jobseekers with criminal records, and then work with employers to change their hiring criteria.

Civic Works recognized that this was a "choice point"—a moment in time when it is possible to choose between an action consistent with (or inconsistent with) their organization's mission and values. "We decided that we would not close the door at enrollment simply because the employer wanted to close the door at hiring. We knew that our workers with criminal records would be...far more qualified than untrained workers without a record. We successfully worked with employers to change their hiring criteria. If there is a choice point, we need to choose to change the system."
Summary of Findings

Data helps focus the conversation on root causes and targeted solutions. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation trains grantees to use “back mapping,” a process that identifies disparities and working backwards to identify their root causes. As one practitioner explained, “Prior to systematically collecting data on our graduates, we could only raise issues they encountered in the workplace episodically. It was a very individualized conversation, and the employer would almost always characterize the employee’s issues as performance related. It made the individual—and their alleged deficits—the focus of the conversation, rather than the racialized workplace culture.” Using data to contextualize the experience of an individual worker helps to shift the focus away from “fixing broken people to fixing broken systems.”

Having data that illustrates the experience of multiple workers in a workplace, “allows us to have a nuanced conversation with the employer about continuous improvement. If we can show an employer that he or she can reduce the costs associated with high turnover by changing the workplace culture, that’s a real value to the employer.”

Large employers and federal contractors must already report employee demographic data in the form of annual EEO-1 reports. However, as our study revealed, very few Baltimore organizations involved in workforce development are systematically collecting, disaggregating, analyzing and using data on the race and ethnicity of their program participants. One provider that has begun to do this analysis explains, “We are looking to see how we can collect data at all these points in service delivery process. Then we will look at that data annually to see where we are in achieving population level outcomes. Then we will disaggregate that data to see who our services are currently working

One thing I struggle with is that the data we are collecting is affected by larger systems of racism. There’s no easy way to tell that story, but it is there in the numbers. Having the data helps us to have a conversation about this—numbers don’t lie. You can’t address racialized outcomes without addressing the underlying structures that have created those outcomes.”
We need to create a space where training providers can be transparent about their outcomes. Right now, everyone wants to make their outcomes look as good as possible so that they can get more funding; that makes it difficult to be data-driven.”

for and who are they not working for. We can use data to determine the strategic changes we need to make to get better at serving that population that we are not doing well with, so that we can address where we are falling short.”

Technical Assistance for Data-Driven REI

Measure4Change is an initiative led by the Urban Institute, with funding from the World Bank, that has provided intensive technical assistance to increase the performance measurement capacity of competitively selected nonprofits in Washington, D.C. In 2017, the Annie E. Casey Foundation provided funding for a cohort of workforce development grantees in Baltimore to participate in the program, which is guided by a curriculum but tailored to meet the individual needs of each nonprofit. In collaboration with ABC, the work in Baltimore has strived to integrate a race equity and inclusion (REI) throughout the training and curricula. The five Baltimore nonprofits received training and technical assistance specific to their data needs with many of the grantees requesting help in using data to improve their REI objectives, and creating and applying logic models and theories of change to REI goals, such as addressing structural and systemic barriers to employment.

Workforce providers urgently need financial resources to support race equity work, which can include hiring skilled consultants and conducting additional training to build internal capacity. Funders must recognize the need for data dashboard and data visualization tools to help to measure outcomes, as well as support the creation of stakeholder advisory boards or other input processes that can help inform a provider’s evaluation agenda and approach.

Data can help confirm what, anecdotally, practitioners suspect to be true. One provider explained, “I haven't broken it down, but I know that... a larger percentage of those that are not doing well, who didn't complete the program, who are having really major issues, without running any numbers I know more of them are black than white. I know the white individuals are advancing at a higher rate. I can't back this with data since I haven't broken it down, but I really think there is more opportunity for people who are not people of color who come through our program.” Programs with significant numbers of white and non-white workers can conduct meaningful data analysis to assess measurable outcomes disaggregated by race. This work requires technical capacity, resources and political will. For other organizations, which serve clients that are almost exclusively African American, disaggregating outcome measures by race may appear less helpful. For those organizations, benchmarking the data against city, state and federal wage, retention and advancement
measures can provide valuable insights. Moreover, disaggregating the data by race and comparing it with other intersecting criteria, such as gender, age, educational attainment, and zip code can also help to identify disparities and suggest solutions.

Interviewees identified the competitive funding environment as a barrier to sharing outcome-level data disaggregated by race. “Funding is the biggest challenge since that is where decisions are going to be made, such as by requiring common performance measures. We need to create a space where training providers can be transparent about their outcomes... Right now, everyone wants to make their outcomes look as good as possible so that they can get more funding; that makes it difficult to be data-driven.”

Creating a Community of Practice

Interviews with workforce practitioners, funders, employers and public partners revealed an overlooked obstacle to structural and institutional change: a lack of “space” to have honest, constructive dialogue about the impacts of race and racism on economic opportunities for people of color. This lack of intentional space for practitioners and others across the ecosystem can mean that people are not doing the necessary work of understanding these issues, challenging their own beliefs and developing strategies with a racial equity framework.

ABC recognized this gap in the ecosystem and in 2017 created the Workforce and Racial Equity: Community of Practice which is a learning community for Workforce Professionals committed to advancing racial equity within the field of workforce development. It has become a working group of colleagues from across organizations focused on building their collective capacities and leading the effort to embed a racial equity lens within their respective organizations and spheres of influence. It is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the intersections between structural and institutional racism, implicit bias and the field of workforce development. It was in this community of practice that practitioners recognized that personal experiences with racism, in the workplace or otherwise, is not the same as applying a racial equity lens to program design, hiring criteria, or funding priorities. While having staff, board members and leadership that reflect the racial composition of one’s surrounding community is a necessary component of equity, however diversity alone is not sufficient to move the needle on racial equity and inclusion. An analysis and application of a racial equity framework is what leads to transformational change.

