

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute

LEARNING, LEADING, CHANGING



Racial Equity Discussion Guide

One foundational pillar of the [NCWWI Leadership Model](#) is the ability to apply a Racial Equity Lens. Effective leaders intentionally examine and improve policies, practices, programs, and organizational cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes for children, youth, and families based on race.

This discussion guide provides key messages, reflection questions, and resources for engaging partners in courageous conversations and planning to challenge the institutional and structural racism that results in worse outcomes for families and children of color or tribally affiliated children.

Information in this guide is envisioned to accompany the [Promoting Racial Equity Through Workforce and Organizational Actions Infographic](#).

NCWWI defines Racial Equity to mean that racial identity no longer predicts how someone will fare in the child welfare system related to assessment, service quality, or opportunities.

It is our ethical and legal responsibility as child welfare professionals to take workforce and organizational actions that promote racial equity. For example, one important action is to assess the decision points along the child welfare continuum and the degree to which racial and ethnic populations are affected.

Considerations for Discussions

Prior to meeting, leadership should establish who will be the most effective partner to facilitate racial equity discussions. Generally, the person with positional leadership will be the one to open the discussion topic; however, there may be circumstances in which a racial equity ally may be better suited to initiate the topic. For example, if the



participants at a meeting are all or nearly all white colleagues, then it may be that one of the white leaders holding positionality above others on the team is in the best position to be heard by their white colleagues.

Another consideration is determining where the racial equity discussion is most ideally situated on a meeting agenda. It is often helpful to align the discussion topic with another agenda item that is a natural segue, such as organizational culture and climate.

If the leader experiences resistance from partners or colleagues, they are encouraged to address the resistance in the context of the discussion by posing a coaching/observation question. One potential question to pose is, “I am hearing that the team may not feel ready to further explore how racial equity impacts the families you serve. Yet our common ground is that we all want families to thrive and reach their potential. What one next step could we take together to continue moving forward on this important issue?”

It is helpful to reflect on the *Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations*¹ prior to meeting with partners and to review these four agreements with the team, preferably before courageous conversations ensue. However, the four agreements may also be noted by the leader if a discussion becomes tense or gets derailed due to discomfort of partners. The four agreements are:

1. **Stay engaged:** This means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.”
2. **Experience discomfort:** This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. Talking about these issues does not create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in society and in our systems. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, that healing and change begin.
3. **Speak your truth:** This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
4. **Expect, respect and accept non-closure:** This means everyone is asked to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue.

¹ Adapted from Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. pp.58–65. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.



Explore Available Coaching Supports

Leaders can access coaching supports to assist in initiating and holding conversations about racial equity issues with partners. Coaching can provide support in preparing for the first meeting, including anticipating some of the strengths and challenges the leader may encounter and also in identifying at least one racial equity ally on the team. An additional session could provide an opportunity to debrief after the meeting, create next steps to address any resistance or avoidance experienced by partners, and create a future plan for how to assist the team. Coaching provides the support leaders may need in helping their team continually examine and improve policies, practices, programs, and organizational cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes for children, youth, and families based on race. You may contact Christa Doty at christa.doty@du.edu to learn more about coaching services available but not affiliated with NCWWI.

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions may be explored at various stages. Exploration of all perspectives—agency, tribal, university, and student perspectives—are encouraged.

1. How well do you believe your program demonstrates a commitment to diversity for the workforce and for the families you serve?
2. Which racial/ethnic groups are most over-represented in your system compared to their representation in your community's general population? Given that, how does your practice model—and your other practice supports—intentionally address the principles, values, and skills the workforce needs to improve outcomes for these groups?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10—with 1 being not at all and 10 being always—to what degree does your leadership decision-making include an examination of the positive and negative implications of a decision on the racial/ethnic groups your program serves?



4. If I were to walk into your program's office tomorrow morning and be a quiet observer, what would I see or hear that would show me that social work values and social justice are present in your daily work?
5. The [Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment](#) (COHA) includes an exploration of workplace prejudice and discrimination. What are the strengths and possible areas for growth related to race and ethnicity dynamics in your workplace?
6. What strategies has your program taken within the past three years to address implicit bias and the experiences of microaggressions within your workplace for racially/ethnically diverse staff? What success have these strategies had on recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce?
7. Let's review the [Racial Equity Infographic](#) together. NCWWI has identified six organizational components that advance racial equity strategies:
 - Institutional Analysis
 - Cross-Systems and Tribal Partnerships
 - Data Collection and Analysis
 - Agency and Workforce Development
 - Agency-University Partnerships
 - Sustainability

After reading the definition of each of these, which of these strategies are you currently working on in your program?