Having a Community of Practice or peer learning environment gives people the time to learn about the persistent inequities in our society and institutions, reflect on these inequities, talk with others about how these inequities manifest within the context of workforce development and inhibit economic opportunities for those they are working with and it allows for group accountability which encourages participants to “stay the course.” It recognizes that adopting and applying a racial equity lens to programmatic and organizational practices will not happen overnight and that no one person can solve these challenges alone, it takes a community working together to address the internal and external needs. One practitioner shared that it took six conversations with his organization’s leadership before they were open to learning more about adopting an explicit racial equity lens to their practices. This honesty was just what another practitioner needed to hear and gave her the courage to keep pushing despite the constant dismissal or disinterest her leadership was showing.
For Practitioners

- Name race as a barrier to economic opportunities for people of color. Although the majority of workers in Baltimore City are African American, only a small minority of organizations engaged in workforce development state ‘racial equity’ as a goal in their materials, strategic plans, internal and external communications. One practitioner put it bluntly: “If [racial equity] was a goal [for our organization], then you would see it in the strategic plan. It’s not. It doesn’t mean anything unless it is being measured, resourced and supported. Until that happens, it’s all just conversation; it’s not a goal that the Board has blessed.”

- According to another practitioner, “We are coming to find out, and we are learning as a team, that racial equity and inclusion don’t equate to a program that serve predominately black people simply because of its mission or just because of where we are located.” While words alone do not drive meaningful change, it is difficult to eliminate barriers for workers of color in the absence of naming race as one of those barriers. Some practitioners, attempting to be more inclusive, use what they perceive as “race-neutral” terms, like equal opportunity and economic equity. While those concepts are important, they fail to identify specific barriers faced by African Americans in Baltimore, which can result in critical flaws in program design. Practitioners, along with every other stakeholder in the workforce ecosystem, must make an explicit commitment to racial equity and inclusion, and take intentional steps to eliminate racial disparities in their programs and workplaces.
Develop training related to interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism that prepares workers to enter the racialized workplace. Just as workforce programs provide specific training on equipment that job-seekers are likely to encounter in the workplace, programs must also prepare workers to respond to issues related to race in the workplace. Workers’ lived experiences can help focus instruction on implicit and explicit bias, code-switching, workplace rights, and racial equity. In addition to pre-job training, workforce programs should provide ongoing case management and coaching that helps workers navigate racialized workplaces. This is especially important in traditionally white-dominated industries, such as construction or engineering, and can help to reduce critically high levels of turnover for workers of color. In taking these intentional steps, workforce providers should enlist the assistance of outside organizations when necessary. Most practitioners reported that while their organizations are highly capable of workforce training, leadership development, and community engagement, they need outside expertise when it comes to developing a successful racial equity strategy. Engage a third-party facilitator to help your organization establish a common language around race, conduct a thorough self-examination of internal and external policies and practices, and develop an ongoing racial equity plan.

Make Racial Equity an Intentional Daily Practice. Individuals across the Baltimore workforce ecosystem reported concerns that their organizations, or their funders, might approach racial equity with a “compliance lens,” satisfied by “checking a box.” For racial equity strategies to be effective, they must be intentional, as well as meaningfully distinct from “diversity trainings,” which have been shown to result in minimal change to workplace diversity, inclusion and culture. Several stressed the importance of making racial equity an intentional and daily practice even when, as one employer noted, “At first it felt forced. We literally had to write at the top of every meeting agenda, ‘How does this..."
affect racial equity? But after a while it started becoming automatic to ask, ‘What’s the racial equity/inclusion impact of that specific—fill in the blank—policy change, program requirement, data piece?’” Another provided the example of creating an employer survey, “and before we hit submit, we stopped and said, ‘Wait a second, are we really asking the questions here from an REI lens?’ We went back and made some changes. We are infusing racial equity into more of what we do daily, so that it is something that’s fluid.”

- **Use data to drive program design and modification.** For-profit businesses have learned to harness the power of data to make informed decisions that drive profitability; likewise, the not-for-profit workforce ecosystem must use data to drive outcomes that advance mission and racial equity. While most workforce providers report collecting data on the race and ethnicity of their program participants, few report using that data to make decisions that generate better outcomes and reduce racial inequities. To be effective, data should be collected, disaggregated for race (as well as age, gender, educational attainment, zip code, and criminal background), and analyzed to measure outcomes against common metrics of placement, retention, wages, and advancement. One practitioner cautioned against drawing incomplete conclusions from participation data. “89% of the people who we serve self-describe as a person of color, so you think, ‘That’s good!’ But what is it really telling us? What’s happening with them? We need to disaggregate outcomes. What do we consider success? And would we consider that success if we were serving mostly white people?” Comparing local outcomes to those on a larger, national level, also help highlight racialized outcomes and reveal racial disparities. Practitioners frequently cited the challenge of disaggregating data by race when the overwhelming majority of those they serve are African American. Explained one, “It’s a task because we don’t have much data on non-African Americans in Baltimore; they are 90-95% of our caseload. However, when we look to state and national salary data, we can see that [the wages of our workers] are very much under those.” Similarly, by benchmarking data on advancement, retention and raises to state and federal rates, you don’t need statistical diversity within your own program to conclude that your workers are having disparate experiences in the workplace.

- **Harness the power of qualitative data.** While quantitative data can help identify gaps in participation, outcomes, wages, retention, and advancement, qualitative data can shed light on the experiences of individuals in your programs, and on the job. Developing a meaningful process for capturing qualitative data helps organizations identify trends and patterns. This data can be just as powerful, if not more so, than quantitative data, because it captures the lived experiences of those you work and partner with. As one provider explained, “We don’t need a lot of people to… put together qualitative data. For a small organization with only 10 employees, we could tell a lot of interesting stories by capturing the right amount of information.” Once you’ve gathered enough data, you can use it to strategically identify new partners and employers, or additional services needed. Cutting data across other demographic intersections, such as age, gender, educational attainment, zip code and criminal backgrounds can provide a more comprehensive understanding of who an organization is serving, as well as the unique challenges they face.
• **Consider “long-term” tracking, using data continuously to close the loop:** Data should not be viewed as a static snapshot. Demographic data can be used to identify racialized barriers in the workplace, which then serves as a starting point of discussion with employers to reduce those barriers and biases. To be meaningful, this data should be collected over longer periods than is currently by most practitioners and funders. Employers reported frustration that workforce programs are not training workers for current sector-based needs. According to one, “It’s felt like for the last six months [the workforce provider] may have been training people for jobs that might not be there in a year. They’ve spent a while building this program and have spent a lot of foundation’s money; no one wants to hear that.” Another employer reiterated, “An employer’s need is not six months from now. It’s now. And it’s always changing.” Staying in touch with your workers after they leave your program not only allows you to better measure impact; it allows you to collect valuable industry- and employer-specific information you can then use to refine your curriculum and develop longer term supports.

• **Be the change you want to see in your partner employers.** Almost every member of the workforce ecosystem—practitioners, foundations, public agencies—is also an employer. Applying a racial equity lens to your internal practices, from hiring to advancement to decision-making, is critical to the success of any racial equity strategy. One training provider reported that while they have always collected racial demographic data of their trainees, they had never collected it from their own staff. This year they are rolling out a staff questionnaire to track and measure their performance on racial equity goals with respect to hiring, salaries, evaluations, merit raises, advancement and retention. Another provider created an internal leadership trajectory, which advances workers through positions of responsibility, including serving on the organization’s board or into full-time employment with the organization. In developing this trajectory, they discovered they needed to make changes to their internal hiring policies to make the leadership track more universally accessible. For example, they eliminated the requirement of a bachelor’s degree, which they felt was an unnecessary barrier. This process not only helps to advance racial equity within the organization, but also “allows us to have those conversations with [employers, other organizations] and ask, ‘Do you even have these positions within your organization?’ And once you carve out those positions, where is your balance of power when making decisions? It’s not enough to have a seat at the table (diversity); your voice needs to be valued (inclusion). We base all our decisions on consensus, which is consistent with our equity values.” Modeling change requires you to make racial equity a core component of your internal leadership development, board recruitment, succession planning and community engagement.

• **Leverage partnerships to meet strategic racial equity goals.** A racial equity approach seeks to change systems, not individuals. For example, rather than solely petition the City for free bus passes for workers and job-seekers, practitioners can engage in more targeted conversations with the Mayor’s office around transportation deserts. When it comes to employer partners, some providers are thinking beyond placements for their workers and identifying opportunities to change the workplaces themselves. “In an industry that is predominately white and very homogenous,” explained one, “we are not just providing an opportunity for people of color. We are also trying to provide the

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*It’s a broken system, not the people! Until we correct that, not only will we not make any improvement, but we will continue to perpetuate this system through untruths.”* —Practitioner
employer an opportunity to learn more about institutional racism and generational impact. It’s hard, but we do look for employers who are of that mindset and ... we have worked with [them] around recognizing the reasons why they don’t have a diverse workforce. We are trying to...go beyond hiring people of color in an industry that is predominately white by understanding the history around racism and ... how our society has reinforced [keeping people at a certain economic level].” Strong partnerships can do more than just open doors; they can help improve the quality of the jobs that workers are seeking. The Baltimore Center for Green Careers developed an innovative incentive structure for solar panel installers who agreed to hire workers from their training program. Employers that eliminated hiring restrictions for workers with criminal records, and who provided higher wages and benefits, received additional solar panel customers recruited by the Center. Through this multi-layered incentive structure, Civic Works delivered up $2 million in business to local businesses.

- **Think strategically and intentionally about partnerships.** It can be challenging when a partner does not share your values. Explained one provider, “Whenever we’re looking at a partnership or funding stream, we are having an internal conversation about what has happened historically in our city with our young people. We’ve turned down opportunities to partner with organization when, quite frankly, we don’t deem them to be fruitful or beneficial for our youth. We need to have very real conversations with people. We’ve seen a lot of organizations forced to change the way they do their work because of the partnerships they’ve developed and the money they have accepted. We are being intentional so that we don’t fall down that same slippery slope.” Another practitioner explained, “We’ve dumped employers before because we just didn’t feel that they were part of our mission and they were being racist.” This can be a tough choice point for providers. On issues of racial equity, some organizations may be able to leverage the relationship they have with a partner to push them further along on racial equity goals. For others, they may find it necessary to disengage from a partner that does not value racial equity; this can be a very difficult moment, one for which a community of practice can provide support.

- **Focus on fixing broken systems, not people.** Most workforce curricula focus exclusively on the perceived deficits of job-seekers—from professional skills and experience to personal attributes—and ignores existing strengths, skills and assets. One practitioner expressed frustration with the tenor of conversations in some workforce settings, even among peer practitioners: “When we are having these racial equity conversations, I feel like running out of the room. People keep talking about deficits of their clients, and I can’t take it anymore! It’s a broken system, not the people! Until we correct that, not only will we not make an improvement, but we will continue to perpetuate this system through untruths.” Practitioners must ask themselves, are they blaming the individual for the challenges OR are they trying to understand how the system may be creating the challenges for the individual (intentionally OR not)? Likewise, organizations should continuously be asking, “How do our programs and our organization work to dismantle systems of oppression for people of color?”

“In an industry that is predominately white and very homogenous, we are not just providing an opportunity for people of color. We are also providing the employer an opportunity to learn more about institutional racism and generational impact.” –Practitioner
For Employers

- **Assess and understand the ways in which race shapes your workplace.** While most workers in Baltimore City hired by employers through workforce development programs are African American, few employers cite racial equity as their primary goal in partnering with a workforce development organization. Although the use of a racial equity lens is recognized as an effective strategy for recruiting and retaining top talent, employers often shy away from speaking explicitly about racial equity. Doing so, however, in your recruitment materials and interview processes, workplace trainings and staff meetings, helps signal to your employees (existing and potential) that yours is a workplace committed to equal opportunity for all. Most employers reported feeling a lack of internal competence when talking about race. As one described, “As an employer, I don’t know how to do this. I don’t know what things I can talk about, what words I can use. This is just really hard.” Engaging an outside organization skilled at facilitating conversations about race, conducting racial equity assessments, and formulating a racial equity plan can be a highly effective first step.

- **Set the tone, establish the priority.** Leadership is essential, both within your workplace as well as the larger community. According to one CEO, “The people at the top have got to be willing to say that racial equity is important. Other CEOs will say, ‘For me to say something, it has to be important to the business.’ What I’m willing to say is that it’s okay for me to say something about this personally. I’m the CEO of this company, and it’s important to me that we make progress on racial equity and inclusion.” Making a public commitment to racial equity helps set the tone throughout your workplace. As an employer who partners with workforce training programs explains, “I create a culture of community support. [T]hose who work for me see this as something that is important to me, they engage because it’s important to me; but they stay engaged because it grows to be important to them. Those who know me know it is a priority. Even within our organization there are those who are much more committed to it than others, they just are.