What is your best hope for what these strategies will accomplish?

8. Which internal and external partners does your program consider as an ally in addressing disparities in your system and the other systems that serve the same families? Who else could you partner with?
9. How recently have you examined your data by race and ethnicity and by various decision points along the continuum (such as decisions to screen-in a referral, accepted reports, response path selection, substantiations, or placement entries)? What did you learn and how have you applied those lessons learned thus far?



10. How are racial equity issues intentionally integrated in the various learning opportunities, trainings, and professional development activities in your program?
11. In what ways do discussions about racial equity and cultural responsiveness appear when your program is conducting reflective supervision, group consultations, and team decision-making protocols?
12. How does the program and university partnership specifically address disproportionality, disparities, and cultural responsiveness?
13. What organizational structures has your program put in place to monitor the parameters and procedures that guide development of leaders and promotional opportunities?

Resources for Discussions

Below are 10 resources to support discussions on achieving racial equity within organizations. These resources help increase understanding, facilitate dialogue, and guide development of sustainable systemic strategies. To explore additional resources: <https://ncwwi.org/index.php/resourcemenue/racial-equity>

1

Ten Lessons for Taking Leadership on Racial Equity

This document distills 10 lessons for how to take leadership on the difficult topic of race in America and is intended to encourage and suggest strategies to people willing to take up the challenge of promoting racial equity and inclusion.

2

Race Matters: Organizational Self-Assessment

This tool contains a questionnaire and next steps that help raise organizational awareness, start focused conversations, contribute to the development of equity action plans, and track organizational change.

3

Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization

This is a chart that describes the six phases of becoming an anti-racist multicultural organization.



4

[Senior Leaders Role in Building a Race Equity Culture](#)

This article highlights the need for leaders to move the work forward in building an organizational culture that embraces racial equity. The four levels of racism are outlined: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural.

5

[Race Matters Toolkit](#)

This toolkit was designed to help decision-makers, advocates, and elected officials get better results in their work by providing equitable opportunities for all. The toolkit, which consists of more than a dozen tools, fact sheets, and a user's guide, can be used individually or collectively to engage stakeholders in deeper discussions that lead to moving their organizational and programmatic equity, diversity, and inclusion work forward.

6

[Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness](#)

This guide provides basic information to enhance cultural competence while providing services in American Indian / Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities.

7

[Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide: 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion within Your Organization](#)

This guide provides a clear framework to incorporate race equity and inclusion at every stage of work by foundations or other organizations that work directly with systems, technical assistance providers, and communities.

8

[A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities](#)

This guide identifies values and priorities that can foster trust and build the knowledge and skills of tribes, their evaluation partners, and other stakeholders to conduct more useful and meaningful child welfare evaluations.

9

[Strategies to Reduce Racially Disparate Outcomes in Child Welfare](#)

This paper documents the efforts underway in 12 states and localities to tackle the enduring problem of African American, Native American, and Latino families faring worse than others being served by the child welfare systems. (2015) This resource contributed to the six-part NCWWI webinar series *[Dismantling Racial Inequity Through Child Welfare Systems Change](#)*.



10

[Policy Actions to Reduce Racial Disproportionality & Disparities in Child Welfare: A Scan of Eleven States](#)

This brief identifies 11 states that are directly addressing disproportionality and disparities through public policy measures and provides information about state-initiated legislative policy. Six dimensions comprise the theory of change: Legislation/Policy Change and Finance Reform; Youth, Parent, and Community Partnership and Development; Public Will and Communication; Human Service Workforce Development; Practice Change; and Research, Evaluation, and Data-Based Decision-Making.

Glossary of Terms

Leaders and team partners are encouraged to use a common set of definitions to guide discussions regarding racial equity. When having discussions, it is helpful to bring a copy or have online access to the glossary resource below.

[Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)

This list defines commonly used terms in order to enhance the quality of dialogue and discourse on race in America and your community.

NCWWI Microaggressions Definition: **Microaggressions** are “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities.”²

²Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271.