- **Be intentional, continuous and consistent about racial equity.** Don’t view “diversity training” as a one-and-done compliance exercise. One provider noted that, “There’s a lot of companies where their equity and inclusion practice is simply hiring from our workforce training program; that checks the box.” To effectively advance racial equity, you need to be working daily to tackle implicit bias. Think carefully about how and where you recruit employees, and avoid, as one white employer recalled, “writing the job description to sound like me.” Another employer learned a valuable lesson about the costs of not applying a racial equity lens to their workplace rules. Thinking it would make a positive impact on workplace culture, the CEO announced a “dress-down Friday” policy to his employees. “The head of IT is African American, and he came to me and said, ‘Just so you know, young male blacks are not going to like this.’ I had no clue why. He went on to explain that, ‘If I come in and I’m wearing jeans and I meet a client for the first time, they are going to think, ‘Black guy wearing jeans: must work in facilities,’ not the Chief as an employer, I don’t know how to do this. I don’t know what things I can talk about, what words I can use. This is just really hard.”

I’m the CEO of this company, and it’s important to me that we make progress on racial equity and inclusion.”
Technology Officer: ‘I thought that was fascinating, it was a learning experience. Because, not knowing that, if I saw him in a suit on dress-down day, I would say, ‘Come on, Brian!’ But now I get it. The way it plays out in the day-to-day is going to mean the difference.”

**Procurement Policy for Racial Equity**

One example of a place-based partnership for equity is the **Baltimore Integration Partnership (BIP)**. The BIP is comprised of anchor institutions, funders, nonprofits, and public organizations focused on establishing economic inclusion as the business culture of norm in the Baltimore region. The BIP promotes the idea that any Baltimore-area business or anchor institution, regardless of its size or the resources available to it, can make a concrete contribution to economic inclusion.

The BIP helps connect local, small and minority-owned businesses to anchor procurement opportunities in the Baltimore region. Anchors include Johns Hopkins University and Medical Institutions; the University of Baltimore; Bon Secours Hospital; Coppin State University; Kaiser Permanente; LifeBridge Health; Loyola University Maryland; and Towson University.

Some of their activities include removing barriers to facilitate the participation of local/small/minority businesses in anchor purchasing; leveraging and supporting real estate and small business investments to intentionally maximize benefits for surrounding communities; and making the business case for economic inclusion. Their recent report, **Collectively We Rise: The Business Case for Economic Inclusion in Baltimore**, acknowledges the history of redlining, community disinvestment, and racialized police practices as root causes of present inequity. The BIP recommends that Baltimore businesses and anchors “establish clear, quantitative targets” for hiring workers of color and reducing employment barriers and/or engage in increased procurement from minority-owned, women-owned and locally-owned Baltimore businesses.

- **Take a Holistic Approach to Workforce Development.** Partner with organizations that can help provide ongoing support to your workers, not simply “skills training.” A commitment to racial equity requires more than hiring a diverse workforce. As one practitioner explained, “Regardless of what kinds of skills someone learns, if we aren’t looking at the impact of trauma, we really aren’t focused on the whole person. At the first sign of bad stress, that person is going to lose their job.” One workforce provider gave the example of a successful employer partnership that made the difference for two workers at risk for losing their jobs. Soon after starting employment, one worker was required to serve a 90-day jail sentence, and the other spent two weeks in an in-patient psychiatric program. These two individuals were afraid of losing the one thing that had brought them any kind of stability: their new jobs. The employer placed both workers on a leave of absence, and once released, worked with the provider’s case manager to ensure that they were fully ready to return to work. According to the practitioner, “This is the model we look to for our employers: it makes sense from a business perspective; it’s the right thing to do from a humanitarian perspective.” Critical to this success, however, was the ability of the employer to say, ‘Hey, we are taking a big risk, but can you support us? Can you work with this person to ensure that after coming back from being locked up for 90 days, that they are going to be okay talking to customers and working in this environment?’ There’s a lot of trust building required for that.”
• **Track, Disaggregate and Analyze Data.** For those employers of 100+ employees, or who because of procurement laws are already required to compile and provide this data, view this data as a valuable resource—one that needs to be mined rather than simply submitted for compliance purposes. Disaggregating the data by race, ethnicity, gender, and other relevant demographic factors can reveal disparities in advancement, retention and turnover. Only then can you make informed and intentional changes that can reduce costs associated with high turnover and inequitable advancement. While using data to uncover racial disparities is a necessary first step, according to one employer, “Just saying what the data is isn’t enough. We need to help people figure out how to take a step to change things, and then measure have we taken those steps and the efficacy of those steps. Whether we measure this way or that way, we know there is not racial equity in this city. We have that data; now what are we going to do about it?”

• **Commit to equity and inclusion as an explicit part of your hiring process.** One employer explained that, “The regular way of hiring people doesn’t produce a diverse workforce in its natural state.” While using workforce providers as a source for talent in Baltimore may, by default, diversify your workplace, more work is needed for genuine racial equity. As one provider explained, “We make it part of the job description, and are in the process of making it a core criterion for evaluation. We are taking steps to ensure that in every job interview we have multiple staff members across lines of difference to inform that evaluation of the candidate.” Another described his organization being, “really fixed on how we could look at promotions and hiring differently. Like if we have a promotion committee and realize we don’t have an African American on the committee, or we have only one woman.” One employer clarified, “Racial equity in the workplace is having leadership reflect the same diversity as first-level line associates. You show me an organization where everybody at the first line is black or brown…and then you show me a leadership structure where it’s mostly white: there’s a problem.”

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**For Private Foundations**

• **Conduct an internal and external racial equity assessment.** Private foundations that support workforce development training are, at their core, driven by a mission to support the work necessary to advance racial equity. Given that approximately 95% of job-seekers in Baltimore workforce development programs are African American, some program officers may not see the need for an explicit, intentional racial equity strategy. Indeed, one public partner warned that by focusing on “data,” many foundations may come to the incorrect conclusion that because most beneficiaries of their funding are African American, when it comes to racial equity, “they’re all good.” While foundations often have regular systems of grant funding review in place, ongoing and specific attention must be paid to identify and mitigate against implicit bias. Without the data, it is impossible to either confirm or deny the impression of one interviewee, who believed that workforce providers led by white individuals were more likely to receive grant funding from foundations with similar racial demographics. Multiple interviewees
The Work Ahead: Reflections & Recommendations

suggested that traditional channels for publicizing, seeking, and supporting grant applications may be reinforcing racialized barriers to funding. Though many private foundations may have developed language and a framework for Racial Equity and Inclusion, many still lack a set of common metrics to measure the impact of such a lens on their REI work with grantees. To avoid the appearance—whether founded or not—of inequitable funding processes, foundations must apply an explicit racial equity lens not only to its grantmaking, but to its internal policies and practices including a review of staff, leadership and board demographics.

• Establish a common set of performance measures designed to advance racial equity. Workforce providers report feeling minimal pressure from funders around racial equity and inclusion. One grantee explained, “When we are writing a proposal, our funders are not looking for a specific percentage of people enrolled who are people of color. They are not asking us to break data down by race or retention by race, we would have to drive that. It’s not like our funders are not thinking about it, they are just not working it into the proposals.” What are the outcomes that signify program success? Respondents described a tension between the desire of funders for “demonstrable results,” and the reality that for many individuals, the road to success is long, and requires ongoing support. As one practitioner explained, “I’ve been doing workforce for almost 10 years now and I’m still getting calls from people from my very first caseload almost 10 years ago. So whatever success measures we were judging those folks on—and I know that I closed out many of those cases successfully—I think [they are still calling because of] a bias we have in the funding community that says we don’t believe in long-term supports.” Common performance measures can help hold individuals and organizations accountable while also recognizing that “one size fits all” is not a recipe for racial equity. “We have not, as a funder community, intentionally invested in those bridge programs that could help [the most marginalized and disconnected] folks get a job. What we have invested in are 30-, 60-, 90-day outcomes. That to me doesn’t look like a sustainable economy.”

• Be the change you want to see in your grantees. Private foundations provide not only the monetary funding necessary for grantees to engage in workforce development. Reporting requirements, programming conditions, common metrics and technical assistance are all foundations tools to help infuse racial equity throughout the workforce ecosystem. Those same expectations and accountability measures should also be directed inward, as each funder is also an employer. One practitioner implored, “Program officers have to look in the mirror,” yet also recognized that, “program officers don’t set the internal policy of their foundation.” By applying a racial equity lens to your foundation’s own
employment practices, from hiring to advancement to decision-making, funders can build their own internal capacity for this work, while serving as a model for grantees. Several grantees recognized the challenges that program officers face within their foundations. Make racial equity a core component of your internal leadership development, board recruitment, succession planning and community engagement. As part of a commitment to racial equity, every organization in the workforce ecosystem should be intentionally recruiting staff and board members of color.

ABC’s Board Pipeline Leadership Development Project helps to develop a pipeline of professionals from racially under-represented communities to serve on non-profit boards in the Baltimore area. Recognizing that many of the nonprofits seeking board members of color are also serving low-income communities, of color, this leadership development strategy provides a double bottom line “return on investment,” for the community and professionals of color.

- **Recognize and fund services that are holistic and trauma-informed.** According to one provider, “The entire [workforce ecosystem] does not recognize trauma or PTSD as a qualifying disability for vocational rehabilitation programs. But recent ACE [Adverse Childhood Experiences] data show that more than 50% of Baltimore’s youth have three or more ACEs. We have all this data. The funding community has all this data. And yet we are still pushing these 30-, 60-, 90-day models. Until the money talks, we are left to assume that the funding community does not want to support us in that long-term type of way.” Understanding the need for holistic supports for job-seekers, both prior to and during their entry into the workplace, requires an understanding of the historical legacies of structural and institutional racism and its generational impact. For grantees to be successful, attention must be paid to the “whole person,” which requires well-rounded programs that provide specific and ongoing supports.

- **Foster conversations to share data and best practices, and to align funding priorities.** Recent conversations among workforce providers convened through an Annie E. Casey initiative allowed grantees to share strategies for working with employers around criminal background issues. One provider explained that they were educating employers about specific charges—sleeping in an abandoned building, for example—are examples of policing poverty and homelessness and should not constitute a barrier to employment. This targeted approach piqued the interest of other grantees, most of whom have struggled to effectively communicate this to potential partner employers. As one of the grantees explained, “You don't really know the work that other groups are doing until you are in the same room to talk about it. Funders need to create more spaces in which these conversations can happen, and then use them as a model for collaborative learning.” According to other providers, this type of funder-led process is “starting to happen.”

Likewise, funders should be talking with one another to align their funding priorities and their reporting requirements. According to one practitioner, “It makes it a lot easier for us, operationally, when all the funders are asking for the same data. That’s one of the biggest problems—everybody wants different forms of disaggregated data, which takes an impossible amount of time to compile.” Collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing data in meaningful ways requires resources. Workforce funders should establish specific funding streams dedicated to train and sustain the staffing and technical assistance necessary to cover the cost of this work (see, for example, Measure4Change, p. 11).
Engaging Community Voices

In the wake of the uprising following the death of Freddie Gray in April 2015, local government, foundations and workforce providers designed initiatives and programs to create opportunities for young people aged 16 to 29 who were neither in school nor working. Yet program providers struggled to recruit and retain these so-called "opportunity youth," and sought to better understand, as one described, "what is needed, not 'What I want you to need.'"

To better understand, and connect with, the youth it was seeking to serve, the Annie E. Casey Foundation invested in a unique participatory research pilot designed and carried out by seven young African-American adults with significant experience as community activists and emerging leaders. Hired as consultants, in partnership with Frontline Solutions, they were given considerable freedom and autonomy in designing a methodology and driving an engagement process they believed would genuinely connect with youth across the city.

The consultants developed a six-month study consisting of a mix of traditional focus groups and non-traditional "corner conversations," designed to help Casey and its partners understand what was missing for opportunity youth in workforce development programs. As the consultants explained, "We were trying to answer questions for a population that [Casey wasn't] allowing to come to the table, and yet realized needed to be at the table." The youth-led research resulted in a report released earlier this year, "Reshaping Workforce Development in Baltimore: Ensuring Community Voice and Expertise Guide Us." According to one of the consultants, the final report, "isn't for those that already know and understand the challenges of People of African Descent; it's for those that do not understand."

The report recommended that funders: increase their investments in existing community organizations and individuals already serving as mentors to youth within their neighborhoods; support entrepreneurship using an explicit focus on black youth and young adults; simplify expungement processes to reduce barriers for youth with criminal records; and engage employers around issues of implicit bias and employment discrimination to reduce barriers for youth of color. The consultants reported that while there is an "absolute need for systems to meet members of the community where they are, the reverse is not the case!" There is also an urgent need to address "digital desserts," which they say perpetuate a disconnect between foundations and the communities they serve, raising questions of who controls the flow of information and how best to engage in two-way conversations.

In addition to the invaluable data collected during the six-month study, the seven community leaders received training to develop their capacity and opportunities for future work as professional consultants. The project sought to recognize the value of participants’ lived experiences and compensate the community consultants for their expertise in a fair and competitive manner. One of the consultants reported that the experience of conducting focus groups, traveling to other cities, and working within a team structure, "increased my confidence and allowed me to see the influence that I have on others. It has allowed me to become a better me."

The Casey Foundation, local policymakers and several philanthropic and business partners have already begun putting this information to use. The consultant team’s findings are now informing workforce development and engagement strategies for citywide initiatives, including a newly created youth fund and YouthWorks, a summer employment program for young people. Ensuring the research project’s success, as well as gaining the consultants’ trust, required Casey staff to be willing to "step aside," and allow the youth to drive the process. Not only did this approach yield stronger research data, it also helped consultants, and strengthened their ability to work together as a team.
Lastly, by convening these larger conversations among members of the workforce ecosystem, funders can help organizations preserve key partnerships while also ensuring accountability. As one practitioner explained, “We have a partner who just doesn’t get it. They do great work in one aspect, but when it comes to race equity, such as managing people with a ton of toxic stress and emotional trauma, they just totally miss the mark. But we don’t have the time to really sit down with them, and it can’t be just one conversation, it needs to be ongoing. It would be amazing to be able to invite this partner into a space in which they would have the opportunity for that light bulb to go off. Most people are not going to be able to intentionally call out a partner, especially a partner they need something from. But if we could, in a backdoor sort of way, get them into the room where they could realize, ‘Wait, am I doing this?’ We need more spaces like that.” Funders can help create these much-needed spaces.

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**For Public Partners**

- **Name structural racism as a root cause of racial inequity.** Recognizing the historical role that government has played in creating and enforcing inequity, cities like Seattle[10], Portland, and Minneapolis have developed racial equity tools to change policies, practices and programs that perpetuate inequity. Rather than focus solely on elected leadership, these city governments recognize the need to develop internal racial equity expertise and capacity. Baltimore must be committed to data-driven strategies that collect and disaggregate demographic data to measure outcomes for specific program and policies, as well as to drive standards upwards across agencies and industries. For this work to be truly effective, Baltimore’s elected officials and other public stakeholders must partner with community-based organizations, employers, funders and other members of the workforce ecosystem.

- **Provide leadership for addressing systemic structural barriers, rather than solely engaging in transactional constituent services.** In its recommendations for public officials, the BIP identified the clear need for improving regional public transportation to increase residents’ ability to reach family-supporting employment. Critical to solving Baltimore’s transportation issues, however, is first recognizing the racialized roots of that problem. As one public partner implored, “We keep thinking that people need bus passes rather than being willing to tackle transportation deserts; we keep looking at the trees and not seeing the forest Baltimore’s history is replete with examples of public policy measures that have served to create and sustain racial inequity, from residential segregation laws to investments in public transportation in predominately white neighborhoods. An understanding of the root causes of present disparity, as well as the role of policy in perpetuating inequities on a systemic level, is critical to the success of any public policy designed to remediate those inequities.” Developing infrastructure and operational capacity that truly supports inclusion requires the application of a racial equity lens throughout every stage of the development process.
• **Set the tone that racial equity is a priority.** Cities like Seattle, Portland, and Madison have established Racial Equity initiatives that require all agencies to apply a racial equity toolkit when developing and revising policies, programs and budgets. While legislative efforts are underway to replicate these successful strategies in Baltimore, there are many ways in which public partners are beginning to apply a racial equity lens to their work. As one practitioner expressed, “If we’re comparing the programs that are created in mainly urban areas, in mainly black, African American communities of color, these programs are setting a bar that is not nearly as high as what we would see when you look at programs outside of the city.” Clearly, political leadership matters. One employer recommended that the mayor and city council members “take one day a month to call those employers [who hire employees through a workforce development program] to thank them personally. If they set aside three hours a month to call employers of returning citizens, it would change everything. They set the priorities based upon how they engage; not enough of them are engaging the right way.” Another way that public partners send the message that racial equity is a priority is by requiring the reporting by workforce grantees of outcome measures disaggregated by race. This might initially be a shift for grantees, but the data obtained will be useful not only for the provider, but also for the public partner as they consider funding strategies or priorities.

• **Leverage procurement and development policies to advance racial equity.** One interviewee suggested that the city create a “super status” for contractors bidding on development projects, in which special preference points would be awarded for hiring returning citizens, or for hiring a significant number of city residents. The BIP recommends strengthening the connections between Baltimore’s business development programs and workforce development programs, a strategy that has seen success in other cities. According to one stakeholder, “We just had to decide that it was important to shift from workforce development as a social service, to workforce development as a business service.”

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**Cultivating New Leadership**

Across all segments of Baltimore’s workforce ecosystem is an urgent need for cultivating leadership that is inclusive, rooted in community values, action-oriented and focused on results. Policy Link has documented that supporting people of color to take on advocacy and leadership roles within their communities is a prerequisite for reducing poverty and disparities. In a study on why people of color are not moving into leadership positions within the nonprofit sector, LLC found that leadership culture and organizational practices devalue the contributions of people of color. The anticipated transfer of leadership creates an opportunity to diversify the sector; however, without a more intentionally inclusive leadership, culture the under-representation of people of color in Baltimore workforce leadership could worsen.

Another area of opportunity is succession planning. This is even more important for organizations that do not currently reflect the diversity of the Baltimore communities in which they operate. An intentionally equitable strategy for cultivating and sustaining workforce leadership requires that providers, funders, and public partners:
actively identify potential leaders of color, rather than rely on traditional or passive channels;
create and fund ongoing opportunities for leadership development; and
reexamine each stage of the leadership recruitment process using a racial equity lens.

Recruitment, onboarding, performance feedback, promotion and compensation setting are all critical points in the hiring and retention process. Organizations—whether for-profit employers or not-for-profit providers and foundations—engaged in these processes without using a racial equity lens, in a city in which 63% of its residents are African American, in a state in which the majority are people of color, are potentially missing or losing talented leadership.

Organizations whose leadership and staff do not reflect the racial diversity of the communities they serve risk relying on their own biases in program delivery. Workers of color may find it difficult to believe in their own prospects for success in the workplace when they haven’t observed people of color finding success with the workforce provider. “In a classroom environment,” one employer partner explained, “you are getting two things: knowledge and confidence. While anyone can provide knowledge, a person of color has the potential of providing knowledge and confidence to folks that have been economically disadvantaged and socially disadvantaged; they need confidence just as much as they need knowledge.”

Several organizations reported that a lack of (racial) diversity in their staff, leadership, and board of directors was a barrier to recruiting board members and other staff who could most effectively lead the organization, design programs, and engage with workers. One practitioner described the internal and organizational conflict this creates:

“Every time people of color say something about an all-white leadership structure, we hear, ‘Well, we aren’t going to fire anybody and give their jobs to black people?’ And yet I have never, in all the conversations with people of color I have had around this dynamic, never ever heard someone suggest you fire someone and give their job to a black person. But what we ARE asking is that considering the entire leadership structure is white, how are you incorporating the perspective of the people you are trying to serve, and the people of color in your own organization who have been in those situations and do program design? The fact that you are not [incorporating their perspective] is very clear.”

**Leveraging Partnerships for Systemic Change**

The workforce ecosystem is situated within a larger biome of interlinked systems of education, health, housing, transportation, finance, community and economic development, criminal justice and social supports. Advancing racial equity and inclusion throughout each of those systems requires a recognition by workforce stakeholders of the importance of strategic partnerships, within, across, and beyond the ecosystem.

Most workforce training providers have already invested time establishing partnerships with service providers, who provide many of the wrap-around support services to workers, such as day-care centers, record expungement programs, community health providers and addiction and recovery services. Such partnerships can be critical to the success of individual workers, many of whom rely on such community-based organizations to help them hurdle over a myriad of barriers to workplace opportunity and advancement. Eliminating those barriers requires effective cross-sector partnerships. Explained one provider, “We also need
to do more to leverage what we learn from participants, to lobby for more systemic change. Rather than simply seeing Juvenile Services as a source of [trainees], we should be at the table advocating for changes to the criminal justice system.” In that case, more deliberate partnerships with policy makers and with the institutions—in this case, criminal justice—themselves, help elevate what the workforce provider is doing at the individual level into more sustained systems change. The workplace is one battleground for racial equity; winning the war for racial equity requires addressing inequity across a multitude of systems of education, criminal justice, health care, and housing.

One example of intra-sector partnership is the Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative (BWFC), which was established to encourage collaboration among private and public funders of workforce development. The BWFC has pursued a sector-based strategy that involves aligning investments among its members and collective advocacy for increased public funding of its industry partnership model. Policy Link’s “All-In Cities” initiative is also an example of a successful cross-sector strategy. With a goal of amplifying, augmenting and replicating emerging best practices in advancing equity, dismantling racialized barriers, and increasing access to justice and resources in cities like Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Buffalo and now Baltimore, the All-In Cities approach recognizes that racial inequity is not inevitable, and that racial and economic equity is possible.

One of the major impediments to the development of strategic partnerships cited by workforce providers is the competitive funding environment. This is true for intra-sector collaboration, in which the competition for scarce resources discourages transparency—particularly around data—among providers. As one provider explained, “Every organization is trying to get resources to keep its own doors open.” One funder attributed a lack of sustained partnerships among workforce providers and social support services providers, to the scarcity of funding as well. “While most groups know they have to partner with other organizations to provide support services in order to deal with barriers like transportation, when you look at their proposals there’s no resources allocated for that partner.” Confirmed another provider, “The funding environment is so competitive that it does not really facilitate collaboration.”

To effect real change, partnerships cannot exist on letterhead or in website form alone. Just as individual organizations must set measurable goals, so too must strategic partnerships outline the shared goals, and the individual resources each entity brings to the partnership in support of those goals. Otherwise, as one funder noted, “it is very loose and there’s no accountability,” which makes measuring progress difficult. One workforce provider explained that by connecting racial equity with economic justice has spurred an internal reflection of their funding sources and community partners. In doing so, the provider has developed strategies for pushing those institutions and agencies forward.

“We also need to do more to leverage what we learn from participants, to lobby for more systemic change. Rather than simply seeing Juvenile Services as a source of [trainees], we should be at the table advocating for changes to the juvenile justice system.”

“We occupy a very large footprint in this city, and we must acknowledge our own responsibility for changing the future. Our leadership skills are needed. We are hired to run big businesses. Let’s take those skills and use them in the community.”
As this study confirms, there is an ongoing shift in understanding within the Baltimore workforce ecosystem that intentionally applying a racial equity lens is different than serving communities of color. Likewise, there is a growing awareness among all stakeholders of the historical context of institutional and structural racism and white supremacy that has created, and continue to replicate, stark inequities. While there are economic arguments that underpin the value of a racial equity lens, it is important to name institutional and structural racism as the problem this lens is intended to address and commit publicly to racial equity and inclusion. Otherwise, if the financial incentives for racial equity wane in a changing economy, employers may retreat from their prior commitments.
“It is amazing what one leader on the right side of equity can do to impact a business.” – Employer

“I do admire our foundations in Baltimore. I think they strive to go to the hard places. I think they do think about [racial equity]. I think they have people they have to answer to, too. And they have things that are on their priority list that they didn't put there. But I think that if anywhere, Baltimore could make that shift in the Foundation space.” – Practitioner

“I care greatly about this topic because of my own experience, but also because of the urgency that I’ve always felt that put me in this line of work in the first place—to do something to help people of color to improve their economic outcomes. I really believe that workforce development is the place to do that work.” – Public Partner

In the absence of a stronger legal and political system that could compel racial equity through top-down regulation, judicial rulings and executive orders, this ecosystem must serve as a bottom-up change lever. Organizations and institutions engaged in educating, training, funding and supporting workforce development must lead by example in the creation of intentionally equitable, diverse and inclusive workplaces, and by tracking, disaggregating and sharing data that holds all stakeholders accountable in our collective mission of dismantling racial and economic inequity.

Nearly every practitioner interviewed cited a need for more "tools" to put their nascent understanding into more concrete practice. Feedback included, “I need a lot of guidance. I feel like I need a lot of tools;” “We need tools, more materials that I can hand out to staff, more assessment tools that I can use. Stuff that we can work with;” “Some kind of plan that we could follow;” “Something flexible enough to allow us to find the mistakes in between;” “I need a lot of guidance.” Being intentional about racial equity certainly requires action, for which tools can be invaluable. But for those actions to result in any meaningful change, they must be accompanied by a process of thoughtful discernment rather than simply “checking the box” for racial equity. We hope this report can serve as a useful tool for those practitioners, employers, funders, public partners and workers engaged in the invaluable daily work to increase access and opportunity in ways that can change the future for African Americans, and for all of Baltimore City.
Appendix A

Methodology

This paper was developed through a review of the literature on racial equity initiatives within the organizational, municipal and foundation segments of the workforce ecosystem, with a focus on Baltimore City. The author conducted in-depth interviews with more than a dozen workforce practitioners, employers, funders, policy makers, community members and academics with expertise in these areas. Approximately 15% of the workforce organizations identified by the Baltimore Integration Partnership were included in the study. Many thanks to the following organizations:

21st Century Power Solutions
ABC
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Baltimore Center for Green Careers
Baltimore Integration Partnership
Bon Secours Health System
Brown Advisory
Donahoe Hospitality Services
Jane Addams Research Corporation
Johns Hopkins University
LifeBridge Health
Living Classrooms Foundation
Loyola University Maryland
Maritime Applied Physics Corp.
New Orleans Business Alliance
Baltimore Mayor’s Office of Employment Development
PNC Bank
The Choice Program at UMBC
Workforce Matters Funders Network
YES Drop-In Center
PREJUDICE: A positive or negative attitude toward a person or group, formed without just grounds or sufficient knowledge and not likely to be changed in spite of new evidence or contrary argument. Prejudice is an attitude. All ethnic and social groups possess some prejudices.

DISCRIMINATION: Unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a group. In contrast to prejudice, discrimination is behavior. To discriminate is to treat a person, not on the basis of their intrinsic individual qualities, but on the basis of a prejudgment about a group. Discrimination can be either de jure (legal, as in segregation laws, or de facto (discrimination in fact, without legal sanction).

OPPRESSION: The systematic exploitation of one social group by another for its own benefit; it involves institutional control, ideological domination and the imposition of the dominant group's culture on the oppressed group. Oppression is different from discrimination, bias, prejudice or bigotry because:
- It is pervasive – woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness
- It is restricting – structural limits significantly shape a person's life chances and sense of possibility in ways beyond the individual’s control
- It is hierarchical – the dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups
- The dominant group has the power to define and name reality and determine what is "normal," "real" or "correct."
- Harassment, discrimination and marginalization are systematic and institutionalized – they do not require the conscious thought or effort of individual members of the dominant group, but are rather part of “business as usual”

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: Those established laws, policies and practices within an institution, supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority, which systematically reflect, produce and maintain racial inequalities in U.S. society to the advantage of whites and the disadvantage of other races. Institutional racism is often discrimination without prejudice. Individuals can unintentionally discriminate by applying policies and practices that perpetuate past inequalities. While their attitude may be unbiased, their behavior enforces the philosophy as well as the practice of racism.

STRUCTURAL RACISM: The normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, educational, institutional and interpersonal—that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, characterized by white supremacy. Structural racism is racism underneath and across society, permeating its entire history, culture and institutions. Structural racism within U.S. culture perpetuates, normalizes and legitimates the effects of racism, while often making those effects invisible to the narrow legal definition of unlawful discrimination.
Appendix B

Glossary (Continued)

**WHITE PRIVILEGE:** The concrete benefits of access to resources and social rewards and power to shape the norms and values of society which white people receive, unconsciously or consciously, by virtue of their skin color in a racist society. For example, a privilege of whiteness is the expectation to be judged as an individual, not as a representative or reflection of an entire group.

**DIVERSITY:** The wide range of national, ethnic, racial and other backgrounds of U.S. residents and immigrants as social groupings, co-existing in American culture. The term is often used to include aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class and much more. The term simply describes the presence of individuals from various backgrounds and/or with various identities.

**INCLUSION:** Authentically brings the perspectives and contributions of all people to the table, equitably distributes power, and incorporates their needs, assets and perspectives into the design and implementation of processes, policies, activities, and decision-making.

**EQUITY:** The condition that would be achieved if the identities assigned to historically oppressed groups no longer acted as the most powerful predictor of how one fares, with the root causes of inequities, not just their manifestations, eliminated. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce or fail to eliminate differential outcomes by group identity/background (economic, educational, health, criminal justice, etc.).

**SOCIAL JUSTICE:** A vision of society in which the distribution of resources, opportunity, societal benefits and protection is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole.

**ANTI-RACIST:** In the U.S., a person of any race who recognizes the role and legacy of historical white institutional power and authority that continues intentionally or unintentionally to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors against people of color in systemic ways; a person who works to oppose individual racism in their own and others’ beliefs, but more importantly works to dismantle institutionalized racism that negatively impacts people of color; a person who above all works towards equity, and values the equality of all humanity, but honors, appreciates and understands differences in culture. By its nature, anti-racism tends to promote the view that racism in the U.S. is both pernicious and socially pervasive, and that particular changes in political, economic, and social life are required to eliminate it.
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 criteria can have on applicants? (i.e. GED requirements, criminal background requirements?)

4. Will the program increase access and opportunities for communities of color? How?

5. 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.?)

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

7. 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?

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

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

10. Does this program work with employer partners to create more inclusive and equitable hiring practices, employment practices and workplace culture?
Appendix D

Endnotes

1 Associated Black Charities. ANALYSIS OF PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT BY RACE IN BALTIMORE CITY AND THE BALTIMORE METROPOLITAN AREA (2018) [HEREINAFTER, PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT].


5 For a full list of study participants, see Appendix A.

6 ABC, Patterns of Employment


10 Associated Black Charities, survey.


